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Advancing Education in Europe: Perspectives on Identity, Trust, Inclusive Practices, and Teacher Development

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Adres redakcji: „Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny",
Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Pedagogiczny,
ul. Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warszawa,
e-mail: kwartalnik.pedagogiczny@uw.edu.pl; http://www.kp.edu.pl

Projekt okładki i stron tytułowych: **Jakub Rakusa-Suszczewski**

Redaktor prowadzący: **Dorota Dziedzic**

Redakcja językowa: **Paulina Marchlik**

Redaktor statystyczny: **Jan Łaszczyk**

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Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego
02-678 Warszawa, ul. Smyczkowa 5/7
http://www.wuw.pl; e-mail: wuw@uw.edu.pl
Dział Handlowy: tel. (48 22) 55-31-333,
e-mail: dz.handlowy@uw.edu.pl

Studio DTP: **Beata Stelęgowska**

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Introduction

Education serves as a cornerstone of societal progress, shaping the identities, values, and opportunities of individuals and communities. Within the dynamic landscape of European education, scholars and practitioners continually strive to advance pedagogical practices that foster inclusive, equitable, and empowering learning environments. The journal volume "Advancing Education in Europe: Perspectives on Identity, Trust, Inclusive Practices, and Teacher Development" offers a comprehensive exploration of key themes and insights shaping the future of education across the continent.

The articles included in this volume represent a diverse array of perspectives and research approaches, each contributing to our collective understanding of the multifaceted nature of European education. From examinations of youth identities and social trust to discussions on inclusive practices and teacher development, the volume encompasses a broad spectrum of topics relevant to contemporary educational discourse. Each contribution offers a unique perspective, shedding light on critical aspects of education and providing valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and teachers alike.

Alistair Ross's article introduces the use of deliberative discussions as a research method, offering a qualitative and mixed methods approach to exploring young Europeans' identities and values. Ross demonstrates how the method of open-ended discussions can yield rich insights into geopolitical affiliations and values, providing a nuanced understanding of young people's perspectives.

Anna Wiłkomirska and Barbara Murawska explore the concept of social trust among youth in the context of depopulation processes. Their research sheds light on the attitudes and perceptions of young people towards their communities, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for fostering social cohesion and resilience in the face of demographic shifts.

Monika Skura's article offers an overview of support mechanisms for students with special educational needs in the Slovenian education system, outlining a tiered intervention model aimed at addressing the unique requirements of diverse learners. Skura's analysis provides valuable insights into inclusive education practices and their implications for policy and practice.

Daniela Worek explores the role of mobility in fostering the internationalization of teacher education, with a special focus on European identity. By examining the impact of mobility experiences on professional development and cultural exchange, Worek's article underscores the importance of transnational collaboration in shaping the future of education.

Ewelina Rzońca and Joanna Madalińska-Michalak's article presents research on mentoring practices in Polish schools, drawing on the perspectives of school principals and pre-service teachers. Through qualitative interviews, Rzońca and Madalińska-Michalak explore the benefits and challenges of mentoring initiatives, and suggestions for improving mentoring effectiveness, highlighting the importance of constructivist approaches to professional development.

Katarzyna Brzosko-Barratt's contribution examines the professional development of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teachers in Poland, offering insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by educators in this context. Brzosko-Barratt's research contributes to our understanding of effective strategies for supporting CLIL teachers in enhancing their pedagogical practices.

Nigora Mamadaminova and Sabina Khadjikhanova's paper presents the findings on teacher professional development (TPD) in Uzbekistan, focusing on teachers' experiences and challenges. Using qualitative methods and global data, it explores the obstacles teachers face in accessing training while balancing heavy workloads and personal duties. Despite these challenges, teachers acknowledge the importance of professional development for career growth. The study emphasizes the need for better support and policies to improve Uzbekistan's education system, particularly regarding time management.

Collectively, the articles featured in this volume weave together a rich tapestry of insights that illuminate the multifaceted landscape of education in Europe. Through rigorous research and thoughtful analysis, the contributors explore the challenges, opportunities, and innovations that define the educational discourse of our time. At the heart of this exploration are four central themes: identity, trust, inclusive practices, and teacher development. These themes serve as critical touchstones, guiding our understanding of the complex dynamics at play within European education systems.

As teachers, researchers, and policymakers navigate the complexities of the educational landscape, this volume offers a robust foundation upon which to build inclusive, equitable, and empowering educational practices that serve the needs of all learners. Ultimately, this volume seeks to inform and inspire transformative action, inviting stakeholders to collaborate in the collective endeavor of building a more just, compassionate, and effective educational ecosystem for generations to come.

Joanna Madalińska-Michalak

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Alistair Ross
London Metropolitan University, UK[*]
E-mail: alistairrosslondon@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-5243-7704

Deliberative discussions as a research method: A qualitative and mixed methods approach to exploring young Europeans' identities and values[**]

Summary

This article examines the use of deliberative discussions as a method of analysing the geo-political affiliations and values of young people. Exploring such areas through traditional interviews and questionnaires can present problems in that they can unduly prompt answers. Using open-ended and loosely structured discussions can allow the generation of ideas and views in the particular vocabulary and context of participants using non-directive open-ended questions. The qualitative data generated by such an approach can be very unstructured, but has the value of being generated by participants without using stimuli that sometimes induce responses that are unreliable. This article focuses on the principles of conducting and managing discussion processes to maximise the potential usefulness of the data. Two investigations are outlined. The first uses data from deliberative discussions in a qualitative study of how young Europeans (aged between 10 and 20) variously describe themselves as members of a state/states, and/or of Europe, a particular locality or as global. The second study uses the same data, but in a mixed methods approach that included a quantitative analysis of the young people's use of values in explaining and illustrating particular affiliations. Deliberative discussion as a process is analysed and defined in some practical detail, with suggestions as to procedures that may elicit the most useful detail using the participants own 'natural' language.

Keywords: deliberative discussion; young people; geo-political affiliation; values; Europe

[*] Address: London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Rd, London N7 8DB, United Kingdom

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The background

This article describes how a particular method — deliberative discussion – can be used in researching beliefs, principles and values; how data generated from this might be used in both qualitative and mixed methods research approaches, and the potential advantages of this method over other methods. Deliberative discussions appear particularly suited for working with young people, still 'in education', but the method could also be useful with older groups of people.

The questions I sought to address in my study was how do young people – defined as within the 10 to 20 years of age bracket – identify themselves with particular geo-political units, such as a city, a province, a state or nation, or perhaps of a group of states, such as Europe, or more broadly as global citizens. In contemporary European society, young people (and others) elect to define themselves with different entities in particular social contexts: these entities are thus self-evidently socially constructed. Why, and how, are such identifications constructed and used?

Social constructionism holds that such concepts, beliefs and values are themselves the outcomes of dynamic processes of social interaction with others (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The problem I sought to address was that attempts to elicit from an individual how they variously used these concepts inevitably involved a social interaction between the researcher and the researched – the outcome thus becomes 'artificial', in the sense that is co-constructed in the interaction of investigation. Pierre Bourdieu (1973) explained this concisely when he asserted that public opinion did not exist: "public opinion is an *artefact,* pure and simple, whose function is to conceal the fact that the state of opinion at any given moment is a system of forces and tensions" (p. 223). In opinion polling, "the questions asked showed that the great majority of them were directly related to the political concerns of the «political staff»" ["*étaient directement liées aux préoccupations politiques du «personnel politique»*"] (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 223).

An example of this can be seen in the efforts of Eurobarometer, the European Commission's opinion monitoring exercise, to report on public engagement with European values. In 2013, representative samples in all EU member states (and accession states) were asked in a survey (Eurobarometer 79.3) QD9: "In the following list, which are the three most important values for you personally?", and were presented with a list of twelve items (such as the rule of law, equality, respect for other cultures, democracy, solidarity, etc.). This appeared to be a partial selection from the values listed in the European Union's *Treaty on European Union* (EU, 2012) and the Council of Europe's *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (ECHR, 1950). The presumption is that respondents

would know all these values, and be able to partially order then in terms of personal importance, which might present some difficulties (such as values not listed, considering more than three values to be essential, embarrassment and not knowing about/having considered some items, etc.). They were then asked QD10: "Which three of the following values best represent the EU?" (which makes the same demands as above, and assumes some knowledge about EU policies, and implies that some different values might/should be more representative of the EU). Figure 1 shows the aggregate responses, sorted into four age categories, including 'young people' (15–25; data were not collected from younger people). The presentation

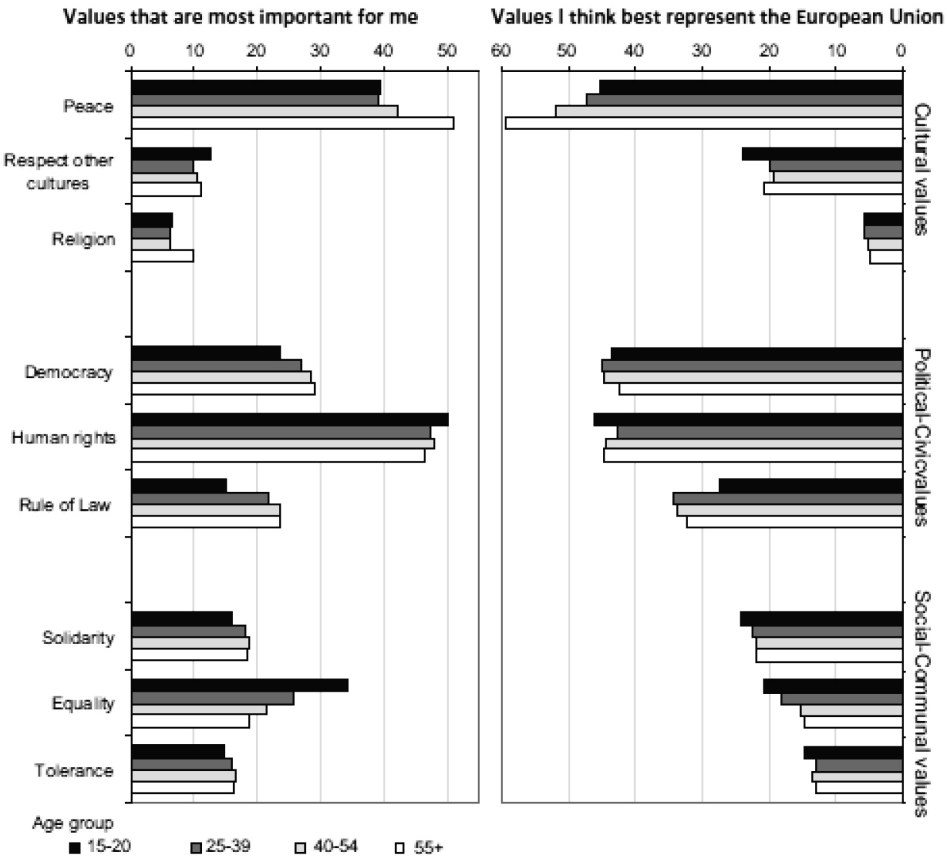


Figure 1. Responses to the Eurobarometer survey, May 2013, on personal and European Values.

QD9: "In the following list, which are the three most important values for you personally?"; QD10: "Which three of the following values best represent the EU?" Eurobarometer response, 2013; responses to selected values grouped by age of respondents.

Source: European Commission (2017). Eurobarometer 79.3, 2013; TNS opinion, Brussels [producer]. Extracted from the GESIS Datenarchiv, Köln. ZA5689 Datenfile Version 2.0.0, taken from Ross (2019, p. 53).

of pre-determined categories, the varying contingencies of time and place, the assumption that they are seen as having different levels of importance, and that personal values may differ from EU values all place demands that will vary from individual to individual respondents that suggest that the findings are of limited value in understanding what populations think these values 'mean'.

Asking questions has a particular complication when working with young people who are in school or college: they often anticipate questions used by teachers (and other adults) to be used to test or assess their knowledge (Alexander, 2008; Hogden & Webb, 2008). There is therefore an expectation that a question should have a 'correct' answer, that they are expected to give, and may feel obliged to find a 'right' response.

Young people have also been characterised as uninterested in politics, and as sceptics of democracy: some studies suggest that a weakening of civic life and falling voter turnout are particularly seen among younger people (Franklin, 2004; Putnam 2000; van Biezen et al., 2012). Pippa Norris observed that "young people are believed to be particularly disillusioned about the major institutions of representative democracy, leaving them apathetic (at best) or alienated (at worst)" (cited in Sloam, 2014, p. 664). Some scholars have suggested that this lack of commitment to liberal democratic values endangers democracies and will result in instability and "democratic deconsolidation" (Foa & Mounk, 2016, p. 16), particularly in areas of Europe where young people face social discrimination, 'apathy has become active antipathy'. An Open Society Foundation study of global attitudes towards democracy concluded "there was less enthusiasm among 18-to-35-year-olds for democracy, with 57 percent preferring it to other forms of government, for those aged 56 and above, the figure was 71 percent" (Peiris & Samarasinghe, 2023, p. 7), and similar proportional differences supporting army rule and strong leadership. But Eva Fernández et al. (2023) suggest that "concerns about young citizens lacking support for or even being opposed to liberal democracy's institutions, values and system functioning must be tempered" (p. 4). Ronald Inglehart (2016) argues that discourses of 'democratic deconsolidation' are overstated: young people feel insecure, rather than rejecting liberal democracy. Norris (2017) suggests young people are sceptical and critical of democracy, rather than oppositional. Young people are generally more satisfied with democracy than older people, and studies point to 'do it ourselves' political behaviours (Pickard, 2019; Pontes et al., 2019). These forms of engagement go beyond the limits of the classic exposition of political culture, made by Almond and Verba (1965), which proposed an essentially passive culture, in which most citizens vote and accept existing political systems and structures, and a few are more actively involved in political roles (Ross, 2018).

Around the world, recent mass mobilisations have brought to the fore groups of young people critical of current political offers and who seek to participate in democratic life in ways that liberal democracies struggle to meet. Cammaerts et al. (2014) describe "a strong desire among many young Europeans to participate in democratic life, but this desire is not met by existing democratic institutions and discourses" (p. 645). Instances of this include the Occupy mobilisations against the excesses of global capitalism, Black Lives Matter, Friday Strikes for Climate Change and Just Stop Oil.

Resistance to discussing politics with young people is sometimes associated with a denial that they can understand sophisticated political concepts (described by Maitles, 1997). Manning (2010) points to the "discourse of youth apathy typically draws upon quantitative methodologies and orthodox hegemonic notions of politics" (p. 2). Henn et al. (2002) call this "conventional political science" (p. 170) and argue that including wider forms of political participation in studies of young people's participation would show much greater evidence of activity among young people, and higher levels of youth political participation (Henn et al., 2003). Hahn (1998) concluded that students report that when they (a) frequently discuss controversial issues in their classes, (b) perceive that several sides of issues are presented, and (c) feel comfortable in expressing their views "they are more likely to develop attitudes that have the potential to foster later civic participation" (p. 233). Kudrnáč (2022) points out that the teacher's role is vital as it is "the teacher that decides if and how often discussions take place that he or she consequently moderates…sets up the topic … [and determines] how much time these discussions take from school hours" (p. 224).

This emphasis on the significance of how classroom discussion can support the understandings of the political is an important contribution to the research method of deliberative discussion. If a researcher can create a young person led discussion, in which the language and vocabulary are those of the young people themselves, it can be possible to listen to the development and use of ideas, concepts and beliefs in their own discourse, rather than that of the researcher. It is to this methodology that we now turn.

Deliberate discussion as a methodology

The term deliberative discussion is precisely formulated. It is a discussion, not a debate: there are no decisions or victories at the conclusion. It is deliberative, in the sense that ideas and examples put forward are listened to be the group, and are challenged by any who disagree. It is also the discourse of a group, known to

each other, not necessarily very closely, but one in which members are acquainted with each other, and share, to an extent, the same environment and context: they will be comfortable with each other, and have no need to introduce themselves to the group, unlike a focus group. It is a discussion, and not a sequential interview, in which each member responds to each question in turn.

Schools or colleges can be a useful and convenient place to recruit such a group – within a year group, or a couple of year groups, they will know each other, but on the other hand, they will be accustomed to the school discourse, where very often form of the question is used to test and evaluate, as noted above. The researcher needs to quickly establish the role of a non-intrusive moderator who asks open ended questions that have no right or wrong answers. They also need to show how they expect the group members to listen to each other, rather than to the researcher. The group must be introduced to the idea that they can disagree with each other, in a civil and respectful manner. The researcher will need to use a highly constrained vocabulary that does not introduce any leading terms or categories. They need to demonstrate that they have no apparent agenda, no list of questions to be got through, no apparent expectations of what will be discussed – and give no indication of frustration when a conversation appears to go off-*piste*, but gently – invisibly – re-orientate the focus if possible. The role is demanding.

Group conversations have been developed in German social science research over the past three decades. Gugglberger et al. (2015) argued that "the more structured focus group method" is not "a very open and flexible method of data generation" (p. 127). Gugglberger and her colleagues were among a number of German social science researchers who have developed the *Gruppendiskussionsverfahren* [group discussion method]: for example, Bohnsack (2000), Loos and von Schäffer (2001). Bohnsack (2000) described the process as "an open interview, intended to let respondents develop a topic in their own language, in their symbolic system and their relevant framework" (p. 21). She argued that this would avoid evaluations that might project on to "single utterances meanings that are not appropriate. … [One will] learn more if this statement is put into a narrative context by the respondent … in his/her own language" (p. 21). Scheunpflug et al. (2016) described how such an approach allowed "respondents [to] … set the structures and contents of the conversation by themselves," and that this allowed access to "knowledge stocks that are not located on the surface of [the] conscious … [or] clear explicable attitudes and values, but which are beneath the surface" (p. 10). Wagener (2018) has referred to such processes generating what she calls "conjunctive knowledge … implicit, action-guiding knowledge … based and acquired in fundamental experiences … that groups of individuals share with each other" (p. 92).

There are some parallels in this with the motivational interviewing strategies Miller and Rollnick (2002) describe, to "create a positive interpersonal atmosphere that is conducive but not coercive to change" (p. 34). I sought to capture what Wood (2014) calls the "everyday data" that is sometimes seen "as rambling, off-task or divergent … with frequent interjections, incomplete sentences, questions and queries or a sense of ambiguity or uncertainty" (p. 16). In these discussions I was seeking to assure them that there are no right answers, that any response can be accepted and valued, that they may disagree, and if they did, they should say so. The objective was to establish an empowering rapport, so that discussion was, to a substantial extent, directed and paced by group members thus giving them the opportunity to develop structures that seem relevant to them.

Practicalities

As will be described in the following section, the author has had extensive, if not excessive, experience of carrying out deliberative discussions, and I make no excuses for now setting out the rules of engagement that I have developed, as suggestions rather than instructions for others. They generally are successful for me: they may be so for you.

Preparation

Group size is generally best if between four and eight young people, with a target of six. Group members should ideally be drawn from the same aged or close-aged class, if in school contexts. Typically, these conversations may last about an hour. Tell everyone – young people, teachers and parents – that there is no need to prepare for the discussion, and it is not a test or assessment of the young person or of teaching in the school. Refrain, as much as possible, from giving details of topics to be discussed.

Setting up the group

Take a little time to explain what's going to happen …

Sit in a circle, so everyone can see each other. Have name cards in front of each person, positioned so you can read them from your position (with one for you). Introduce yourself and explain what your research is about (broadly), and that you will record the conversation. Explain the anonymity rules (give an example, using one of their names), and explain that the tape will be wiped as soon it's been transcribed. Explain how the discussion will proceed:

- you will ask a few questions – none of them have right or wrong answers;
- they may not agree with someone's answer – just explain what you think, and why;
- one person speaks at a time (because of the recording).

Getting going

Avoid having a list of questions or notes (this suggests you have an agenda you want them to follow). Try not to introduce leading terms and vocabulary (like identity, nation, state) or other categories: only use such terms after they have been first introduced by a participant.

Start with an icebreaker (the only time you go round the table and get everyone to respond – this makes it easier for shyer people to become involved). "Tell me a few things about yourself". Accept what they say – comment positively, ask a question back. (You may get very similar responses – if one describes their pets, they may all tell you about pets. Allow this: don't get frustrated. The first minutes may give you no usable information, but it will start a relationship with them.)

Ask questions that are open and encourage a multiplicity of potential responses (How and Why are usually better that What, When, Where).

The earlier stages may be slow: they are trying to learn about what you want!

During the discussion

Don't make notes (this signals that something 'interesting' (or 'wrong'!) has been said – or 'Ah, so *that's* what she wants us to talk about!' Try and keep eye contact; smile and nod as they speak. Accept whatever is said. If something's unclear, say you are confused, can they give an example? Model *how* to discuss – how to listen to everyone – "Do you all agree with that?", "Does anyone disagree with (any of) that?". Loop the conversation back to what's someone's said earlier – again, demonstrating that they need to listen to each other, and comment on each other's views. Respect shifts in the focus away from the issues that you, as researcher, would prefer they focused on – but then appropriately later redirect the group's attention, preferably back to a particular person's contributions ("earlier Gunther and Freida were saying that …").

Appropriately challenge or question views, in a way that extends and keeps discussion open, rather than closing it down. For example, a person may say something that appears to clash with what they've said earlier: rather than saying they're contradictory, say "I'm a bit confused – you're saying *y*…, but earlier I think you said *x*…?".Not everyone needs to participate by speaking – but do try by

gesture, eye-contact, etc. to not let some people dominate discussion ("We haven't heard very much from this side of the table …").

If asked for your opinion, ***either*** give a short account *if you feel it appropriate*, but stress that it is only *your* opinion – others will have different views and they don't have to agree with you; ***or*** offer to discuss your opinions later – it's their opinions you are interested in. If asked for factual information – give a short account if you can, or say you don't know, and that you can all look for the details later. Try to protect young people who may be vulnerable because of their particular characteristics or experiences.

As you gain their confidence, and they start disagreeing and arguing …

This doesn't always happen – but may after 30 minutes, or more. They need time to understand how they can participate in this kind of discussion. Try more leading questions, such as "Do you think everyone in this country] would agree with that point?", "What would you think if x happened? Would this be a good thing, a bad thing, or not matter?"

At the end of the discussion

Thank them all for their contributions, tell them it's been interesting and helpful, and wish them well for their futures.

A qualitative study

The first example of deliberative discussion techniques was a purely qualitative study. This was made as a one-person post-retirement project, largely self-funded. The objective was to analyse the range of ways that young Europeans described their identity/ies as affiliated to a geo-political region, be this a local settlement, a state, or globally. The original intention was (in 2010) to survey young people in the new members of the European Union, who had joined the EU after 2004, and the countries that were then in the process of joining. All those under 20 would have been born after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, and might therefore perhaps have a different construction of this than older generations.

Fifteen countries were included, and through an extensive set of European contacts and networks, social scientist colleague in each state assisted in identifying a range of locations (from large cities to small towns), distributed in various parts of each state, where deliberative discussions might be arranged. Fuller descriptions of the arrangements are described elsewhere (Ross, 2014, 2019).

As this progressed, it was decided to follow this with a second phase from 2014, that would include fourteen more countries that were longer established members of the EU or of EFTA (The UK and the Republic of Ireland were to have been included, but the Brexit debate, referendum decisions and consequences made the UK impossible to include, and the Republic was judged to be feasible only in the UK was surveyed in parallel).

In all, 29 countries were surveyed, each usually with between 8 and 20 groups (more groups in the larger states): 104 different locations, 182 schools, colleges and institutions, 324 groups, and in total 1,998 young people participated. Consent was obtained from all young people (and parent/guardian consent for those under 16). All discussions were recorded transcribed in full and all individuals and schools were anonymised. This was a very large quantity of data – about 1.25 million words – far more than the amount normally expected to reach data saturation, which is usually defined for group discussion numbers as the point when new material and opinions are not emerging. In the case of this study, there were two factors that meant that data saturation was not fully achieved: firstly, the very wide geographical sweep, through counties and regions within countries, continued to show up contrasts in emphasis and detail that were significant; and secondly, the protracted period of time over which the discussions were conducted – just over six years – was marked by a continuing movement of the particular examples and illustration selected by the groups and their relationship to the very recent past – often recent weeks or months. These points will be illustrated in the paragraphs that follow.

The ice-breaker was followed by a short discussion about characteristics they shared, which nearly always soon reached a point where individuals, and then groups, would identify themselves as from the country of discussion (or not, or from a mixture of countries), at which point they were asked "Why are you Danish?" (or "Danish-and-Serbian", etc.). This usually led to a long discussion, about matters such as birthplace, parentage, language, culture, 'feeling', quite often laced with descriptions of other similar identities (the town, the region, Europe, global, for example). From this we moved to aspects of these countries that they liked, and then that they disliked. The later was an area that was usually discussed for quite some time, and was frequently about behaviours they disapproved of, ranging from discarding litter to racism, inequalities, the behaviour of politicians: all of these were raised by the group themselves, with in most cases some disagreements about emphasis and detail. In all cases, I focused on not just the examples they raised, but the specific phrasing and vocabulary they used. Open ended questions extended the discussion: for example, did everyone in the country feel the same way as they did? This often led to discussions about generational differences, and

sometimes to contrasts to other areas (often cities, or the capital, by those groups in rural areas, and vice versa).

One of the striking characteristics was the emphasis they gave to contemporary and recent news events, from local to global: it was relatively uncommon to draw on events of more than three or four years earlier, or historical examples. In particular the migration of Syrian and other refugees into Europe in 2015 gave rise to discussions in many groups: this will be analysed in more detail in the following section (at Figure 2).

After about half an hour, I would generally go back to some of the alternative identities (particularly to Europe, if this had been mentioned by someone). There was often a degree of 'othering' of different countries: specifically, the USA was 'othered' in respect of insufficient social welfare and health provision, gun violence, racial injustice and the death penalty (all conversations were in the period of the Obama administration, and before Trump was the leading candidate in the 2016 election, and all these references were completely unprompted).

By this stage – maybe about three-quarters through the hour – the nature of the discussion, and my role, were well established, and I was able to introduce some specific prompts. In many cases, I might say: "Your country is a member of the European Union [or applying to become a member]: how would you feel about other countries, like say [deliberate pause, as I appeared to search for an example] – Russia applying to join the EU?" This produced a variety of responses: generalising, groups in the Baltic and Visegrád states spoke of fear of invasion (citing Georgia in 2006, or Ukraine in 2014), or parental and grandparental accounts of the Cold War era; while in the Nordic states, Southern and Western Europe they raised the lack of democracy and dictatorship, and the suppression of human rights (particularly with respect of LBGT communities and freedom of expression). These were also mentioned in Balkan and south-east European groups, but less often, and a not insubstantial minority saw Russia as economically rich and powerful potential member (few appeared to realise that the GDP of Russia was significantly lower than any of their own countries).

Another finding of significance was the impact of the deliberative process, particularly of the encouragement of disagreement between members. This often led to individuals and groups not just challenging each other, but moving in their opinions as they discussed each other's experiences, views and examples. For example, it was possible to trace individuals who initially dismissed or minimised the EU as a mere economic convenience to having some significant role in establishing communal values – solidarity between states, standards, democratic processes, for example. The introduction of Russia and the USA into the discussion not infrequently sharpened these views. Discussions in France, Spain, Portugal and

Germany all took place during or just after the 2015 migrations into Europe from the Syrian conflict (and from Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Eritrea): the majority of comments were positive and sympathetic to the refugees, with negative comments particularly directed at the Hungarian response (for example: "After that, I don't feel European any more", or "that was against all the Europe stands for"). There was in many cases much discussion and some disagreements on the response: in Germany, these were sometimes framed within family stories of the migration into Germany immediately after 1945 as a consequence of the new post-war Polish frontiers, and exclusions from the Sudetenland.

Racism was frequently discussed in generational terms: (some) parents and (more often) grandparents were seen as racist: what was particularly of note was the way that this was often explained (particularly in Nordic, Western and Southern Europe) in terms of demographic changes in the population. From the early 1990s there has been significantly more migration both into Europe and within it (Gatrell, 2019), and since 2008 the number of non-EU migrants of both first generation (birth) and second generation (origin) has again risen sharply, from 6.6 million in 2008 to 9.4 million in 2014 (Eurostat, 2017a, 2017b). Agafiţei and Ivan (2016) estimate that by 2014, just over a fifth of all EU households included at least one person of migrant origin. This was reflected in the composition of the discussion groups: 7 per cent of them had at least one grandparent of non-European origin and a further 16 per cent from another European country: nearly a quarter had some origins in a different country to the one in which they were living. (In terms of birthplace, nearly 94 per cent were born in the country of the discussion.) This led to observations such as "we've grown up with this" and "we know them well", and of how some older people's prejudices came from their upbringing in different times. There were also accounts from several young people who had moved from rural areas to more cosmopolitan ones in the previous few years, and how this change had resulted in them having a more positive view of minorities.

Two other generational differences were also clear. Firstly, the political changes in the former Warsaw Block countries (and, to a slightly lesser extent, in former Yugoslav countries) had led to a family history narrative that many young people in those countries saw as creating a sense of difference in the way that they identified themselves geo-politically. Secondly, across all regions of Europe, the rise and ubiquity of the internet was widely seen as creating a fracture with older generations: parents were seen as having adapted to this, grandparents as (largely) struggling: but many of them saw themselves – as one put it – "kind of born with a cell-phone in our hands." Many of them argued that they were well able to handle net-based rumours and misinformation that their elders struggled with.

A mixed-methods study

The second project was based on the same data, but as a mixed methods investigation. A Jean Monet Network Project (CitEdEV: Citizenship Education in the Context of European Values) had started work in late 2020, with one of the objectives being to investigate "the knowledge of young people in European countries about civil society, its principles, citizenship, European values and the European Union". A small working group, with members drawn initially from Estonia, Czechia, German, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Turkey and the UK had been established to undertake this, but the Covid-19 pandemic made undertaking fieldwork and having access to schools and students impossible, as the repercussions of lockdowns and school closures persisted well into 2022. The group therefore looked to existing data, and several had been involved in the earlier study (as the principal researcher, or as academic affiliate contacts in some of the locations), and it was recognised that this date differed significantly from material such as the Eurostat analysis (European Commission, 2017) in that it was unprompted data, without leading or direct questions. Moreover, the sample size of 1,998 young people was very similar to that of the 15–20 age group identified in the previous section. The group brought in additional members from Sweden, Greece and the UK (either academic affiliates of the former study, or with particular statistical skill sets).

The group first defined 'European Values' to be those set out in the European Union's *Treaty on European Union* (EU, 2012) and the Council of Europe's *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (ECHR, 1950). We did not see that these were exclusive to Europe, nor that they were necessarily only of European origin. Other states (and individual European states themselves) may refer to these values as being 'their' values, and many other countries in the world may hold the same values. There are many lists of human values, most of which include social and political values, from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights onwards. And before this, many countries have long histories of establishing citizenship rights – civil, political and social. What made these 'European values' was that they were within treaty obligations, to which all European states (save Belarus and, from 2023, Russia) are signatories: these date back to 1950, and has the unique distinction, amongst all international declarations and statements, in that that a European Court of Human Rights can make judgements on contraventions of these rights, and require remedies of states that fail to apply them. We simplified and reduced the various values to:

- **Structural Values** (principles which underpin the values are determined and upheld): Democracy and the Rule of Law;

- **Core Fundamental Values** (principles of human dignity, respect and safety): Tolerance of diversity; Respect for Other Cultures; Respect for Life; Respect for the Safety; Social Inclusion; the prohibition of capital and unusual punishments, and of persecution;
- **Process Values** (mechanisms to achieve values): Freedoms (divided into fundamental freedoms and the EU value of freedom of travel); Equalities and Solidarity.

Reading exemplar transcripts of the original data, it was recognised that many of the discussion group participants had references to these values, though often not in the vocabulary of these documents, nor with their precision and legal exactitude. A working group collectively examined a sample of transcripts, and devised a coding system, in which each individual group member's references to these values could be identified, with codes to identify specific examples, the geographical location referred to, the time that the example referred to, if a group was 'othered' and whether the value was positively supported or negatively rejected (or was unclear), as shown in Table 1.

We also devised a data capture system, that could be used alongside each transcript, to note each individual's relevant remarks and code these in a way that could be relatively easily transferred to an SSPS file. Each member of the team was then allocated a batch of about 35 transcripts to code. These were arranged so that no individual received any material from their own country, in order to try and minimise any specialist knowledge of a situation distorting the analysis.

The analysis, when complete, was sampled to check for consistency of coding, and discussions and correcting followed this. The data was clearly relatively old: the earliest material was, at the time of analysis, twelve years old, the most recent six years. We recognised from the outset that the analysis was not going to reveal the current preoccupations and concerns of young people over these values. But we had also recognised that *any* data of this nature would be out of date by the time it reached dissemination. The value lies not in the identification of the examples raised, but in the processes and kinds of practices employed by the young people: the references to the immediate concerns of the day, the othering, the location of values within different geographical areas, the general tendency to refine values within discussions, the sense of specific generational concerns. While not completely timeless, these do indicate ways of identifying the process and direction of travel in young people's concerns.

The 1,998 young people mentioned such values on over 5,000 occasions: in 44 per cent of these they were discussing values about the state in which they were living; in 33 per cent of cases they concerned Europe; values concerning the local area or global affairs were each raised in 5 per cent of cases; and the remaining

Table 1. Examples of coding

		Characteristics of value				
Fragment of speech (with pseudonym, gender, age, location)	Value	Example	Location	Time	Othering	Positive/ negative
Ladislas (M,17), Lille: I'm proud of France, because there are many ethnicities in France – we are all mixed together, and we have equality: that's what I like about France.	Diversity	Ethnic	State	Now	No	+
Tirza (F,14), Linz: Many people complain about ,.. people coming to Austria from other countries – my grandmother is complaining al the time – I love her, but I can't understand it.	Diversity	Ethnic	State	Now	Older people	+
Waltrute (F,17), Wien: some countries in Europe that have a monarch, like the UK or Spain – it's not like the old monarchies, there's only a king or queen for presentations.	Democracy	General	Europe	Now		+
Yekikki (F,17), Turku: France passed a low that it's forbidden to wear the niqab? – that goes against the European Union – if there's supposed to be freedom, how can they pass that sort of law? It's a little hypocritical to do that, and at the same time insisting that [applicant] countries have some level of human rights.	Democracy	General	State	Now	–	+
	Freedom	Dress		This year	French	+

13 per cent could not be allocated to a geo-political level. The great majority of references were positive about these values (over 90 per cent), 5.5 per cent were neutral or ambivalent, and 4 per cent negative about each particular value. 52 per cent of responses were about the processes of upholding values (the support for freedoms, equalities and measures of social solidarity); 28 per cent were values about human rights; and 20 per cent were about the underlying structures of democracy and the rule of law. More specifically, Social solidarity was raised in 30 per cent of cases, Democracy in 17 per cent, Equalities in 10 per cent; and Respect for Other Cultures in 10 per cent of cases. Unlike other surveys of values, these were – because of the methodology of deliberative discussion, as described above – totally unprompted mentions (Ross, Loughran, Brunold, Hartsmar, & Liljefors Persson, 2024).

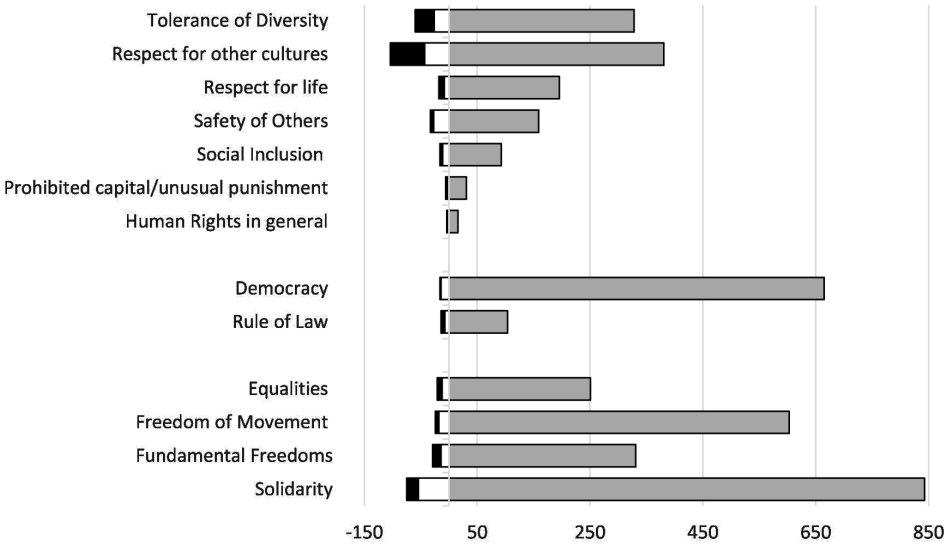


Figure 2. Strength of feeling about each value, numbers of mentions.

Figure 2 shows the various responses for each of the 13 values identified. The length of each horizontal bar shows the total number of instances where the particular value was mentioned. The grey element, to the right, shows the positive mentions of support for that value; the left-hand elements (shown as negative numbers) represent the negative comments (black) and the ambivalent or 'neutral' remarks (white). Thus Solidarity, the most frequently mentioned value (918, 41 per cent of the whole sample) was mentioned positively 843 times, neutrally 54 times, and negatively 21 times. Other frequent mentions were of Democracy (total 681) and Freedom of Movement (603). The least commonly mentioned value was the prohibition of the death penalty, cruel punishments and persecution (37). Note that the significance of this is not that there was significant support for capital punishment, but that it was not raised as an issue, in the context of these discussions. ('Other Human Rights' was a catch-all residual category for remarks that could not be classified in the other six categories). Social Inclusion (109) was not mentioned often, but the human rights values of Respect for others (485) and Tolerance of diversity (383) were relatively popular.

We were able to use the data analyses in this mixed methods way to combine qualitative examples of the actual vocabularies, expressions and examples used with quantitative indications of the relative frequencies of use. For example, we were able to include numbers of positive, neutral and negative attitudes to each value, as shown in the figure above, demographic data about parental occupations, and the geographical origins of parents and grandparents. The following four

examples indicate some of the additional value the quantitative analysis added to the qualitative data.

In the previous section mention was made of when refugees were particularly mentioned correlated with the large movements in 2015: Figure 3 shows this graphically, linking the number of times refugees were mentioned each year (the lower broken black line, right hand scale) to the actual numbers of refugees entering Europe each year (upper grey line, left hand scale).

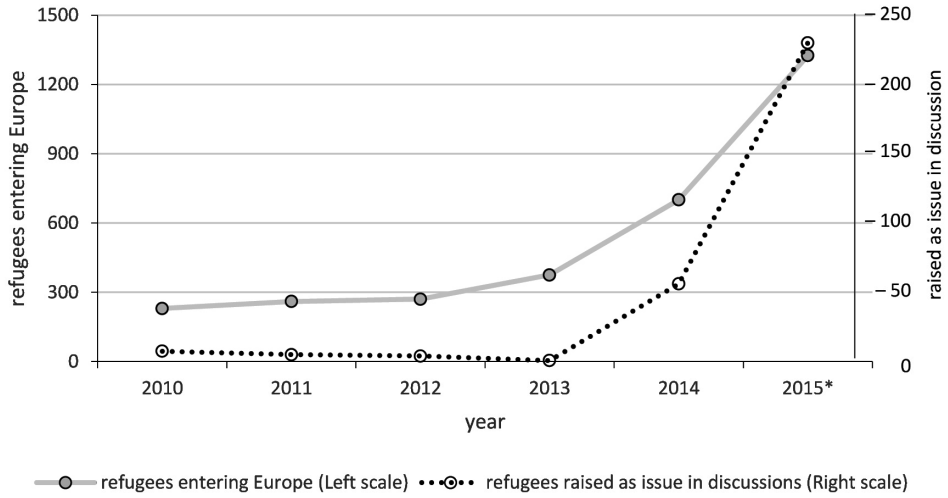
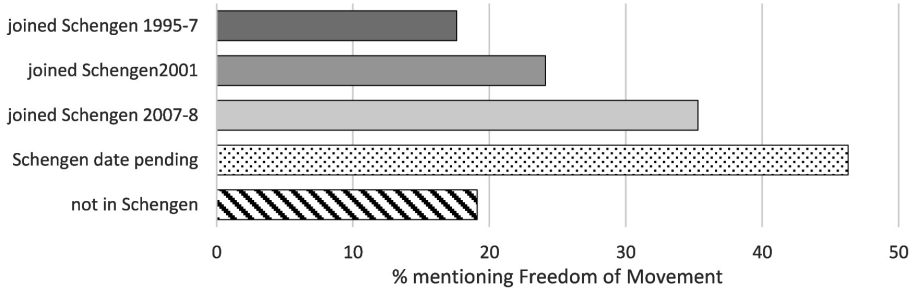


Figure 3. Refugees: mentioned in discussions; numbers entering Europe.

This shows how the common popular discourse at the time of a particular deliberative discussion impacts greatly on the examples used to illustrate the value being mentioned. Both figures 2 and 3 plot the actual numbers of a value being mentioned. It is also possible to show the percentages of two or more particular populations, allowing a comparison of different responses, as in the following three examples.

Figure 4 shows the various times individuals mentioned the Freedom of Movement within Europe, generally as an advantage, in EU membership and the Schengen agreement.

Figure 4 groups respondents in particular countries together, based on the lapse of time between that right first becoming available to that group for countries and the time of the deliberative discussions in the country (with additional categories for the right being available in the future, and for those where it was not, at that time, even a matter for discussion). The percentage of young people mentioning this freedom was mentioned was calculated for each country in the study:



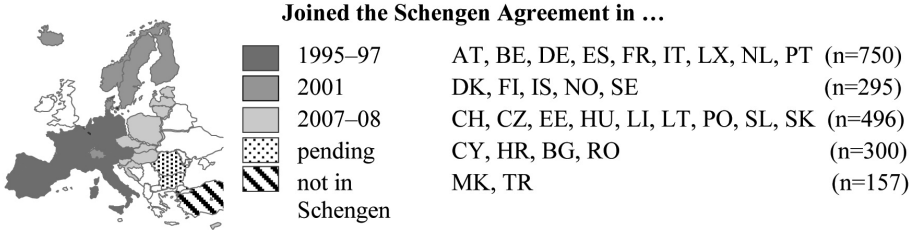


Figure 4. Freedom of movement mentioned, by date of country formally joining the Schengen Agreement.

Figure 4 shows that the rate of mentioning this was particularly high in the countries where Schengen was pending, and how it was much less a focus in discussions in those areas where Schengen had been in force for many years. These figures are of proportions of the number of young people in each group of countries (these groups of very different sizes). On several occasions in France and Germany, for example, there were comments such "Oh, I'd forgotten that" or "We're so used to that". Recent acquisition of the right meant that it was more frequently mentioned; anticipation of the right in the future made it even more important.

We also had collected data on parental occupations (of both mother and father). When the data was originally collected for a qualitative study, it was thought that possibly the children of police officers were making rather more negative comments about human rights issues than those whose parents were in other occupations – but this was only a possibility: checking this would have required disproportionate effort. The quantitative data set in the mixed methods study enabled us to look at this in more detail, as we had coded the occupational data on a standard occupational coding system. Figure 5 shows a comparison, value by value, of the relative frequency of mention of two sets of young people: those who had one or both parents in the 'education services' (shown in the lighter grey bands) and those with a parent or both in the 'protective services', a category that included police, gendarmerie and military personnel (shown in dark grey).

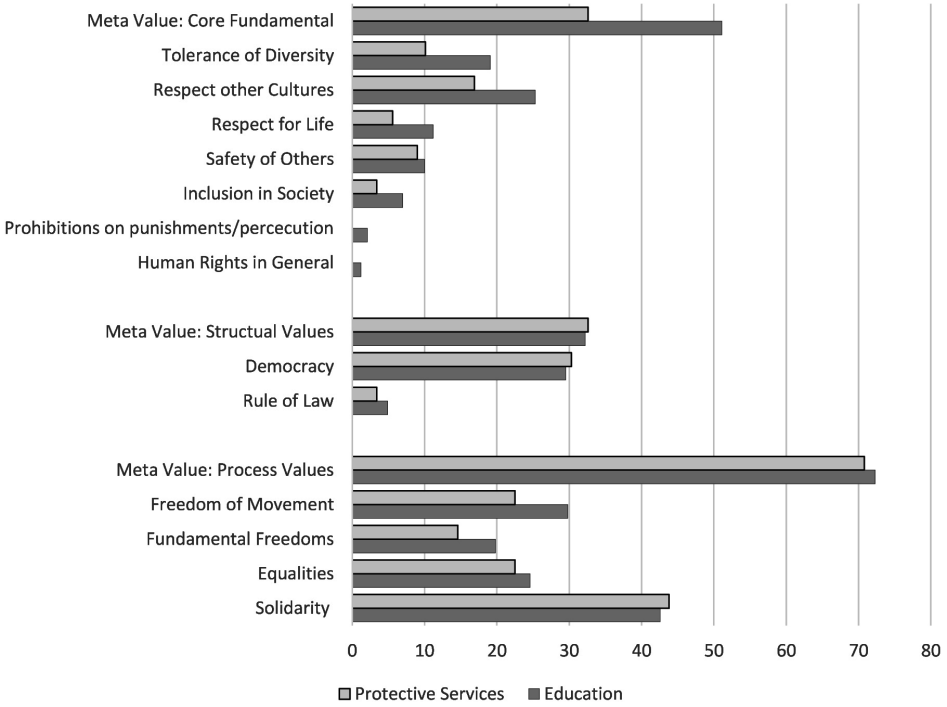


Figure 5. Strength of values by parental occupation sector: Education and Protective Services.

As in Figure 4, these are percentage proportions of each occupational group, not absolute values. The differences are revealing: the structural values of Democracy and the Rule of Law, and the process values of Equalities, Rights and Freedoms, the two groups are very similar. But in terms of the fundamental core values, such as respect for other cultures and tolerance of diversity, the children of teachers are very much more likely to mention these values than those in the other group.

It was noted earlier that the sample of young people include a significant proportion of young people who had a parent (or both) or a grandparent from a country other than that in which the discussion took place. Figure 5 shows the data on each value gathered for three groups. The first, shown in pale grey (the upper bar in each group of three) are the frequencies of those who had two parents originating in the country of the discussion. The second group (the middle bar, in mid-grey) shows the responses of those who had both parents from other EU or EFTA countries. The third band (black) shows the proportions of young people who have one or both parents from Africa, Asia, the Middle East of Latin America.

Structural and Process values are broadly similar for each of the three groups, but Human rights values are generally more likely to be mentioned by children from

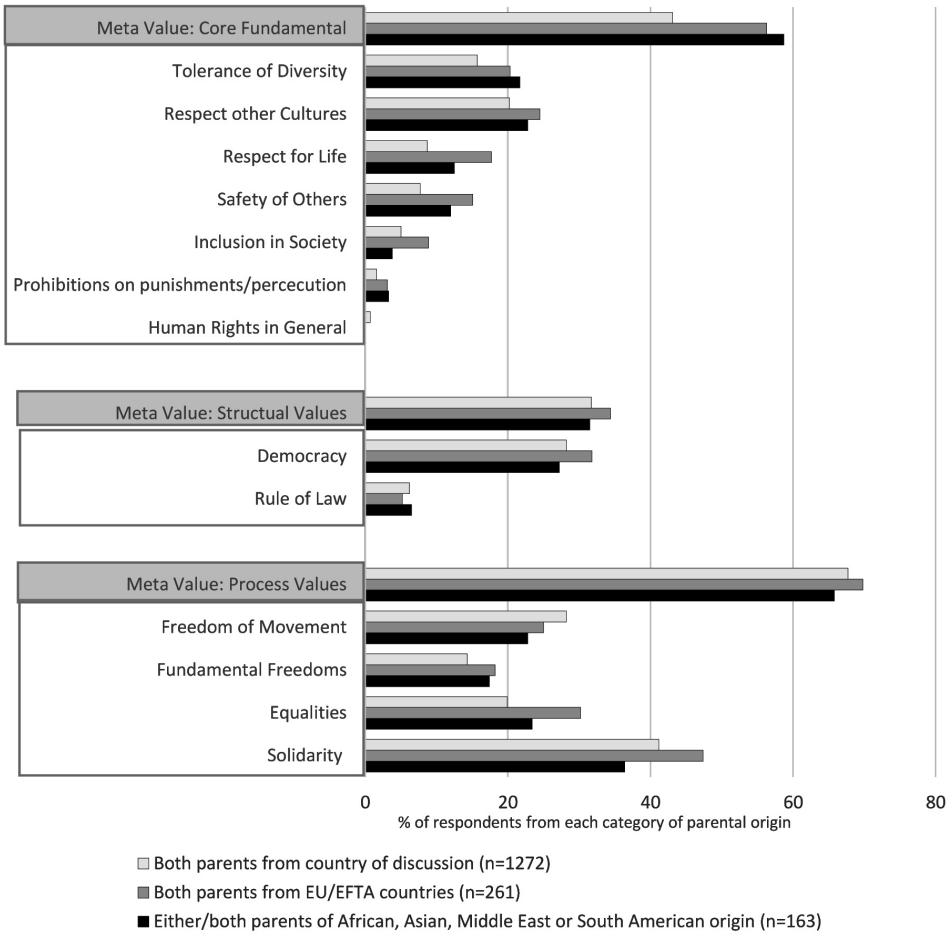


Figure 6. Responses to individual values by individuals, grouped by parental origins.

migrant family backgrounds, more so than those whose parents both originated in the country of the discussion. The young people who had some non-white ancestries in particular were more positive about these values; the European migrants were also positive, but not as much as the non-white origin young people.

These findings contrast to the populist right-wing discourse of some social and political commentators, who argue that peoples of migrant, particularly non–European, origin have difficulties in accepting European values (either being unable or unwilling to do so). They are thus said to represent a threat to the continuance of European values. For example, Victor Orban has said "western Europe is the half [*sic*] where European and non-European peoples live together. These countries are no longer nations: they are nothing more than a conglomeration of peoples … no longer

the Western world, but the post-Western world. … here we are in Central Europe … the West in its spiritual sense has moved to Central Europe – what is left over there is merely the post-West" (Orban, 2022). Others who appear to subscribe to this 'race replacement' theory include Thio Sarrazin (2018) and Eric Besson, the former French Minister for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co–Development (2009–10), whose Immigration Act required immigrants who sought French nationality to adhere "to the essential principles and values of the republic" and "to sign a charter of the rights and duties of the French citizen" (République Français, 2011).

But these findings suggest that those young people whose parents have origins in the less-economically developed countries of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America are *more* likely to accept the fundamental human rights principles in the European Charter than those young people of whose parental origins are both from the country in which they live. Of course, as has been acknowledged in the earlier discussion on the nature of 'European' values (as simply codified and legally sanctioned global values) means that these values, some or all, may be equally or more valued than they are in Europe. It also suggests that the experience of being brought up in a family of mixed origin supports young people in recognising these values in a more explicit way than those with a monocultural family upbringing. This effect is seen even when the ethnic diversity is not particularly great or explicit – the EU/EFTA group, of 169 individuals, comprises 99 where both parents come from outside the country, 39 where the father does so, and 31 where the mother is from a different country.

Some conclusions

This paper has shown, through an examination of the practicalities of two related research projects, that data collected through deliberative discussions offer opportunities for both qualitative and mixed methods analysis. These examples have taken young people between 10 and 20 as their subjects, but such an approach may also be suitable for other age ranges. The particular value of the method is that it gives the researcher an opportunity to minimise their own involvement in how subjects elect to describe their understanding of particular topics:

- the use of non-leading questions,
- the encouragement to listen and respond to other group member's contributions,
- members to take ownership of many elements of the course of the discussion, and particularly
- young people using their own terms, vocabulary and structures.

Encouraging them to introduce practical examples and instances can lead to disagreements, more detailed expositions, subtle changes in viewpoints, and a sense of ownership over the whole process. The power relationship that is inherent in all researcher-subject interchanges is weakened.

This diminution of researcher control may bring out epistemological illumination, but it is at the expense of allowing a lot of discussion to run in alternative directions, listening to narratives that are not the intended focus (Wood, 2014). Consequently, the data saturation point – when further discussions are of little incremental value – takes longer to achieve and is perhaps never reached. This in itself might be a useful finding: that certain meanings are so multiple that an absolute range of meaning may be unachievable, because it may not exist in a wholly unambiguous way.

There are other potential problems with this approach. The need to assemble groups makes true random sampling impossible. The need for group members to (in some way) know each other and be comfortable with each other as fellow discussants is a limiting restriction, which is why institutional settings – schools, colleges, workplaces – become valuable sites for recruitment. There are regional variations that require any sample to take into consideration such variations, for example using a range of different sized settlements, the sometimes more cosmopolitan capital often being very different from distant and rural settlements.

The extension to using qualitative analysis is thus limited: the construction of a statistically true sample is not possible, and the kinds of analysis used here are only possible because of the particularly large set of qualitative data: most qualitative studies have far fewer participants. It becomes possible to divide the sample into distinct groups – by locations, parental background, etc., and show comparative percentages volunteering particular issues or values, as well as absolute numbers for the whole group. While such access to a data set of unprompted, volunteered data does present particular advantages in gaining insights into people's constructions, these may need qualification: for example, the very low number of times that the prohibition on capital punishment was mentioned cannot be used to infer that there was any lack of interest in this, or rejection of it: it was (probably) simply not volunteered as an issue of current concern. (It was raised particularly by some of the Norwegian groups, who used the way that the mass-murderer Anders Breivik (who had killed 80 people, mostly teenagers, in 2011) was being held in detention as an example of Norwegian tolerance; and more generally as a means of contrasting European states with the USA.) Non-prompted data collection can leave lacunae, as well as providing detailed constructions.

But the process does address Bourdieu's concerns (1973): it does not present research informants with pre-formed categories, and seek responses to these, but attempts to allow categories to emerge, be discussed and argued about, to be rejected

or confirmed as the specificities of meaning are refined. The nature of the state is, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, is to impose a "totalizing classificatory grid" (Anderson 1991, p. 184). Kertzer and Arel (2002) describe how "the use of identity categories … creates a particular vision of social reality. All people are assigned to a single category, and are hence conceptualised as sharing, with a certain number of others, a common collective identity" (p. 5). This reification of identity categories imposes tidy boundaries between groups (Kertzer, 2017). Appadurai (1996) puts this neatly: the "process of enumeration and assignation through … body-counts create not only types and classes … but also homogeneous bodies, because number, by its nature, flattens idiosyncrasies and creates boundaries around these homogeneous bodies, since it performatively limits their extent … Statistics are to bodies and social types what maps are to territories: they flatten and enclose." (p. 133).

Deliberative discussion produces data that troubles this process, and challenges the use of categories that are far less distinct than is often admitted. It is a process that seeks to capture what Wood (2014) called the "everyday data", that can be seen "as rambling, off-task or divergent … with frequent interjections, incomplete sentences, questions and queries or a sense of ambiguity or uncertainty" (p. 16). Rochat (2010) points out that in much social science "Universality claims get more attention because they are cleaner and sharper, encompassing control and predictive power … This tends to relegate diversity to noise rather than as a primary object of study" (p. 107). Deliberative discussion may produce data that is necessarily noisy, but "not everything that can be counted, counts; and not everything that counts can be counted" (Cameron, 1963, p. 13).

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Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval from the London Metropolitan University, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, in two stages:

- for the study in Phase 1 (between January 2010 and October 2013) (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Turkey) on 15 October 2009, extended 22 September 2012,
- for the study in Phase 2 (September 2014- January 2016 (Austria Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) on 25 February 2014.

Participant consent

Written consent was obtained from all participants (young people) and from the parents or guardians of those under 16 years of age, before each discussion took place. This included permission for the discussions to be recorded, transcribed, and then used in a range of unspecified academic publications, including articles and books, based on their anonymised contributions. These statements are held in the archives of the University.

Data availability

All recordings of the discussions have been transcribed, and have not yet been archived because they are still being added to and further analysed by the writer. The original audio recordings have been deleted. Records of demographic data and consent forms from parents and young people that contain material that would identify them are being securely held in the archives of London Metropolitan University until 2026, when they will be destroyed.

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Anna Wiłkomirska
*University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education**
E-mail: awilkomirska@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-2413-245X

Barbara Murawska
*University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education**
E-mail: barbaramurawska@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-3576-2051

Social trust of youth in the shadow of the depopulation process

Summary

The article analyses selected results of an extensive study conducted as part of the ProEdUMW project – Scientific research in the service of local educational policy implemented in Ostrołęka by the Faculty of Education at the University of Warsaw. Two quantitative studies, conducted using the survey technique as part of the Ostrołęka educational observatory projects (covering the issues of teaching effectiveness, developing students'; social competences and equal educational opportunities in public primary schools in the city) and Democracy is OK! (strengthening the democratic culture of the school) were implemented in the 2021/22 school year. The first study was conducted in the eighth grades of all public primary schools in Ostrołęka, the second among students of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades of public secondary schools. The aim of the analyses of selected research problems was to acquire knowledge covering important issues for a city at risk of marginalisation and depopulation, such as: the attitude of young people to the city, their life plans, students' trust in the institutions of the city and the state. Regardless of the positive attitude towards the city in which they study, young people do not plan to live there and leave it with very low levels of social capital. The aim of the entire ProEdUMW project was

* Address: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Pedagogiczny, ul. Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warszawa, Poland

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to support local educational policy, so the article ends with recommendations for school culture and practice that could help build young people's social trust.

Keywords: social trust, local educational policy, the Ostrołęka educational observatory projects, school culture and young people's social trust

Introduction

Applied social research, focused on providing data that supports the development of scenarios for beneficial changes for the municipal authorities, must precisely take into account the broadest possible scope of the local context. The subject of this study is the analysis of a study conducted in a medium-sized city located in central Poland – Ostrołęka. This paper focuses on reflecting on the potential of young people as a driver of urban development, and considers the issue of the social capital with which they leave their home environment. The local context, being an important part of the analysis, appears particularly important in view of the expanding areas of small and medium-sized Polish cities threatened by depopulation and marginalisation, both social and economic. Despite these threats, these regions still remain the key environment for the socialisation and school education of children and youths.

Social marginalisation of Ostrołęka

In Poland, the processes of depopulation and social marginalisation cover rural areas (for many years) and small, medium and large cities in most voivodships, and the scale of the phenomenon is growing (Szukalski, 2019). The main reasons are: low natural growth and internal and foreign migration caused by economic and social aspirations. The decreasing number of inhabitants, especially the outflow of young, working people, causes a decrease in the economic and social potential, which leads to the marginalisation of given areas. In 2019, there was a decrease in population in 295 poviats, and only in 84 there was an increase in population (out of 314 poviats and 66 cities with poviat rights).

As suggested by the report of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) (2019), Ostrołęka belongs to the group of cities threatened by depopulation and marginalisation (social and economic). Based on the data collected in the years 2008–2014, Ostrołęka was identified as a city of declining potential, only to change its ranking to a city at risk of marginalisation in the next report, covering 2014–2018. These positions in ranking depend on how many of the seven analysed risk indicators characterise the given city. These are:

1. Change in the registered population (2008–2014) in comparison to the average change in the country during the same period.
2. The forecast developed by Statistics Poland for the years 2018–2030 for the municipality, as compared to national average for the whole country (Statistics Poland's country-level forecast by 2035 was replaced by the more precise municipality-level forecast by 2030).
3. Change in the number of registered unemployed persons (2008–2014) in comparison to the average change in the country during the same period.
4. Change in the level of own income in the municipality's budget (2008–2014) in comparison to the average change in the country during the same period.
5. Change in the number of provided overnight stays (2004–2014) in comparison to the average change in the country during the same period.
6. Change in the number of registered business entities (2008–2014) in comparison to the average change in the country during the same period.
7. Change in the number of registered seats of the largest companies included in the 2000 List published by the *Rzeczpospolita* daily newspaper (2011–2014) in comparison to the average change in the country during the same period.

Five of the above mentioned risk factors apply to Ostrołęka: a decrease in the number of inhabitants, unfavourable demographic prognoses, the number of overnight stays provided, and both indicators of the number of business entities. Moreover, the actual scope of population decline is probably larger, because Statistics Poland does not take emigration into account. In Ostrołęka (next to such cities as Tarnów or Bytom) it can reach even 40–50% of the current numbers by 2050 (Śleszyński, 2018). As follows from Statistics Poland's data, in 2002 Ostrołęka had over 54 thousand inhabitants, and over a ten-year period their number dropped to slightly over 48 thousand. This is a decline by about 10%.

Similar data, although derived with the use of a slightly different methodology, are presented in the report of the Polish Economic Institute (PEI) of 2019 (Dębkowska et al., 2019). Over 700 small and over 200 of medium-sized cities, whose population accounts for about 40 percent of all Poles faces the risk of depopulation due to economic and demographic factors. A significant part of them requires new development strategies. Those cities are located primarily in central, eastern and southern Poland.

Negative demographic processes, such as depopulation, result from the outflow of young, ambitious and entrepreneurial people to other locations, which reduces not also the economic, but also the social potential. Low incomes of the population translate into declining own revenues for local governments, while the needs and aspirations of local communities are growing, especially those of young people who do not want to replicate the social life scenarios of previous generations.

Economic factors are forcing city authorities to "rationalise costs," which often results in the liquidation of important social, cultural and administrative institutions (libraries, cinemas, community centres, schools, health and cultural centres, police stations or courts). This unfavourable picture can be compounded by the poor road or poor tourist offer, and in some cases climatic pollution.

The PAN report also points to a low level of social activity, admittedly characteristic of Polish society in general, but particularly unfavourable in small and medium-sized cities, where local communities could reduce the negative consequences of the city's economic and administrative weakness.

Young people are driven to migrate from small and medium-sized cities to larger centres (or in some cases, villages) by high unemployment rates, lack of opportunities to fulfil their aspirations – economic and personal alike, including educational aspirations.

Social trust

If the migration trend, regardless of its pace, becomes unavoidable, the young people leaving smaller cities are their "calling cards" and could be the hope for development for their new communities. One of the important elements of environmental socialisation, including school socialisation, is the building of social capital. It determines, among other things, young people's social attitudes and the level of satisfaction from being a member of a particular community. The concept of social capital is defined differently. In this study, it will be understood in accordance with the approach of James Coleman and Robert Putnam, as a set of organisational and communicative features of society, where trust, norms and relationships that ensure cooperation and smooth operation play a key role (Putnam et al., 1993). The basic element of social capital analysed in this study is the trust in institutions and selected sources of knowledge.

Trust is one of the most essential components of social capital. It is also the subject of reflection and multifaceted research by scholars from many social science disciplines. In Poland, Piotr Sztompka is the authority who has studied this issue in depth. His simple definition of trust has been quoted many times (Sztompka, 2007). He defined trust as a wager made "on the uncertain future actions of other people." Two types of cultures are distinguished repeatedly in scientific works – a culture of trust and a culture of distrust. Poland is rather a country of culture of distrust. This is due to a long history of imposing oppressive power, the absence of democracy, and the need for individual struggle for existence, which created many barriers to the development of a civil society that fosters a culture of trust. Anthony Giddens (1991) pointed out the essential characteristics of trust, defining

it as confidence, reliance on individuals or systems or institutions. According to him, passive trust, i.e. acceptance of authority, which is characteristic of traditional societies in post-industrial societies, is changing into active trust, which involves constant monitoring and evaluation of the integrity of individuals and institutions. Francis Fukuyama (1995) also associated trust with social capital. Trust builds the belief that other people (and institutions) who recognise similar norms and values will behave honestly and in solidarity.

So how do we build social trust? What conditions must be fulfilled for the young people to have a sense of connection with the place they come from? The answer to this question is very difficult. Numerous studies show diverse conditions, principles, bases for building a culture of trust in social, individual, organisational contexts. Let's begin from looking at the conditions for building social trust, formulated by Piotr Sztompka (2007). He opens the catalogue of such conditions by stating that normative consistency is the key here. A well-constructed law, devoid of internal contradictions, is conductive to building of an orderly and predictable social life. Additionally, normative consistency should be supported by the consequent observance of rules by individuals. These characteristics of society build individual and organisational trust. The second condition for building a culture of trust is the durability of social order. Sztompka states that the permanence of the state system, its institutions, organisations, structures gives a sense of stability to society, and thus builds a sense of security. Such conditions of social life are conducive to the display of trust, and most often this trust is reciprocated. The transparency of social organisation is equally important. Transparency of the actions of those in power, access to information on the functioning of the structures of social organisations, is a necessary condition for the emergence and development of a culture of trust. Knowledge of misguided decisions or unfavourable actions is better for social functioning than attempts at concealing it. It protects against the development of suspicion towards an institution whose principles of operation are not known. Another element of a culture of trust is what Sztompka calls familiarity. It refers to an individual's physical surroundings and the environment of action. Familiarity with the place where we live, the architecture, the landscape, but also the possibility of repetitive behaviour promotes a sense of security and mental stability. Sztompka mentions another condition, which supports the building a culture of trust: it is the responsibility of other people. The observance of rules and laws that regulate social life is subject to social control. Every individual can appeal to an institution, organisation or another entity that monitors the observance of applicable regulations if they suspect their rights are being breached. The certainty of existence of such a mechanism, and positive experiences with such mechanism, build social trust (Sztompka, 2007). The review of factors necessary to build the

culture of trust demonstrates that its fundamental element is the creation of conditions for the development of mental peace and emotional stability, based on a sense of community. Can the trust-building conditions, discussed above, be implemented at school? This is not a simple and clear-cut task. Many studies have attempted to clarify the complexity of building a culture of trust in an institution. Let's take a look at some of the results, treating the school as an institution that fulfils its designated tasks in society.

Finnish researchers, Johanna Kujala, Hanna Lehtima, Raminta Pecetami (2016), have analysed the role of trust and mistrust in an institution. Their study confirmed the complexity of the role trust plays in building an organisation's culture and showed that trust is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon. It confirmed also the outcomes of many earlier studies that indicated the role of affective and cognitive factors for building a culture based on organisational unity and its fragmentation. The researchers established that affective trust combined with cognitive mistrust leads to organisational unity, whereas emotion-based trust and mistrust lead to organisational fragmentation. The researchers pointed also to the fact that organisational fragmentation can have positive aspects. It supports the expression of doubt and is conductive to honesty in communication, which can lead to positive changes in the institution.

Trust in institutions is linked by many researchers to interpersonal trust. If we get to know and trust someone, we are more likely to cooperate and share knowledge. Thus, interpersonal trust can be a basic condition for continuous knowledge sharing and building cooperation, both of which affect the development of organisations (von Krogh, Ichijo & Nonaka, 2000). American researchers Ji Hoon Song, Hong Min Kim and Judith A. Kolb (2009) have demonstrated that interpersonal trust can be the basis of organisational trust structure. It can build organisational-level behaviour based on trust. This happens through cooperation that enables learning.

Institutional trust applies also to the culture of trust at school. Trust is the basis for the effectiveness of the school's work. Numerous research (e.g. Tshcannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998) show that this is an element of the teacher-student relationship. If a teacher can rely on students, fellow teachers and other school staff, they can concentrate on their duties at school. A study conducted in primary schools in Ankara by Cetin Erdogan (2016) shows that the person responsible for building culture of trust at school is the principal, who is responsible for communication of mission, understanding of the school's purposes and for ensuring good relations among employees of the school. Bad relations between the principal and the staff, characterised by prejudice, harm the culture of trust in the school. Thus, the condition for building a culture of trust is the fight against prejudice, which according to the author include social background, gender, age, disability, ethnicity,

religion, being a foreigner. It is also important for the principal and the staff to share common values. According to Wayne K. Hoy and Cesil G. Miskal (2008) (based on Erdogan, 2016), trusting relationships between participants in the education system determine the basis of a culture of trust in schools.

Trust is strongly related to the national culture of individuals. A focus on collectivism, and thus the existence of high-intensity internal social control, is associated with lower external trust. Strangers pose a threat to the community. Representatives of an individualistic culture, where in-group control is lower, are more open to outside contact and are inclined to place trust in strangers (Irwin & Berigan, 2013). This is an important information in the context of the increasing migration movements, and in particular with respect to the numerous group of war refugees from Ukraine, studying in Polish schools. It shows that locking oneself within the circle of one's own culture is not conducive to trust and community building.

The search for factors that foster a culture of trust at schools is a complicated task. It is also difficult to answer the question of elements that build culture of trust at the school level. Research conducted within the framework of the international Civic Education Study program in 1998–2003 demonstrated the complexity of the trust phenomenon and did not lead to an understanding of the genesis of political trust. The authors of the study only noted, on a macroscopic scale, that the relationship of trust is more significant in the community dimension – young people from lower status groups displayed relatively higher trust in institutions with clear socialisation tasks. Of the micro-social determinants tested, the freedom to speak one's mind at school and interpersonal trust are of some importance for building political trust (Dolata, Koseła, Wiłkomirska & Zielińska, 2004).

Is the school infrastructure relevant to building trust? It probably is. Interestingly, Ali Erden (2007, based on Erdogan, 2016) argues that smaller schools have a better level of trust culture than big ones. Teachers believe that the size of the school is associated with the ability to pursue common goals and values. It also fosters a positive attitude among teachers to build a culture of trust. In small schools, students are more inclined to learn and be involved in the implementation of school tasks.

The Public Opinion Research Centre CBOS (Omyła-Rudzka, 2022) has been researching social trust in Poland for twenty years, and despite certain fluctuations, it remains on a constantly low level. Less than one-fifth of Polish respondents state that people can be trusted, and 77% believe that one should be very cautious in relations with other people. In general, as suggested by numerous studies, mistrust is expressed more strongly in the Polish society than attitudes based on openness and trust. Our society has also long been characterised by rather low levels of trust in state institutions and other social institutions. In international studies, such as

the European Social Survey, conducted since 2002, Poles are characterised by much lower social trust indicators than many other countries (especially Western ones) (Domański, 2018). This also applies to school students. The report *Youth in Democracy. Results of the ICCS 2022 International Civic Competence Survey* provides information on, among other things, the level of confidence of 14-year-olds in the agendas of social life. Young people declare their general level of trust in others at 36%. This is three percentage points less than the average in 20 countries participating in the study.

Threats associated with such low level of social capital are very serious. These include a lack of social cohesion and solidarity, a lack of motivation to cooperate with others, a lack of motivation for social involvement, a lack of openness to others, social divisions and other factors destructive to the functioning of society. This is stressed also by authors of the report *Poland 2030 – Development Challenges*, who have listed the increase of social capital among the ten crucial challenges, and indicated trust as the most important stimulus for the multi-annual development strategy of our country (Boni et al., 2009).

Description of the study

The study was conducted as part of the broad research project ProEdUMW – Scientific research in the service of local education policy, carried out in Ostrołęka[1] by the Faculty of Education of University of Warsaw. The analysis covered selected data from two quantitative studies, conducted with the questionnaire technique as part of the projects, *Ostrołęckie obserwatorium oświatowe – the Ostrołęka Education Observatory* (which covers the issues of teaching effectiveness, the shaping of students' social competences and equality of educational chances in public primary schools in the city) and *Demokracja jest OK!* (*Democracy is OK!*) (strengthening the democratic culture of the school). The first study was among eighth graders of all public primary schools in Ostrołęka, the second one among students in the second, third and fourth grades of public secondary schools. Both took place in the 2021/22 school year, were voluntary and anonymous. All students were invited to participate in the survey (subject to legal guardian consent). The survey, using an online questionnaire, was conducted in school computer labs, under the supervision of the researchers (at the primary school) and accompanied by teachers. At the primary schools, the questionnaire was completed by 580 students (83% of the population). At secondary schools, a total of 2,421 students completed the questionnaire (61% of the population). 2,400 questionnaires were qualified for statistical analysis. The

[1] https://www.pedagog.uw.edu.pl/2021/05/27/proedumw-badania-naukowe-w-sluzbie-lokalnej-polityki-edukacyjnej/

analysis did not include two vocational schools, as the number of questionnaires completed there was too small. The third vocational school completed only 22 questionnaires, which was too small a number to include this school in statistical analyses. Therefore, the analysis of results covers eight secondary schools from Ostrołęka (four general secondary schools and four technical secondary schools).

Both surveys were multi-faceted, covering a range of issues, relating to how students function in school. In primary schools, these included issues of student self-help or homework, and in secondary schools the level of democracy at the school. This paper covers their selected elements, such as students' attitudes toward the city where they study, plans for the future, trust in city authorities and institutions, including school and sources of knowledge.

Attitude of the young people to the city where they study

Attitude towards Ostrołęka and possible plans to continue living in the city may depend on their current place of residence and where young people would like to study and live in the future. 95% of primary school students would like to continue their education in schools based in Ostrołęka. By far the largest group plans to continue their education in general secondary schools – 59%, nearly 1/3 would like to continue their education in Ostrołęka's technical schools and just over 4% in vocational schools. This is a clear signal to the city – in what schools the students wish to study.

Ostrołęka is the capital of the district, and the location of the largest number of secondary schools in the region. Therefore, the secondary school students population is dominated by commuters from the surrounding area – nearly 2/3 of secondary school students do not live in Ostrołęka. Relatively more Ostrołęka residents study at (general) secondary schools.

Are the data favourable for the demographics of Ostrołęka? Do the years spent in schools in the city support the development of ties that would encourage the young people to remain in Ostrołęka and work for the city? An analysis of young people's educational and housing plans provides some answers to these questions. As shown in Figure 1, less than one-fifth of the eighth graders plan to live in Ostrołęka after completing their education. The largest group would like to move to another country, and slightly fewer to large cities. For the 15-year-olds, not only are small and medium-sized cities unattractive as planned places for adult life, but also Poland as a country. The authorities of the small and medium-sized cities facing risk of depopulation must therefore cope not only with the need to develop local strategies that would be attractive for the young people, but also with the resentment of the country as a whole, in terms of a desirable place to live. The demographic trend

indicates a steady decline in Poland's population as a result of low fertility rates and migration flows to large cities and other countries – it can be assumed that they are motivated not only by economic, but also by ideological factors.

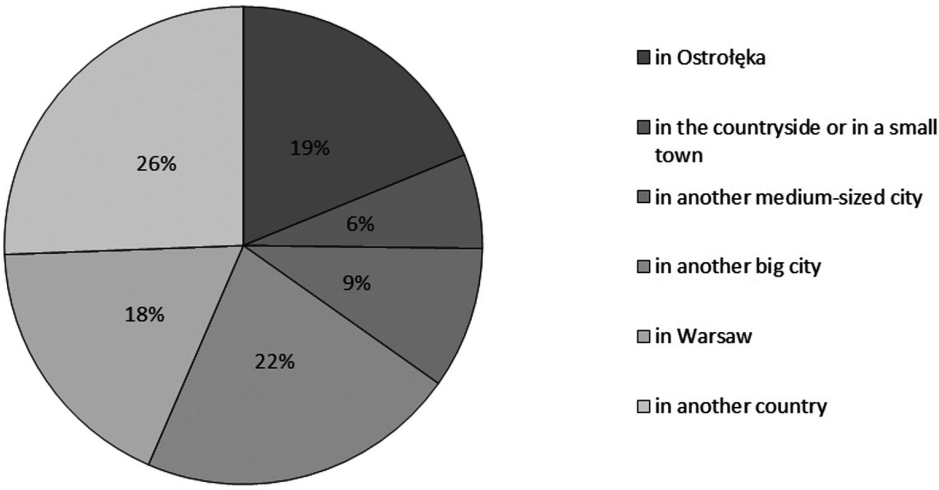

Figure 1. Residential plans of primary school students.

Does the different demographic composition of secondary school students change the picture of their residential plans? Does attending school in the city encourage young people to choose Ostrołęka as their future residence? Answers to these questions are illustrated in figures 2, 3 and 4. An interesting element is the much larger group of young people who would like to live in the countryside. Among the older young people, the number of those planning to live in Ostrołęka is also significantly lower – the drop exceeds 50%, more young people would like to move to big cities, but not to Warsaw. Still a very large proportion – 25% – would like to emigrate to another country.

Do the residential plans vary due to the current place of residence? The general tendency is such that residents of Ostrołęka indicate large cities and other countries as their future preferred place of residence more frequently, while residents of the neighbouring, smaller towns are significantly more inclined to choose the countryside and small towns. However, almost 30% from this group would like to lead their future lives in large cities, another several percent in Warsaw, and more than 20% in another country. More than 30% of the current residents of Ostrołęka would like to leave Poland. Only 10% of residents of neighbouring towns and 3% of those living in Ostrołęka would like to associate their future with Ostrołęka.

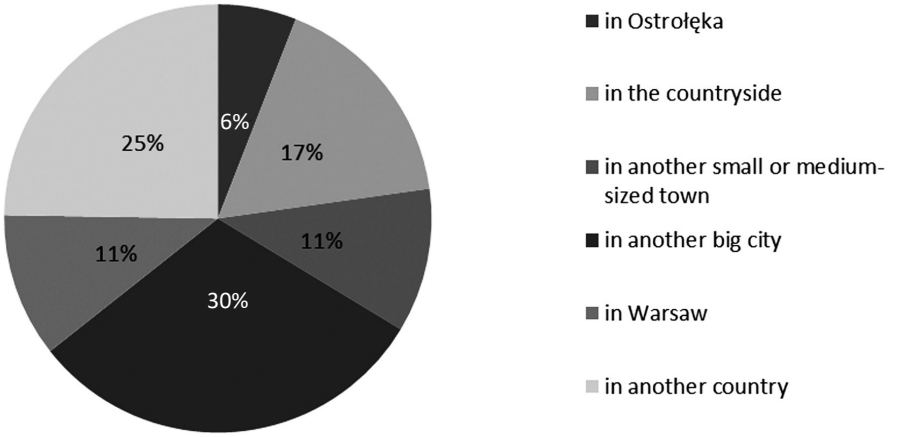

Figure 2. Residential plans of secondary school students.

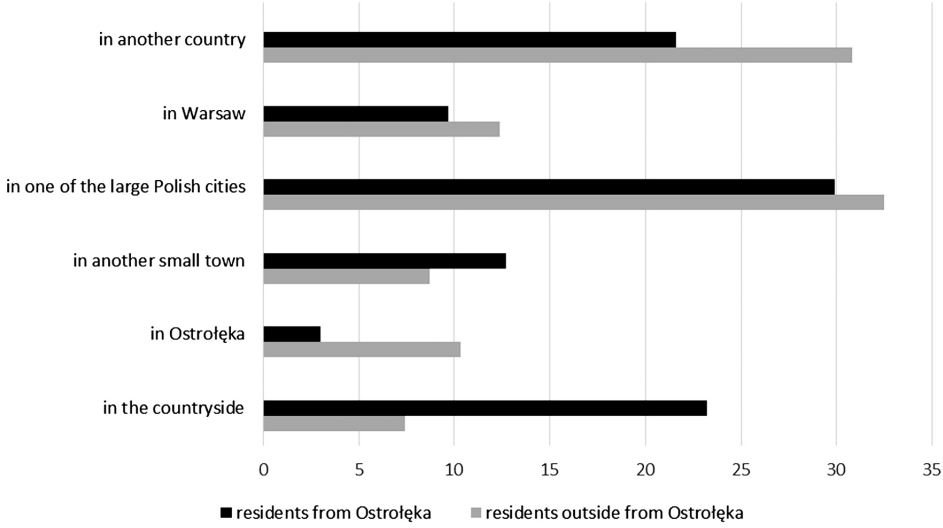

Figure 3. Current place of residence and the residential plans of secondary school students.

The residential plans of older youths also vary by the type of secondary school they attend. Students of technical secondary schools have varied plans, groups of twenty-something percent, similar in sizes, choose either the countryside or a big city. One-fifth of respondents would like to live in another country. Less than 10% of future graduates of technical secondary schools would like to remain in Ostrołęka. By no means can the city count on (general) secondary school students.

Nearly 35% of them choose to live in a big city. If we add those who would like to move to Warsaw, this means that almost half of them would like to associate their future with large urban centres that offer broader and more varied employment opportunities, as well as usually higher earnings. The advantages of cultural and commercial infrastructure are also an important factor.

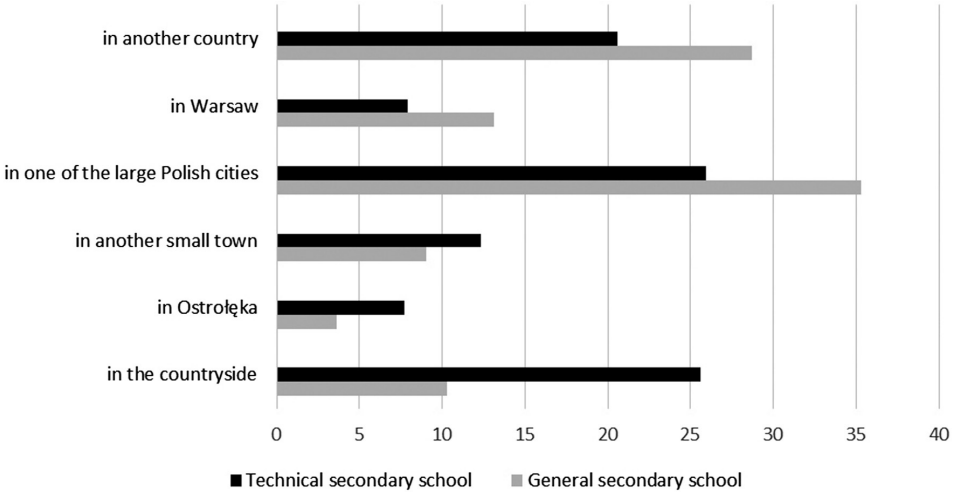

Figure 4. Residential plans of students by type of secondary school.

The data clearly suggest that students of the Ostrołęka secondary schools will not reduce the depopulation trend of the city, will not prevent its marginalisation, and are unlikely to ensure social development and economic growth. Less than 6% of all surveyed are considering living in Ostrołęka, with the largest number of people from a vocational school. Taking into account the educational plans of the younger group, the situation will strengthen this trend in the coming years.

Educational plans of older youth are also not conductive to staying in Ostrołęka. Most of them plan to leave the city after completing secondary education. Almost 70% of (general) secondary school students want to study at Polish universities, of that number one-fourth plans to combine studies and work. Less than 10% of future secondary school graduates plan to continue their education in Ostrołęka. Almost 40% of technical secondary school students also plan to study at universities, of that number about half plans to combine studies and work. From this group of students, one-fifth would like to start work.

The Association of Polish cities has been carrying out two flagship projects on a nationwide scale: “Local Development Program” and “Advisory Support Centre”.

The first one is dedicated for small and medium-sized cities, the second – for marginalised areas. Diagnostic research is conducted as part of these projects. Their results show that the reason for the depopulation of smaller and medium-sized centres is the lack of attractive job offers, entrepreneurial opportunities and the need to go to big cities in order to study at better universities. Dreams of a future job, preferably in a foreign company, are also important. The young people also need constant communication with the world, and do not want to close themselves in local, closed environments (Kaczmarek, 2021).

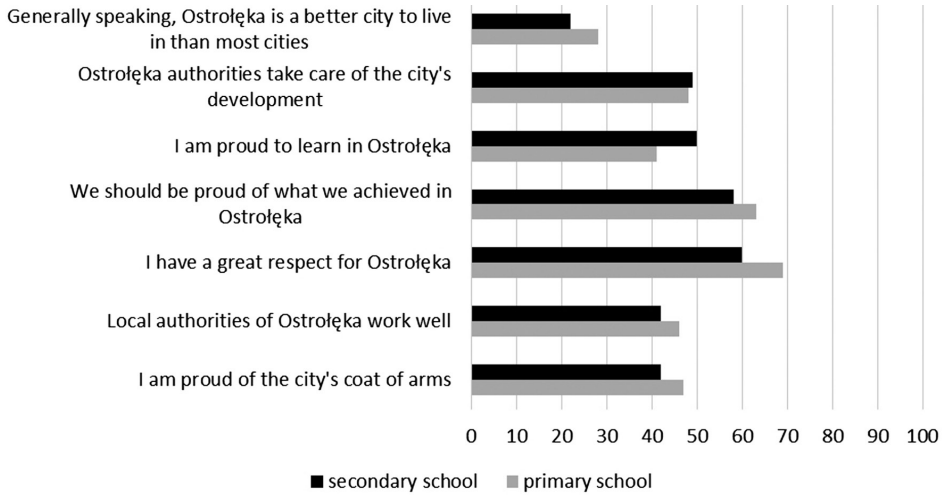

Figure 5. Attitude towards Ostrołęka – sum of "strongly agree" and "agree" responses.

Does the fact that the life plans of the majority of Ostrołęka's youth indicate they would like to live outside the city where they currently study mean a negative attitude toward the city itself? The answer to this question is complex. The local patriotism scale was used in the study[2]. Students from both groups responded on a four-point scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) to a pool of statements. The percentage of respondents agreeing with each statement is illustrated in the chart above. The young respondents, especially from primary schools, declared great respect for the city and pride in its achievements. Half of the older students also take pride in the fact that this is where they study. Nearly half of the young people also believe that Ostrołęka's authorities care about its

[2] After checking the parametric properties for the local survey, the analyses were performed with the use of scale from the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Study of 15-year-olds.

development, and a few percent less that they work well. One could say that the effectiveness of actions is rated a little lower than intentions or efforts. More than 40 percent of young people also display symbolic patriotism by emphasising the importance of the city's coat of arms. These opinions, however flattering, do not imply a positive view on Ostrołęka as a better city to live in than others. Such far-reaching local patriotism is shown by only less than 25% of students (including only 16% of secondary school students).

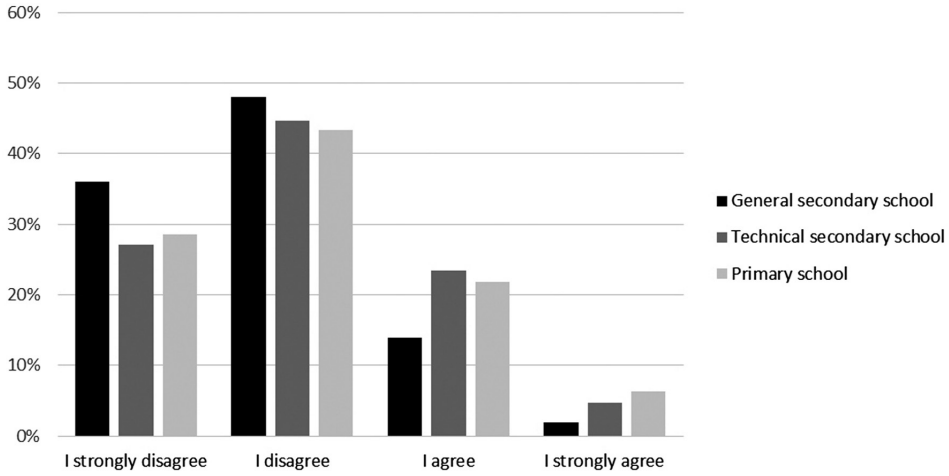

Figure 6. Ostrołęka is a better place to live than other cities.

An important element of attitude towards one's local environment is the trust in local authorities. The level of trust in various institutions was also covered under our study.[3] About one-fifth of all students declare they trust the local authorities. This is a rather small group, especially if we take into account that they place larger trust in the courts and the police, which used to be disliked, as well as in the European Parliament. This proportion is also significantly smaller than in the representative group of all Poles (aged 15+) in the 2022 CBOS study, where 63% of respondents declared their trust in local authorities. Can some consolation be taken from the fact that central authorities are trusted even less than the local ones? The government and political parties, as well as the Polish parliament, are trusted by less than 10% of secondary school students and a few percentage points more in primary school. These numbers are also much smaller than in the CBOS study, referred to above (the government – 32% of trust, the parliament – 23%, political

[3] The question had a slightly different format between primary and secondary schools. At the primary schools, it covered more institutions and sources of knowledge.

parties – 18%). These differences appear significant, however, such comparisons have to be viewed with caution, with the awareness of methodology differences between referenced studies, mainly in terms of sampling and such an important characteristic as age. What is striking, however, is the catastrophically low level of trust in government institutions declared by young people.

In general, according to a 2021 OECD international study, people in various countries trust local authorities, police and courts more than central authorities (Poland did not participate). In Ostrołęka, secondary school students are less trusting than the younger primary school students. This is due to their more extensive experience and probably more developed criticism. Even taking into account the criticism and rejection of establishment, typical for adolescence, the results show a deepening crisis of trust in the state among youth groups. The young people are much less trusting than the adults who raise them.

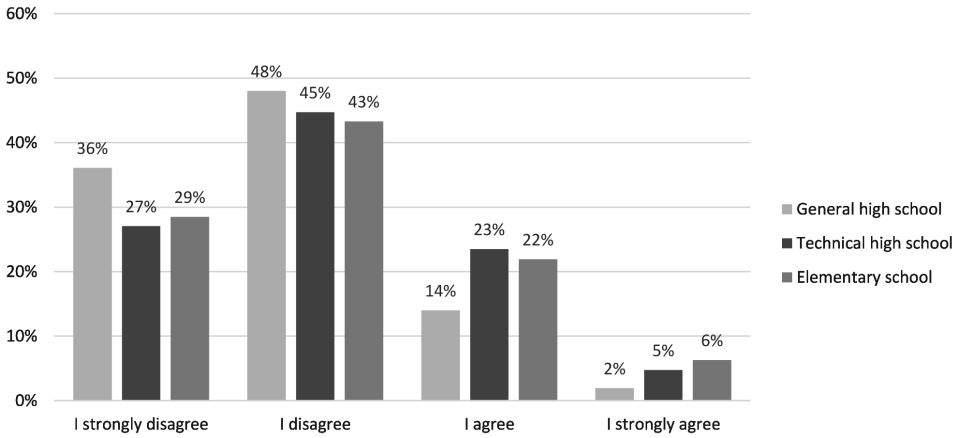

Figure 7. Trust in institutions in primary and secondary schools (responses "to a large extent" and "fully").

Question regarding social trust, asked in primary schools, covered more institutions, including ones close to the students, such as the school or social media. Here too the level of trust turns out to be low. Data are presented in Figure 8. Scientists are the most trusted group – nearly 70% of responses, and the military comes second, at 60%. The latter institution is the only one that has been rated as trustworthy by the majority of Poles for many decades. However the percentage of those who declare trust in the military is systematically declining. Other institutions are trusted by less than half of the respondents. The already-cited *Youth in Democracy* report shows that only 36% of 14-year-olds in Poland

trust local authorities. The average in all countries surveyed is 62%. Trust in the government and the parliament is declared by one-fourth of respondents, while in other countries this result is usually two times higher.

Polish students' confidence in school is alarming. In Ostrołęka, only one-third of eighth-graders trust teachers, and one-fourth trust school as an institution. In the ICCS study, only 45% of respondents declared trust in school, as compared to 61% average in all countries surveyed. In Poland, trust in school is the lowest among all countries surveyed (Wasilewska, 2023). This result is difficult to interpret, and its reasons are complex. However, it is necessary to change the students' attitude towards the place where they spend most of their educational time is necessary.

Another worrying phenomenon is the 40% of young people who trust social media (while only one-fourth trust the traditional media). This result is similar to the one from the ICCS study. 14-year-olds declare trust in social media at the level of 48%, which is higher by 9 percentage points than the average in that study. Only teenagers from Bulgaria trust the social media more. Critical thinking with respect to this source of information, commonly used by young people should become one of the goals of school socialisation, unfortunately media education does not have a significant position in the core curriculum. Can such results be satisfactory for the teachers? It appears that these findings are worth thinking over.

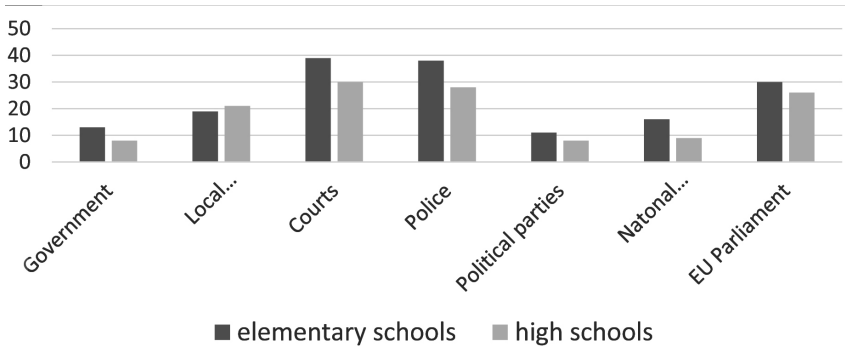

Figure 8. Trust in institutions and sources of knowledge in primary schools.

What emerges from the research described above is a picture of young people from a medium-sized city, most of whom will seek their place to live somewhere else – in large Polish cities, and a not inconsiderable number of them outside Poland. Despite their still young age, they are already very distrustful of many institutions that, regardless of their will, exert a significant impact on their lives. It is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the pauperisation of local governments, which deepened in recent years, and therefore the threatened development of

the social and economic spheres of many cities such as Ostrołęka is exacerbating the already strong migration trend. The catastrophically low level of trust in state institutions leads to devastation of civic attitudes, and is an important driver of emigration to other countries, alongside material needs.

The school is an institution operating in certain specific social reality. Its autonomy is increasingly constrained. However, building social capital, developing civic attitudes, including critical loyalty with constructive intentions, is a very important goal of education. The result of the survey of eighth-graders indicating that only one third of the respondents trust their teachers, and barely one quarter of the students trusts the school as an institution means that the performance of the school's educational function is at risk. Without trust, the interaction of education does not take place. Democracy is the factor supporting trust, which has been proven by numerous research, including the European Social Survey, already cited in this paper. The school can be a certain oasis of democracy, even in a country that prefers more authoritarian than democratic rule. Trust is also of crucial importance for the student as an individual, who nowadays is frequently lost in the rapidly evolving reality, dependent on the constant censure of adults with traditionally assigned educational functions on the one hand, and the criticism and manipulation of peers (and various influencers) on social networks on the other. Trust in family and in relatives is at a relatively satisfactory level – what can be done to make teachers and school deserve the trust of students? Many teachers would probably think that it's worth reversing this question – what should be the behaviour of students to promote teachers' trust in them. Let's assume that trust is a relationship that both parties build, and both are responsible for it. Only according to the role of the institution, it is the teachers who lead it. Therefore, it is worth to begin by referring to the rules of a democratic community. What to pay attention to when building a culture of trust at school?

A common system of goals and values, and common responsibility

Place emphasis on what unites teachers and students, break the barricade that divides these two groups, do not underscore differences in status. Opt for cooperation, not for competition. Convince the students that learning is in their best interest, that they are responsible for their own education. This is fostered by active learning methods, by offering students opportunities to choose content, materials, forms of education, as well as by verifying their knowledge. Similarly, instead of behavioural control by teachers only, it is worth creating mechanisms for developing self-control and peer control, even if this is more difficult and less effective.

Credibility as the main pillar of trust

Clear, honest intentions, transparency of standards and rules, similar definitions of situations

Honesty is the key for credibility, but it is frequently conditioned, especially in the students, by fear of sanctions. Teachers' trustworthiness is assessed by the sincerity and positivity of their intentions. If a student says of a teacher that he/she is "picking on me", or "wants to get at me," whether this assessment is right or wrong, there is no trust relationship. It is very important for the teachers to communicate their intentions and adapt the form of their execution to the needs of students, sometimes even individual needs. The students frequently complain that teachers break the rules, even internal school codes. An often-repeated example are stressful forms of testing the students' knowledge. The breaching of the rule that students can only have one class test daily, or bypassing that rule by applying other forms of knowledge testing on the same day, undermines the trust in teachers. When the same situations are defined in various ways and the young people see this as unfair, the credibility drops and trust becomes impossible.

Predictable behaviours, clarity and equality of criteria and consequences

Credibility, and therefore trust, is built through predictability that offers a sense of security. In our study, we have defined trust according to Sztompka (2007), as "a wager made on the basis of conviction that institutions are predictable and behave in a specific, expected manner." The rules of behaviour for all school actors and the consequences of not following them must be clear and respected. The surveyed secondary school students pointed out that such matters as dress code rules are different for students and teachers (this was in the section of open-ended questions regarding desirable changes at schools). This also applies to the expression of emotions or the right to disparage or even insult a student's knowledge.

Personality, character (image)

The level of trust is affected also by personality traits, both those tied to one's social role and the individual character traits. Traits that inspire confidence include sincerity, kindness, balance, patience, reasonableness, a degree of forbearance and a sense of humour. The ability to understand emotions is also important, even if some ways of expressing emotions cannot be permitted at schools. However, a display of warmth and the calming of negative emotions significantly increases

trust. Discretion is also an important feature – its violation usually results in loss of security and exposure to negative reactions, which permanently ruins trust. It is also advisable to avoid constant critical (sadly, very human) evaluation of appearance, behaviour and narratives – both in public in the classroom and in the "privacy" of the teacher's room.

Professional competences

The teachers' profession is an extremely difficult one. This is because it requires meeting the expectations of both social (expectations of various groups of people) and institutional roles. As a rule, the subject knowledge of teachers is rated quite well. The view on their teaching competence is worse, and educational competence is seen as the weakest. Similar conclusions can be drawn from research analysed in the present paper. In the students' opinions, teachers often "do not teach, do not explain – only require." There are many known factors that can give rise to such an assessment and would not meet with the understanding of students – such as the extensive curriculum. However, it is worth spending more time patiently explaining more difficult issues and less time testing knowledge. Another common complaint is also the failure to understand young people, their needs or views. Do adults complain about not being understood by the young people? This does not occur frequently, as adults expect obedience, not understanding. Democratic rules and trust are not possible without an acceptance of difference (not only based on age), diversity of needs, beliefs, world views, without giving the diversity the right to exist, without forgoing negative judgments and discrimination.

Competences of the principal: good, competent management of a school

The principal is the person responsible for organising all aspects of the school's operation. Good management is based on legislative transparency on the level of school and class. It encompasses trust-based cooperation with teachers, parents and students. A competent principal is open to the needs of all parties participating in the teaching process, and fulfils their needs as far as possible. He or she builds a friendly atmosphere at the school, supports students' initiatives, accepts entrepreneurship, courage and resourcefulness in implementing ideas to enrich school life. Supports all manifestations of democratisation of school life. First and foremost, the principal is open and friendly in contacts with students and teachers and realises his or her responsibility for building a culture of trust at school.

Parents at school

Inclusion of parents in the fulfilment of the school's tasks and in the building of culture of trust is an extremely difficult task. Provisions in the documents that govern the educational process have made little difference in the attitude of students' parents toward school. They certainly have not made them participants in actual decisions on what children learn and under what conditions. Rather, parents are more or less involved in the process of supporting the school in organising the cultural life of children. Undoubtedly, they are important as co-creators of the school climate. But do parents participate in the school life? Research conducted in Ostrołęka's secondary schools demonstrated that parents are rather unwilling to participate in the organisation of school life of their children. They appear at school only when summoned by the teachers, and even in such situations they frequently avoid contact. The teachers do not perceive them as partners in the education and upbringing of their children. This is a sad truth, but school should not give up on building the culture of trust in contacts with parents, realising the importance of their role in the life and education of their children.

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Monika Skura
*University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education**
E-mail: monika.skura@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-2506-2107

Support for students with special educational needs in the Slovenian education system***

Summary

The article outlines how support is provided to students with special educational needs in the Slovenian education system. The principles of the adopted forms of assistance and the five tiers of the intervention model are discussed: 1. Support from teachers in the classroom, including lesson-related activities and other forms (additional teacher assistance), 2. Additional support from the school self-government, 3. Individual and group additional support, 4. Support from external institutions, 5. The process of issuing opinions regarding programs for students with special educational needs and individualized programs. The first tier involves additional teacher support, aimed at adapting the teaching process to the individual needs of students. The second tier consists of additional initiatives and measures within the student government. The third tier encompasses an individualized approach, taking into account the unique requirements of each student. The fourth tier provides support from external institutions specializing in assistance for students with disorders and disabilities. The fifth tier involves the process of issuing decisions and developing an individualized support program. The principles of supporting students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the Slovenian education system are drawn from the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, widely recognized and applied in the USA for over 30 years. Currently, many teachers, researchers, and other specialists are examining its utility. The text includes an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the adopted support model and several conclusions relevant to the Polish context of education for students with special educational needs.

Keywords: Republic of Slovenia, inclusive education in Slovenia, RTI model, special educational needs (SEN), education support module

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* Address: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Pedagogiczny, ul. Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warszawa, Poland

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Background of an inclusive education system in the Republic of Slovenia

The global changes in Slovenia after the 1990s, particularly the establishment of an independent state, also necessitated comprehensive changes in the education system. A plan for comprehensive education system reform was formulated in 1995 as the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia. The 1995 White Paper was based on human rights and children's rights standards, as well as the rule of law, and it defined the fundamental principles, rules, and goals of education in Slovenia. The basic principle of equal opportunities regarding academic outcomes was to be reflected in the consideration of differences among children and their rights to choice and diversity. In 2000, a law was introduced regarding the placement of children with special needs in mainstream schools. This was the first law to incorporate the education of children with special educational needs into educational legislation (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2023).

Under Slovenian law, students with special educational needs include those with intellectual disabilities, blind and visually impaired individuals, children with visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing individuals, students with speech and language disorders, students with physical disabilities, chronically ill students, students with learning difficulties, students with autistic disorders, and students with emotional and behavioral disorders who require adapted educational programs with additional professional support or tailored educational programs or special educational programs (Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami, 2013).

Students are recognized as having special educational needs upon receiving an official decision from the National Institute of Education of Slovenia (NEIS). Typically, it is the parents who apply for the official placement procedures for students with special educational needs, but schools or students themselves (from the age of 15) can also apply. Students with special educational needs are inclusively placed in educational programs tailored to their physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and health needs. This process takes into account the child's level of development, ability to learn and achieve knowledge standards, as well as forecasts regarding their further development, considering any deficiencies, impairments, or disorders, and criteria determining the nature and degree of these deficiencies, impairments, or disorders. Providing education to students with special educational needs is a public service. Under exceptional circumstances, it may take place in private facilities without a concession or in private facilities, as well as in the form of home education (Eurydice).

The assumptions of the American RTI model in the Slovenian education system

The basis for creating the Slovenian support model was the Response to Intervention (RTI) model existing in the United States for nearly 30 years. RTI is a multi-tiered approach to early identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs (National Association of State Directors of Special Education & Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2006). The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in general education classrooms. Students with difficulties receive interventions at increasingly higher tiers of intensity to accelerate their learning progress. Typically, the RTI model consists of three levels of instructional processes. At Tier 1, considered a key component of multi-tiered instruction, all students receive instruction within an evidence-based, scientifically researched core program.

All children receive instruction at Tier 1, but those requiring additional intervention receive supplemental instruction at Tiers 2 or 3. Tier 2 includes children who achieve below expected performance tiers (referred to as benchmark tiers) and are at risk of academic failure but still remain above tiers considered indicative of high-risk failure. Typically, depending on the RTI model used, small support groups at Tier 2 consist of approximately five to eight children. Tier 3 encompasses children considered at high risk of failure and, if they do not respond to interventions at Tier 2, are identified as having special educational needs. Student groups at Tier 3 are smaller, ranging from three to five children, and some models utilize individualized instruction (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Wheeler & Richey, 2019).

Five-tier support model in the Slovenian education system

In 2007, the Expert Council for General Education of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a document titled "Učne težave v osnovni šoli: koncept dela" (Learning Difficulties in Primary School: Work Concept), which outlined guidelines for dealing with students experiencing learning difficulties. Within this document, strategies for implementing the RTI model were developed, along with key guidelines for its implementation (Križnar, 2018; Magajna et al., 2008). The experts opted for a five-tier model of assistance and support, based on the three-tiered American model. The project was adapted to Slovenian school practices and existing solutions and resources within the system. The tiers involve forms of support of varying intensity, starting with assistance provided by the teacher in the classroom. Subsequently, school counseling services or mobile special educators are engaged, employing individual and group forms of assistance, as well as utilizing support from external

specialized institutions. The process culminates in support for the most challenging cases, focusing on an educational program with non-standard implementation and additional professional assistance (Peklaj, 2016).

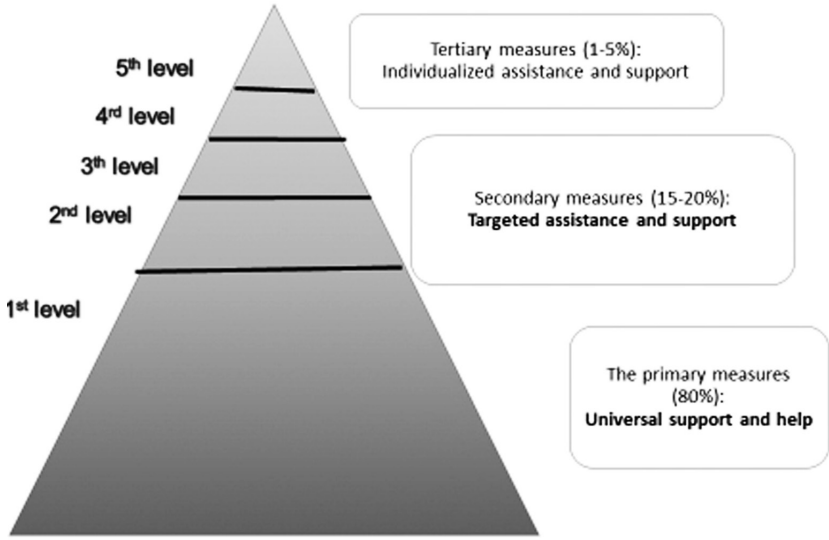

Figure 1. Five-tier model of help and support (source: Kavkler, 2011).

The role of the teacher in the five-tier assistance and support model

The effectiveness of the model highlights the significant role of teachers and other school staff, as they are key to the quality implementation of the model. Professionals (psychologists, educators, special educators) determine which students require specific types of assistance and at what intensity. It is important for teachers to propose more intensive forms of assistance only after ensuring that the overall educational process for a particular student with learning difficulties is ineffective. This allows professionals to more effectively monitor the student's progress even at the tier of implementing simpler forms of assistance that students receive as part of regular teaching (Kavkler, 2011; Magajna, Kavkler, & Košir, 2011).

The teacher's assistance at the first tier is continuous and lasts throughout the support process. The first step conditioning the initiation of actions at the first tier of the model is careful observation of the student by the teacher in various classroom and non-classroom situations and activities. The teacher should record their observations and seek the reasons for what hinders the student in class,

how they react to stimuli, etc. Only based on appropriately collected information about the student can the teacher compare the student's work style with the usual learning method typical for a specific age group of students. The model aims for assistance at the first tier to be sufficient for as many students with learning difficulties as possible.

Assistance at the second and subsequent tiers does not need to be cumulatively related, which means that if a mobile special educator is involved in the third tier of assistance, it is not necessary to simultaneously continue consultation assistance at the second tier. Regardless of the increasing amount of assistance for the student with each subsequent tier and the growing circle of experts, the teacher spends the most time in contact with the student during regular classes. Therefore, their role is crucial at all stages of the model, and the teacher should not be excluded from the assistance project at any stage (Peklaj, 2016).

Support provided at the basic stage of assistance and all stages of the model are documented in the form of a journal, allowing insight into the student's progress and development for all participants in the assistance project. The role of parents of students with learning difficulties is emphasized early in the process and then at all other tiers of the model (Magajna et al., 2008). The intensity of therapy is influenced by: the time the teacher dedicates to the student, the frequency of therapy (number of hours of assistance per week), and the duration of therapy (number of minutes or hours of additional therapy per week). The intensity of assistance for students increases when support is provided in smaller groups. Therefore, groups of 2 to 6 people are most commonly formed.

Strategies to support students with special educational needs

As part of specific strategies to support students with learning difficulties, experts point to the following approaches: cooperative teaching, cooperative learning, team problem-solving, and creating heterogeneous groups among team members, i.e., between the teacher who instructs the student and other school staff inside and outside the school. The school provides teachers with support focused on the teacher (provided by consultants, mobile special educators, and other specialists), focused on the student (provided by other teachers, consultants, mobile special educators, and other specialists), targeting both the teacher and student, and oriented towards collaboration and counseling, which is intended for all participants, i.e., teachers, students, and parents (Kavkler, 2008).

Educational adjustments

Strategies to assist students with learning difficulties involve individualization and differentiation based on the difficulty of the subject matter or the child's special needs. The teacher individually selects and tailors requirements for each student. Adaptations are a normal part of teaching practice for all students in the classroom and vary from minimal to very explicit depending on the educational needs of the students. During lessons, the teacher can adjust: content by selecting different types of tasks based on their difficulty tier, ranging from specific to complex and abstract, and dividing tasks into multiple parts of varying difficulty tiers, while posing questions at different tiers of difficulty; process aimed at developing teaching strategies that enable students to most effectively grasp the content; assessment of learning outcomes, which must be adapted to the student's educational problems and needs (e.g., reading, attention, number automatization, coordination issues, etc.). To most effectively individualize and differentiate the teaching process, the teacher must identify the student's strengths (Kavkler, 2008).

Discovering and recognizing student's strengths

Recognizing and discovering a student's strengths enables the development of strategies that will help them overcome learning difficulties in subsequent support processes. The teacher identifies the student's strengths, talents, and abilities. These aspects indicate how the student can effectively learn. This supports building the student's self-confidence, influences a positive self-image, and fosters the creation of a stimulating and safe environment in which the student develops social skills and others. Strengths can manifest in various areas of the student's activities, achievements, talents, and interests. Areas of student functioning to consider were described in an expert document from 2007 and include general and specific cognitive abilities, metacognitive abilities and functioning language; motivation to learn; emotional functioning; social integration and functioning; biological factors, physical functioning, and health; as well as home and school environment (Magajna et al., 2008).

Organizing the teaching process

Systematically monitoring students' progress allows for adjusting the teaching process to individual needs, which facilitates effective knowledge acquisition. A key element of the structure is the ability to convey fundamental concepts in a way tailored to students' understanding, facilitating effective knowledge

acquisition. Effective feedback, both in real-time and from students, enables quick identification of errors or misunderstandings, fostering further refinement of the teaching process. Precise instructions facilitate understanding of expectations and task execution, positively impacting the efficiency of the learning process. Breaking down complex problems into smaller units helps focus on specific learning aspects, facilitating step-by-step knowledge acquisition. A comprehensive approach involves using various forms of learning support, such as materials, verbal, and non-verbal assistance. Teaching diverse learning strategies enables students to develop effective methods of knowledge acquisition. Regular skills training and diverse methods of knowledge retention help students retain acquired knowledge over a longer period. Combining these elements within the structure of teaching and learning constitutes, for the creators of the Slovenian education system, a comprehensive approach to education, shaping an effective teaching environment conducive to students' comprehensive development (Kavkler, 2008).

Individualization and differentiation of lessons by teachers

Teachers individualize and differentiate lessons because there are differences among students in terms of knowledge, abilities, physical characteristics, backgrounds, motivation, readiness to work, social relationships, and health status. The rationale for professional reflection on the application of lesson individualization and differentiation lies primarily in how to recognize individual differences among students and incorporate them using appropriate organizational and implementation methods; how to achieve the highest quality and durability of students' knowledge; what the social and economic-educational needs are; how the democratic position of individuals in society is changing, and how to influence the socially shaped role of schools (Valenčič Zuljan, 2012).

Individualization of learning is understood by Slovenian researchers as discovering and developing well-founded individual differences among students. It is necessary to personalize the teaching and learning process as much as possible, i.e., to adapt to individual personal characteristics, needs, wishes, and inclinations of individual students, and to enable them as much independence in learning as possible. Differentiation of learning involves organizational actions, which include the method of learning and other differences only within smaller homogeneous or heterogeneous groups of learners (e.g., group work, supplementary and additional task work). The aim of differentiation is for the school, through more tailored learning objectives, content, and teaching methods, to better achieve social and individual educational goals. A characteristic feature is that all students in a given group are subject to relatively the same learning requirements and procedures (Strmčnik, 1993).

In Slovenia, three types of learning differentiation and individualization are indicated. The first is internal differentiation and individualization, which are maintained by naturally heterogeneous classes. Within the group, students' needs and capabilities are taken into account through the selection of different learning objectives (it is not necessary for all students to have the same objective), teaching content, and, above all, teaching methods and aids. To implement internal differentiation and individualization, three different models are used, namely the preference model, which overcomes students' difficulties by selecting more suitable and effective methodological procedures and longer learning times; the compensatory model, in which we choose different content if we find that a child cannot do something, and the corrective model, in which we remove the causes of learning difficulties and create a stimulating learning environment. This model is characterized by the creation of homogeneous groups, within which work is much easier because all work is tailored only to those students. Internal differentiation and individualization ensure equality and democracy for all students.

The second type is external or functional differentiation and individualization. Students are divided into homogeneous and permanently distinct groups based on their learning abilities. Work in these groups is based on differentiated educational objectives and content. External differentiation of learning can be inter-school or intra-school. In inter-school education, students are assigned to separate school courses, while in intra-school education, students are grouped within the same school. Student separation can involve all subjects (complete external differentiation) or only certain subjects (partial external differentiation).

The last approach is flexible individualization and differentiation. It involves intertwining heterogeneous and homogeneous groups, regular and graded classes, and partial organizational, spatial, and time-based group separations. A common practice in this approach is to divide students into levels of mathematics, Slovenian language, and foreign language, especially in the third educational period. In this method, the teacher suggests student grouping based on observation, student results, and interests, but the final decision is made by the student. Flexible differentiation can take the form of individually planned lessons, project-based learning, or additional and complementary lessons (Strmčnik, 1993).

Supplementary classes

According to the Primary School Act of the Slovenian education system (Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o osnovni šoli, 2011, čl. 20, 24), supplementary classes are part of the extended school program, involving additional activities

related to students' interests and optional subjects. Therefore, teachers are obligated to conduct additional classes for students facing learning difficulties. Students participate in supplementary classes throughout the year or only occasionally (as needed). Typically, all students in the class who require additional explanations attend supplementary classes, so they are often conducted in a group setting rather than individually. Supplementary classes are usually taught by the same teacher who instructs the students during regular lessons, although this is not mandatory. The format of conducting additional classes is also not legally defined, so teachers may conduct them within one school hour or multiple times in shorter intervals (e.g., three times a week for fifteen minutes each) (Kesič Dimic, 2008).

Collaboration with parents

Effective collaboration between the teacher and the parents of a student facing learning difficulties is essential at the initial stage and subsequently at all subsequent levels of assistance. The teacher shares their observations with parents and highlights effective adaptations, methods, and work forms, approaches, and strategies. At the initial stage, the focus is primarily on advising parents on how they can support their child at home to achieve better academic results in the school environment. This also provides the teacher with extremely useful information, enabling a better understanding of the student, their learning style, which can then be utilized in organizing and planning teaching (Križnar, 2018; Peklaj, 2016).

Assistance from the school counseling center

If a student facing learning difficulties does not show progress despite assistance from the teacher and other first-degree specialists, additional support is required, involving the school counseling center. Thus, the provision of support moves to the second tier of the model. Support is provided by counseling center staff, such as psychologists, pedagogues, social pedagogues, and special educators. The school counseling center aims to complement and deepen the diagnosis of student deficits using more specialized knowledge than that available to teachers in the school environment, as well as identifying the student's strengths and talents. Based on this assessment, the school counseling center provides advice to the student, their parents, and the teacher. During counseling, the nature of the student's deficits is explained in detail, which allows parents and teachers teaching the student to better understand the origin and nature of learning difficulties (Križnar, 2018).

The school counseling center invites the parents of a student identified with learning difficulties for an individual conversation, during which they comprehensively present findings about the student in an understandable manner. Advisors inquire about the student's homework, learning strategies, attitude toward school, teachers, etc. At the end of the conversation, parents of the student, together with the school counseling center, agree on further assistance and jointly plan future actions. Parents receive guidance and adaptations that can help the child at home. School counseling center staff also inform the student's teacher and all other specialists at the school working with the student about their findings. The school pedagogue and teacher discuss the specifics of the child's functioning, possible adaptations, appropriate assistance strategies, and preparation of necessary teaching materials to provide adequate support to the student. In such discussions, teachers usually confirm whether their observations were accurate and whether the assistance forms provided to the student in the first stage of the model were adequate and sufficiently intense (Križnar, 2018).

In working with a student facing learning difficulties, the school pedagogue primarily focuses on shaping the student's self-image and motivation to learn, as well as preventing potential stigmatization of the student in the school environment. This assistance is provided occasionally. At this stage, the teacher continues to support the student during lessons and supplementary classes, while the school pedagogue initiates an individual assistance project. One of the essential steps is creating evaluation reports written by professionals working with the student. Based on these reports, assistance and support for the student are planned for the future. Evaluation reports and the entire individual assistance project constitute school documentation. This includes a written opinion from the teacher, detailing the procedures by which the teacher assisted the student in the initial stage of assistance (this opinion also describes the student's behavior on school premises and adjustments and forms of assistance during lessons, supplementary classes, and extracurricular activities), proposals for further assistance activities, and other documents (assistance implementation journal, individual work plan, etc.). To create a student's personal file, the school counseling center must obtain written consent from parents due to personal data protection laws (Križnar, 2018; Magajna et al., 2008).

Additional individual and/or group assistance

If the school counseling center and teacher determine that a student requires more intensive assistance and support, they propose to parents to proceed to the third tier of the model, where additional individual and/or group assistance is

organized for students with learning difficulties. This assistance is provided based on the opinion of the school counseling center, which includes the final evaluation of the second stage. Depending on the type and severity of the learning difficulties, more in-depth diagnostic procedures may be conducted at this stage if necessary (Magajna et al., 2008).

The individual and/or group assistance can be provided by teachers conducting classes with students in regular classrooms, other teachers working in the school, special educators, psychologists, or social pedagogues. The assistance aims to develop strategies through which students learn to overcome their specific deficits (e.g., strategies for solving text-based tasks, strategies for independently correcting spelling errors, etc.). Typically, assistance is provided once a week, occasionally it may also be implemented in parts (e.g., 15 minutes three times a week or as needed). Some adjustments are prepared by the teacher themselves, while others are prepared for the teacher and more precisely specified by the person providing individual and/or group assistance in learning (Križnar, 2018; Magajna et al., 2011).

Additional adjustments made at this stage include adapting the format of materials (e.g., fewer tasks per page, more space for notes, highlighting key information, additional tasks as examples to solve, etc.), explanations with additional illustrations, different levels of reading difficulty and written materials, various ways of presenting results, several timing adjustments (e.g., extended time for written assessments, more short breaks during work, etc.), photocopying written materials, as well as adapting the format of knowledge tests, for example, increasing the number of oral questions relative to written ones, using various technical aids (e.g., calculator, reading ruler), and the possibility of specialist support during sessions, etc.

Students with learning difficulties are supported at this tier of assistance for at least 6 months. After this period, the professionals involved in the assistance process together with the child's parents assess the effectiveness of the assistance and support provided so far. They pay particular attention to the appropriateness of new adjustments to lessons and, if necessary, establish new ones or update existing ones. The conclusions from this assessment are included in the final evaluation of the third tier, which is placed in the student's personal file. If it turns out that the assistance still does not bring progress to the student, professionals discuss the next steps together with the parents.

Support from external institutions

At this stage, students who, based on the final evaluation of the third stage, still show no progress and require a more intensive form of assistance are

identified. The school collaborates with external specialized institutions, such as health centers, mental health clinics, etc., where multidisciplinary specialist teams operate. The school engages them for an additional expert opinion and, if needed, additional assistance. The duration of intervention at this stage depends on the extent of the individual's educational needs (Magajna et al., 2008).The primary role of specialists at this support level is to conduct a more detailed diagnostic assessment of learning difficulties and to assess whether the school effectively utilized all sources of support in the preceding three stages of the model. They may organize therapies, workshops, lectures, seminars, recommend publications, and implement other forms of assistance as required. Besides students, their parents, and the school's professional staff are also referred to these institutions. The experts summarize their findings and recommendations in a report, which serves as the basis for a broader meeting involving all stakeholders in the assistance project (class teachers, school staff, and parents). Together, they evaluate the effectiveness of prior assistance efforts and determine whether the support at the fourth level will be adequate to address the student's learning challenges (Križnar, 2018).

Program with customized implementation and additional professional assistance

If specialists from the school and experts from an external institution believe that despite all the support, the student is not achieving the expected learning outcomes, they propose referring the student to a program with customized implementation and additional professional assistance. In this assistance project, even more adjustments and more intensive help are suggested. The task of the school professionals and the external specialized institution is to familiarize the student's parents with the entire counseling process. Parents must include in their application documentation prepared for their child by school staff (class teacher, other teachers working with the child, and the school counseling service) as well as external institutions. This documentation includes: a report from the educational institution about the child, a statement from the school about the implementation of the concept of learning difficulties in primary school, a record of the conversation with the child about the counseling process, professional documentation (psychological, social reports), and a memorandum about cooperation between parents and school staff (this is not a mandatory attachment but is still a useful document demonstrating collaboration at all levels of assistance and the pursuit of a common goal) (Križnar, 2018).

Article 26 of the Law on Counseling for Children with Special Needs (Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami, 2013) stipulates that the Institute of

Education of the Republic of Slovenia must obtain from the applicant (parents or school) a report from the educational institution attended by the child, indicating that continuity of assistance has been provided to the child. This report must include: observations about the child (strengths and weaknesses, social integration in groups, etc.), a prepared work plan for the child by the school based on identified issues, description of the assistance implemented at the school, description of the student's progress compared to the initial situation, description of cooperation with parents, school's proposal regarding the type of assistance the child may still need, and data on the course of learning and academic achievements (Magajna et al., 2008).

The commission prepares an expertise report that includes counseling proposals regarding appropriate teaching programs, type and degree of deficit, obstacles, or disorders, and proposals for adjusting the educational program. Based on this, a decision is made on the necessity or non-necessity of directing a child with special needs to an educational program. If directing a child with special needs to an educational program is justified, the decision specifies: the child's educational needs, the educational program to which the child is directed, the educational institution where the child will be enrolled, the start date of the program or educational institution, the scope, form, and entity providing each additional vocational assistance, tools, space, and equipment, and other conditions necessary for education and training, individuals accompanying the child temporarily or permanently, reducing the number of children in a group/class according to specified standards, and the deadline for checking the correctness of counseling. No later than 30 days after the decision becomes legally binding, an expert team designated by the director of the educational institution will create an individualized program for the child with special needs.

One of the key tasks of the expert group preparing and monitoring the individualized program is to include not only the child, considering their functioning and age, but also the child's parents throughout the entire process. The program must be evaluated in each educational period and adjusted as needed based on the current situation. Students continue to use the school's offered forms of assistance in the first three tiers of the model (adjustment of general classes, supplementary classes, counseling assistance, and individual and/or group forms of help). Upon receiving the decision, the maintenance of existing support is discussed, and the student receives only the most useful forms of assistance.

Additional support at this can only be provided by a special educator, rehabilitation educator, or teacher after additional training in working with students with special needs. Support can take three different forms: assistance in overcoming deficits, barriers, or disabilities, counseling, or support in learning. The schedule and method of providing additional support are tailored to the student's needs and can be provided

individually or in groups, in the classroom or outside of it, in an educational institution or social assistance. In exceptional cases, assistance may also be provided at home. Additional professional assistance is provided once a week and cannot exceed five hours per week, with at least one hour dedicated to counseling services. The method of providing additional substantive assistance is based on an agreement between the student, their parents, teachers, and special educator (Križnar, 2018).

Advantages and disadvantages of implementing the five-tier assistance and support model in the Slovenian educational system

Decision-makers and researchers in the Slovenian education system have appreciated the effectiveness of the procedural implementation of preventive actions in the RTI model. An advantage of the model is the ability to detect general and less distinct learning problems early, providing earlier, simpler, and less intensive forms of learning assistance. Proper early support and frequent monitoring of student progress are factors that help prevent academic failures and identify students who, despite appropriate teaching methods and increased intensity of simpler forms of assistance, show no progress. The RTI model allows for transitioning from accommodations for all students to more intensive forms of assistance for students with specific learning difficulties. Effective support enables students to move up and down levels. Professionals (mobile special educators, consultants) establish appropriate criteria by which students can be moved. The criteria relate not only to the student and their learning difficulties but also to environmental factors (e.g., examining teaching methods, assessing how much assistance can be provided to the student, what support teachers can obtain from other specialists, etc.) (Kavkler, 2011).

On the other hand, some parents argue that the model is ineffective for students with more significant functioning difficulties. They believe that too much time elapses between transitioning from the first to the third stage of the model, where students receive appropriate special educational support. Students with significant needs (e.g., those with deeper levels of autism, significant physical disabilities, etc.) should be directed to the most intensive level of intervention as early as preschool, which is not addressed in the model (Kavkler, 2011).

Conclusions in the context of the Polish education system for students with special educational needs

According to the RTI Action Network, an organization aimed at developing the program, RTI is a "multilevel approach to helping students with difficulties."

Response to Intervention (RTI) is based on early identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs. The model is designed for use in decision-making in both general and special education, creating a well-integrated teaching and intervention system driven by child outcome data. Consequently, the RTI concept consistently holds a prominent place in the teaching/learning process in the USA (IDEA, 2004).

The key concepts of the RTI approach emphasize systematic: 1. use of research-based interventions in general education; 2. measurement of student response to these interventions; and 3. utilization of RTI data to inform instruction. Continuous monitoring of the adequacy of student response to instruction is particularly crucial in the RTI approach as a means of determining whether a student should progress from one level to the next by documenting that existing instruction and support are insufficient. Identifying difficulties and selecting appropriate forms of support is done using scientifically validated teaching strategies (Barnett et al., 2006).

The RTI model has been the subject of intense discussions in the field of education since its proposal. American authors indicate that this approach has the potential to eliminate the "wait-to-fail" situation, allowing students to receive specialized assistance much earlier in their school education (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). By providing appropriate education to at-risk students, the RTI model has the potential to reduce the number of children referred for special education (Deno et al., 2001). The RTI approach also appears promising in reducing bias in the assessment of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Marston et al., 2003). On the other hand, researchers note that outcomes are often recorded in a manner that complicates objective, comprehensive assessment of effectiveness, and the entire process, including hiring specialists and training staff, is costly (VanDerHeyden & Jimerson, 2005). Nevertheless, the assumptions of this model are worth considering in the Polish context.

In the Polish education system, students in grades 1–3 are assessed for writing, reading, and numeracy skills. The assessment covers both academic achievements and adaptation to the demands of school life. The collected information may indicate specific difficulties such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dysorthography, as well as the particular abilities of the student. Students in higher grades are also assessed, and this action takes on a more control-oriented character, especially if diagnostic assessments have been conducted earlier. The aim of these actions is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the student and suggest support in appropriate areas to prevent the development of problems and facilitate the child's school life, both in terms of learning and peer relationships. However, these actions lack a systemic dimension and vary in intensity depending on the availability of specialists in schools. Additionally, diagnosing a child, especially indicating problems, often encounters various reactions from parents.

Difficulties related to the functioning and behavior of students in Poland are diagnosed in external institutions such as counseling centers, often without observing and diagnosing the student's functioning in school. Based on these diagnoses, decisions are made regarding the provision of assistance and support, and further steps in the student's education are suggested. Sometimes, cooperation between the school and counseling center in determining the causes of difficulties, providing support and therapy is insufficient. Moreover, actions taken by the school, counseling center, and parents regarding therapy and assistance to the child are usually not coordinated and sometimes even contradict each other.

The RTI approach emphasizes progress monitoring through the use of curriculum-based assessment, student portfolios, teacher observations, and standardized achievement measures based on uniform criteria, which is not present in our solutions. All students are supported from the beginning of the learning concepts, and individualized progress plans are created as needed to meet the child's specific needs, preventing the labeling of students as disabled. Students with difficulties receive the attention they need, regardless of the grade level they are in. Furthermore, a systemic approach to support helps bridge the gap between inclusive and special education.

European countries often use their own strategies and approaches to support students with diverse educational needs. Some, like Slovenia, successfully implement support programs and diagnostic forms based on the RTI model. Researchers present in their studies how RTI can be used to overcome barriers to integration (Grosche & Volpe, 2013) or assess the effectiveness of interventions at different tiers of the model (Jiménez et al., 2010). Of course, most RTI research comes from the USA. There is a clear need for research on RTI in other cultures and educational systems to confirm the effectiveness of this model in new contexts.

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Daniela Worek
*Hessian Teachers' Academy**
E-mail: dr.daniela.worek@web.de
ORCID: 0000-0002-3826-2597

"The real voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes,
but in having new eyes"
Marcel Proust (2002)

Exploring the role of mobility in fostering the internationalization of teacher education – with a special focus on Europeanness**

Summary

We are witnessing how significant changes are increasingly impacting our lives, future generations and society as a whole in a constantly evolving world. As a reflection of society and a place of formal education, schools provide guidance for tomorrow's European citizens and prepare students for future challenges, even if they cannot be predicted. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating learning, which is closely linked to personal and social development, particularly in the context of a future European society. Therefore, mobility in Teacher Education and beyond is essential to ensure high quality within the profession and to meet the expectation that teachers will become European role models. Improving the recognition of professional qualifications and detailed competences is crucial for sustainable mobility in all its dimensions. This paper aims to stimulate discussion on these issues.

Keywords: European education, teacher education, transnational mobility, virtual mobility

* Address: Stuttgarter Straße 18-24, 60329 Frankfurt am Main HE, Germany
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Introduction

Movement and acceleration are fundaments of today's society (Rosa, 2005) and lead to various globalization phenomena (Osterhammel & Petersson, 2019). As the pace of change accelerates, our world is becoming more complex. It is important to anticipate how these changes will impact our daily lives, future generations, and society as a whole. In this context, the complexity of mobility including all its different facets, such as multi-directional, cultural and international to name only a few, gets a new meaning.

In the present globalized world, transnational exchanges have gained increased standing, as cross-border travelling for professional and academic purposes has become the new normal. Due to increased migration and global economic expansion, classrooms of today are characterized by a variety of languages, cultures, and values. To prepare future generations for living together in an increasingly multilingual and pluricultural environment, it is necessary for teachers to obtain intercultural experiences and competences (Elsner & Worek, 2016). Although study-related stays abroad are constantly recommended, few teachers gain study or work experience abroad during or after their Initial Teacher Education. Scholars in higher education research are skeptical towards exclusively focusing on physical mobility, arguing that this approach is inadequate for a comprehensive examination of international mobility (Teichler, 2007). In the context of sustainability and climate change, international travel, especially by air, is under scrutiny due to its significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and potential adverse effects on the climate (IPCC, 2023).

One positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant increase in virtual mobility in recent years. Virtual mobility refers to the experience or facilitation of educational programs and content from foreign universities through the internet or other innovative forms of information and communication technology (Hahn, 2004).

The impact of 25 years of the Bologna strategy

The 1999 Bologna Declaration was a milestone in the internationalization of education systems in the EU, pledging all signatory countries to undergo a reform process in their higher education sector. Its objective was and still is to enhance the quality of higher education systems in Europe, make them more transparent and comparable by promoting mutual degree recognition, mobility among signatory countries, and coherence as well as compatibility of the systems in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

These reforms have also contributed to the establishment of a "European Teacher Education Area" within the European Higher Education Area although Teacher Education had not been specifically considered or addressed within the Bologna Process. One main reason for this was certainly the fact that several Teacher Education paths in Europe were not conceived on university level. "The information collected by ENTEP (European Network on Teacher Education Policies) highlights the diversity of Initial Teacher Education structures and systems in Europe and the multiple routes to teacher status across countries. ENTEP welcomes the reforms and looks for further progress in the following areas:

- improving the readability and comparability of Teacher Education structures in Europe;
- strengthening the professionalization of the teaching profession in Europe;
- enhancing research-based Teacher Education;
- increasing flexibility in Teacher Education structures;
- further implementing ECTS in Teacher Education programs;
- increasing competence orientation in Initial Teacher Education;
- facilitating mobility among students, teachers and teacher educators;
- further developing a professional continuum (lifelong learning) in Teacher Education" (Dimitropoulos, 2008, p. 3).

Since then, various factors, such as globalization and internationalization processes, quality assurance developments, and the implementation of the ECTS credit system, have been instrumental in realizing this goal. "Internationalization has on the one hand been a motor for the invention of the 'Bologna Idea' and is on the other hand further increased by the ongoing Bologna Process itself" (Uzerli, 2017).

Schleicher (2012) states that international mobility in Initial Teacher Education can have many beneficial effects on the quality of teachers and with this on the quality of schools. Yet, current numbers of university students' international activities show that the interest in mobility programs is extraordinarily low on behalf of student teachers, especially when compared to other courses of study (DAAD, 2015).

Despite numerous reasons for these low numbers, it is unclear how the Bologna Declaration can effectively enhance Teacher Education, in ITE and CPD, in Europe after more than two decades, especially since the Declaration was not initially designed for Teacher Education purposes. While several Teacher Education stake holders (DAAD, 2015, 2023; HRK, 2022) have expected that the modernization process in structures and Teacher Education programs would facilitate mobility among aspiring teachers, latest studies (DAAD, 2023; Worek, 2017) show the opposite.

Further, European Teacher Education and Teacher Education policy experts expect that increased mobility among student teachers would lead to a shared

European identity linked to democratic principles (DAAD, 2023; Elsner & Worek, 2016; HRK, 2022; Schratz, 2008). The competences of those shaping the next generation of European citizens should go beyond those of reflective practitioners, researchers and social actors. The professional profile should include an understanding of 'unity in diversity', acknowledging the coexistence of national and transnational specificities (Uzerli, 2017). The issue of mobility as a factor in promoting a common European identity is in line with the reflections on higher education policies related to Teacher Education discussed in ENTEP's publication on the subject (Schratz, 2008). The European Commission (2009) emphasizes the need to reform Teacher Education systems to make them more flexible, coherent, and responsive to societal needs. Thus, Teacher Education institutions should play a more active role in building the European knowledge society and contribute to the Lisbon Strategy. The importance of high-quality Teacher Education has not been automatically recognized with the Bologna Process. Some signatory countries have struggled to accept the changes they would need to initiate not only in the structure, but also in the underlying philosophy of their systems.

Looking at the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, it is easy to see that mobility, especially for those in the medical, legal and teaching professions, is often fraught with major difficulties. This leads to the questions: why, after 25 years of policy documents emphasising the importance of internationalisation in Initial Teacher Education, is international practice still very limited? Studies show (DAAD, 2015; HRK, 2022; Worek, 2017) that the answers can be many and varied, ranging from institutional barriers to individual reservations and insecurities among teachers. These include, but are not limited to: lack of financial support, bureaucratic hurdles and lack of incentives from educational institutions, as well as the problem that mobility may also be perceived by students as not beneficial for employment and career opportunities or for further study. The Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK, 2022) identifies the unsatisfactory recognition of university credits in some countries as one of the main obstacles to internationalization in Teacher Education. A particular national challenge in Germany is the second state examination, which is not found in the classic Bologna structure. "The recognition procedure should generally be based on a holistic assessment, which means that, depending on the individual case, it should be more possible to incorporate professional experience and additional skills into the recognition process than it had been before. Furthermore, non-isolated phenomena should not be compared on a word-for-word basis, i.e. sub-modules or the literal wording of modules and its corresponding content", but should rather be examined for equivalence instead of similarity (Worek et. al, 2017). The vision of 'unity in diversity' is based on a shared understanding of European values and should be an integral part of Teacher Education. Uzerli (2017)

emphasizes that "uniting without creating uniformity" should be the motto. While structural changes may occur in ITE, it is unlikely that teachers will simply be asked to embody and disseminate the idea of shared Europeanness.

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire", William Butler Yeats once said. So how can we encourage future teachers to gain international experience, not only to light their own fire, but also to light a fire in their students?

The role of Europeanness and the identity of a European teacher within teacher education concepts

Schools are currently undergoing significant changes and, as a result, Teacher Education is also evolving. High quality basic education in schools is central for social cohesion, the integrity of democracy and the sustainability of our knowledge society. This underlines the importance of teachers as bridge builders. The EU Commission (2022) states that the effectiveness of the European political system relies on citizens' knowledge and understanding of it. The European Commission (2009) emphasises in this context that teacher mobility is a crucial factor in ensuring that education systems can respond to the constantly changing needs of society and the economy.

Schratz's (2008) concept of the European Teacher is a model of an ideal teacher who possesses both subject-specific knowledge and cultural and linguistic competencies to teach in diverse cultural settings and is able to provide a European perspective in teaching, promote democratic values and human rights. The European Teacher model emphasizes the importance of Teacher Education programs that foster intercultural competencies and prepare teachers for internationalization in education. The concept also acknowledges the importance of teachers being able to adapt to the changing educational landscape, which has become increasingly globalized and diverse (Madalińska-Michalak, 2018).

In light of today's challenges, schools bear a special responsibility, as they usually reach all children and young people equally in order to prepare them for future challenges (Worek, 2019a). More than ever, teachers play a key role in guiding prospective teachers to integrate international experiences and perspectives into their education. These experiences, in turn, profoundly impact the professionalization of future teachers in this field (OECD, 2023). "Teachers, who themselves are familiar with more than one culture and language, are ideal bridge-builders for integration. They help children and young people to find a new home and thus increase their chances of real participation and integration," said State Secretary for Integration Serap Güler in 2019. In this context, dealing constructively

with changes is of particular importance as they adequately learn how to deal with diversity in a non-dominant, mindful and respectful way (Uzerli, 2017).

The climate crisis is an increasingly significant aspect that raises questions about international mobility. The catchphrase "by design or by disaster" succinctly points out the necessity to actively shape humanity's response to self-induced climate change (DAAD, 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic has provided alternative ways to enable intercultural encounters without environmentally harmful travel by airplane. For instance, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD, 2023) has established the subsequent principles: 'Form follows function', where physical mobility is essential and can be complemented or substituted by digital measures, the desired impact must be taken into account. 'Design with the users', the design of international mobility must cater to the diversity of target groups and consider their respective expectations and competencies, to 'leave no one behind'. To provide solutions that are both climate-friendly and inclusive, it is important to consider the needs of disadvantaged groups. In terms of decarbonising mobility, it is necessary to find practical approaches that are environmentally friendly. It is also essential to focus on quality and use instruments that can achieve the desired effects for sustainable solutions.

Key aspects of the European Teacher include having a deep understanding of European cultures and languages, as well as being able to teach from a cross-cultural perspective. Additionally, the European Teacher should have a deep knowledge of the European Union and its institutions and should be able to promote European values in their classroom. This Europeanness of teaching provides an important concept for shaping the future of European education by promoting intercultural understanding and providing a model for Teacher Education that prepares teachers for the challenges of an increased globalized and diverse world.

In today's interconnected world, it is crucial to promote a European perspective in education, which emphasizes European values of democracy, European ethics and human rights. The European Teacher's focus on promoting European values and providing a European perspective in teaching is therefore highly relevant in today's context.

For this purpose, structures are needed that enable student teachers to gain relevant experience already during their studies. There are several ways to increase the mobility of Teacher Education students within their study programs without necessarily being physically mobile:

1. Raise awareness about mobility opportunities: Many students may not be aware of the opportunities available to them for mobility programs. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness about the benefits of participating in mobility programs and provide information about available opportunities.

2. Provide language training: Language barriers can be a significant obstacle for students who wish to participate in mobility programs. Providing language training and support can help to increase students' confidence and ability to participate in mobility programs.
3. Offer scholarships and funding: Providing financial support, such as scholarships and funding, can help to alleviate some of the financial barriers that prevent students from participating in mobility programs.
4. Develop partnerships with universities abroad: Establishing partnerships with universities abroad can provide opportunities for Teacher Education students to study and gain practical experience in different cultural settings. These partnerships can also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and teaching practices.
5. Incorporate international experiences into the curriculum: Integrating international experiences into the Teacher Education curriculum can help to expose students to different cultures and teaching practices. This can be achieved through study tours, internships, and other forms of practical experience.
6. The recognition of study achievements and teaching diplomas can help promote mobility in the education sector, facilitate the integration of students and teachers from different countries, and support the creation of a common European education space.
7. During Initial Teacher Education, universities should offer hybrid courses for student teachers. Cooperating with universities and schools abroad can be particularly beneficial for gaining intercultural experience and acquiring or expanding necessary skills. Here, methodological approaches and best practice examples can be exchanged, expert discussions can be held in different languages and networks can be formed for the future.
8. A continuous accompanying seminar, in which key elements of blended learning, education for sustainable development, resilience, etc. could be discussed throughout the programs in order to offer student teachers security and a professional network for the future. A semester abroad can be thoroughly prepared and followed up in this context.
9. Dealing with the challenges arising from the digital transformation emphasizes the importance of appropriately trained teachers. The world "feels like it's always just a click or two away" (Rosa, 2019, p. 85). However, in the sense of the didactic triangle, this "felt" also requires learning arrangements in authentic encounters between learners and competent, open-minded teachers in order to jointly develop strategies for dealing with all the phenomena of digitalization (Worek & Kraler, 2020).
10. Implement evaluation and feedback mechanisms: Establishing mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of mobility programs and gather feedback from

participants can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that future mobility initiatives better meet the needs of students and educators.

Initiatives such as the ERASMUS+ programs aim to provide opportunities for teacher education and development in European countries. This program offers a platform for European cooperation and exchange, enabling teachers and students to experience Europeanness. This can help teachers to develop their intercultural competences, enhance their knowledge of European cultures, and promote the values of European citizenship. Such initiatives can also encourage virtual instead of physical mobility of teachers, helping them to act as role models and promote intercultural awareness among their students and work against discrimination. In line with the idea and initiative of ERASMUS+ it is important to include all teachers in service – not online student teachers – in the presented activities in the context of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

The Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030) supports this concept and points out that lifelong learning and mobility become accessible to all, including those in the education profession. It emphasizes the importance of enhancing the competences and motivation of teachers, recognizing their critical role in preparing the next generation of citizens. These priorities reflect the growing recognition of the need to invest in and support the ongoing development of teachers and teacher educators in Europe, in order to ensure the success of the European Education Area and to foster a culture of lifelong learning and mobility. The following aspects should be considered:

- In the modern-day university campus, students hail from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, displaying variations in ethnicity, religion or belief, gender identity, sexual orientation, parental or caregiving duties, disability, chronic illness, mental health, financial status, work commitments, age (including mature students), and returning to education after a long hiatus. Prior to embarking on mobility, it is imperative to obtain comprehensive information from the host institution not only regarding the cultural nuances of the destination but also concerning the students (Council Resolution, 2021).
- The European Universities initiative presents an opportunity to trial and promote innovative approaches to teaching mobility. To overcome barriers related to the mobility of academic staff, it is suggested that the best university alliances in Europe be incentivized to explore potential solutions. This can be achieved through piloting these solutions with a small group of stakeholders, which would provide valuable insights and enable the identification of the most effective strategies. Ultimately, this approach could help to address some of the challenges associated with promoting teacher mobility in the European

context, and facilitate the sharing of best practices and approaches across different institutions and countries (Council Resolution, 2021).

- "Professional exchange of knowledge and experience abroad support life-long learning processes, which in turn could positively impact any educational system, as teachers who have gained international experiences will be braver, more tolerant and assess/value their home country differently" (Baedorf, 2015, p. 52). In this context, Leutwyler, Mantel & Tremp (2011) stress the importance of a professional exchange between schools or other educational institutions and universities of different countries. The systemic cooperation between different institutions is a worthy goal, which entails changes in practice, mind-set, the development of new work environments, but it needs time (EU COM, 2015).
- Especially today we need incorporating sustainability as a guiding principle in teaching mobility guidelines to ensure that all mobility-related activities and processes are conducted in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. This can be achieved through the adoption of green mobility principles, which prioritize the use of environmentally friendly modes of transportation, as well as the reduction of carbon emissions associated with mobility activities. Encouraging and supporting the realization of these principles should be a priority in order to ensure that teaching mobility does not contribute to the worsening of the global climate crisis. By taking a sustainable approach to teaching mobility, we can work towards minimizing the environmental impact of these activities, while simultaneously promoting responsible and ethical practices in the education sector (Council Resolution, 2021). It is important to promote the digitalization of administrative procedures for staff mobility at the highest level and to support the extension of already existing digital tools for student mobility. This would enable more efficient and streamlined processes, making it easier for teachers and students to participate in mobility programs. By leveraging digital tools and platforms, administrative tasks related to mobility can be simplified, saving time and resources for all parties involved. Additionally, a digital approach would facilitate the sharing of information and data across different institutions, enabling a more seamless and integrated experience for all stakeholders (Council Resolution, 2021).

Giving credit for international activities, transnational education or inward and outward mobility to increase the number of role models with respect to teaching and learning in an internationally diverse context seems to be another important aspect to motivate student teachers going abroad (Elsner & Worek, 2016). Initiatives such as the ERASMUS+ focus on ITE/CPD can contribute to the development of teachers as change agents, promoting the values of European citizenship and supporting the

ongoing process of improving the quality of education systems and outcomes, as well as promoting internationalization and mobility processes.

This in turn could lead to a simplification of accreditation and recognition procedures, without diminishing the need for quality assurance, which is essential to ensure that Teacher Education and training systems remain of high quality, despite any structural changes, and relevant to the needs of European education and outcomes in general.

Conclusion

Schools have the task to provide top-level education to all its students. However, what does this entail? "Undoubtedly there is much we don't know. What might be competences or knowledge that are fundamental and enduring, such that they can serve society long beyond the 21st century? In what ways might we need to think differently about what we now define as learning or worthwhile knowing? And consequently, what would we need to teach – and how – to prepare young people for the unknown, but inevitable, future?" (Goodwin, 2019).

What we do know is that the increasing diversity of cultures, languages, and values, as well as the shortage of teachers in Europe, require strategic interventions by Ministries of Education and providers of Teacher Education. Effective teaching requires educators to possess a high level of intercultural competencies, gender sensitivity and interdisciplinary skills. Additionally, subject-specific vocabulary should be used when it conveys the meaning more precisely than a similar non-technical term. These abilities enable teachers to bridge gaps and mediate between different perspectives, cultures, policies and religions.

In 2013, Lenzen stated that only teachers with international experience would be able to prepare their students for the opportunities, risks, and uncertainties of a globalized society. According to Mizzi & O'Brien-Klewchuk (2016) teachers who go abroad enlarge their "awareness to the social, economic, political, and cultural variances across the globe." One further advantage of transnational mobility of teachers is the experience being in contact with a different education system with different teaching draughts, methods and organizations (European Commission, 2015). Therefore, it is highly recommended that future and current teachers receive systemic support to acquire intercultural competencies, especially through an intense exchange of knowledge and practise already during their Initial Teacher Education. It seems to be crucial that they reflect on their professional experiences to maximize the benefits of these intercultural encounters. For those who cannot participate in international programs (virtually or physically), alternatives close to

or at home should be provided. Every effort should be made to ensure that student teachers, just as teachers and teacher educators can develop their intercultural skills and knowledge. Virtual stays abroad often serve to prepare or supplement physical stays abroad, but they also potentially offer the option of gaining international study experience without physically leaving your home country. They may therefore have the potential to provide groups of students with international experiences, who, for certain reasons, are not able to physically go abroad (DAAD, 2023) and are a welcome tool in the current critical discussion on climate change and concerns in connection with travelling.

As outlined above, mobility does make a difference as an essential component of professional lifelong learning, enabling individuals to gain new perspectives, experiences, and knowledge from diverse cultural and intellectual contexts. This kind of learning can be facilitated by university partnerships, which can provide opportunities for students, teachers, and researchers to engage in international exchanges, joint research projects, and other forms of cooperation. This can help foster the development of reflective practitioners and teachers who are increasingly committed to research in the context of a shared sense of Europeanness.

Thus, future teachers, educators and teacher educators should be highly aware of the relevance of international experiences and be determined to improve systemic and structural necessities related to recognition and career advantages to make this professional element more attractive. New teaching and learning arrangements should be developed with a focus on student-centredness and cooperation to foster strong relationships among all participants. Besides that, it is important to consider the social and ecological impact of international mobility and develop sustainable solutions to combat climate change while offering creative alternatives. These considerations should be viewed as a snapshot, as digital formats and technological possibilities are rapidly evolving. The discussion should focus on strategic questions related to international cooperation, internationalization goals and partnership networks. Barriers to inclusive participation should be identified and addressed to ensure equitable access to international education and research opportunities.

Concepts of "mobility" should continuously be reassessed in the tension between physical encounters and virtual worlds. As mobility alone cannot guarantee the expansion of individual and intercultural competencies, it can, however, contribute to a different view on the world.

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Ewelina Rzońca
*Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw**
E-mail: e.rzonca@uksw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-6434-9207

Joanna Madalińska-Michalak
*University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education***
E-mail: j.madalinska@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-9980-6597

Mentoring in school settings: Insights from school principals and pre-service teachers***

Summary

Mentoring programmes have recently emerged as crucial components of professional development in Polish schools, providing essential support for teachers in line with current educational standards. This study focuses on the perspectives and experiences of both pre-service teachers and school principals regarding the role of mentoring in their professional development and learning. Employing qualitative interviews guided by Kvale's methodology, data were collected from a sample comprising 40 teachers and 33 school principals. The findings reveal shared experiences and needs among school principals and teachers, offering insights into their perceptions, expectations, benefits, challenges, and suggestions for improving mentoring effectiveness. Additionally, both groups advocate for a mentoring approach grounded in constructivism, highlighting its importance in enriching professional development through mentoring initiatives. These insights underscore the significance of adopting constructivist mentoring models to optimise the effectiveness of mentoring programmes in school settings. However, further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of mentoring programmes on teacher retention, student achievement, and overall school improvement.

* Address: Wydział Nauk Pedagogicznych UKSW, ul. Wóycickiego 1/3, budynek 15, 01-938 Warszawa, Poland.

** Address: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Pedagogiczny, ul. Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warszawa, Poland.

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Keywords: mentoring at schools, the effectiveness of mentoring programmes in school settings in Poland, mentoring approach grounded in constructivism, teacher professional learning and development, career advancement of teachers, school quality

Introduction

Teacher education is encountering global challenges that urge educators worldwide to reconsider their purpose, methods, and perspectives. As the role of teachers evolves rapidly, those who educate them must adjust (Goodwin, Madalińska-Michalak, & Flores, 2023). Mentoring in school settings, as an integral part of teacher education, plays a crucial role in facilitating teacher professional development (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Greiner, Hofmann, & Katskaller, 2017; Wanga & Odella, 2002). It has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and motivation to work, and it serves as a bridge between theoretical knowledge gained in teacher education programmes and practical application in real-world educational settings, especially for beginning teachers. Mentoring provides beginning teachers with guidance, support, and opportunities for reflection as they transition from student to teacher. For school principals, mentoring offers a platform to cultivate leadership skills, share best practices, and navigate the complexities of school administration. This study aims to illuminate the significance of mentoring in the broader landscape of teacher education and professional development by investigating the experiences and perspectives of both principals and pre-service teachers. At the core of the analysis lies the question: What are the experiences and opinions of school principals and pre-service teachers regarding the role of mentoring in their professional development?

Mentoring at school

A teacher's responsibilities extend beyond classroom instruction and encompass their own continuous professional and personal development (Madalińska-Michalak, 2021). The commencement of a teaching career marks a pivotal juncture (Madalińska-Michalak, 2019), as teachers embark on their professional journeys within specific educational environments, engaging with various stakeholders such as students, parents, and fellow teachers. While the initial stages of teaching may present challenges, they also offer substantial rewards. It is imperative for teachers to embrace new challenges, demonstrate dedication to their work, and exhibit a willingness to continually enhance their professional skills. This endeavour is characterised by a duality of emotions – on one hand, feelings of apprehension and uncertainty, and

on the other hand, a fervent desire to learn and strive for excellence. As noted by Joanna Madalińska-Michalak (2021), contemporary professionalism necessitates that teachers engage in continuous learning and professional development throughout their careers, deepening their knowledge base, refining their pedagogical skills, and adeptly applying acquired knowledge in practice. School-based mentoring is a topic extensively discussed in the literature, with numerous definitions underscoring the vital role of mentors and their actions in providing support to less experienced individuals. Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2009) define mentoring as "individual support of a novice or less experienced practitioner by a more experienced practitioner, designed primarily to assist in the development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate the mentee's acquisition of knowledge into the culture of the profession" (p. 207). In turn, Pirkle (2011) points out, specifically referring to teachers, that the mentor's observation and provision of teaching support and feedback are crucial. Teachers define mentoring as a master–student relationship (Aydın & Arslan, 2022). Feiman-Nemser's approach (2001) delineates two distinct models of mentoring: the transmissive model and the constructivist-oriented model. In the transmissive model, the mentee passively receives knowledge transferred by the mentor. Conversely, the constructivist-oriented model emphasises two-way learning, characterised by the exchange of experiences and the analysis of actions. In this model, the mentor's mentee actively participates, initiating and carrying out activities. The mentor's communication encompasses both informational and controlling aspects (Hofmann & Springer, 2014). A controlling mentor sets goals and ensures their achievement, while an informative mentor provides feedback through reflection, exchange of perspectives, and collaboration.Numerous studies affirm the positive impact of mentoring on novice teachers at the outset of their careers. Through analysis of these findings, several areas emerge where mentoring yields significant benefits:

- Emotional support: novice teachers often face professional and personal challenges that can lead to stress, exhaustion, and frustration. In these situations, having a mentor who can offer emotional support, lend a listening ear, provide advice, and help find solutions proves invaluable.
- Motivation for work and development: mentoring encourages novice teachers to stay motivated, remain engaged in their work, and pursue ongoing professional development.
- Classroom/group organisation and management: mentors assist novice teachers in honing their skills in effectively organising and managing their classrooms or groups, contributing to a more conducive learning environment.

Research indicates that mentors play a crucial role in supporting novice teachers worldwide, particularly those at high risk of attrition (Howe, 2006;

Hudson, 2013; Li, Sani, & Azmin, 2021). A novice teacher can rely on the mentor for advice, tips, and valuable experiences that aid in navigating their teaching journey. Furthermore, through the support and knowledge provided, novice teachers enhance their self-confidence and develop problem-solving skills, leading to increased job satisfaction (Ingersoll, & Strong, 2012; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Lindgren, 2005). Moreover, mentoring can contribute to increasing teachers' motivation for professional development, improving skills and improving the quality of teaching work, cooperation, and building positive interactions. According to research results, cooperation with a mentor has a positive effect on the motivation of a beginning teacher (Klassen, & Durksen, 2014), as well as on improvement and a sense of community (Schwan et al., 2020). It is especially worth emphasising the importance of mentoring based on constructivism. Its importance is confirmed by the research of Richter et al. (2013). Feedback from a mentor, joint activities and work planning, as well as inspiring the teacher to act may have a positive effect on his/her willingness to develop professionally and personally. Additionally, mentors can help teachers develop classroom management skills by providing practical tips, strategies, and tools. Thanks to this, they will be able to effectively deal with various situations and challenges occurring in the classroom. Research results show that mentoring improves teachers' skills in organising work and classroom management (Lindgren, 2005; Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007). Consequently, the skills and knowledge gained by a novice teacher can lead to a more positive classroom atmosphere, enhanced teaching effectiveness, and improved relationships with students. The mentor thus assumes a pivotal role in the developmental journey of a young teacher. Collaboration, exchange of perspectives, and emotional support foster the growth of professional competencies, motivation, and job satisfaction.

Mentoring at schools in Poland – legal regulations

In Poland, teachers acquire multifaceted knowledge through pedagogical studies, covering a broad spectrum of subjects including the history of education, philosophy, didactics, individual class methodologies, psychology, and sociology. Nonetheless, it is crucial to underscore the importance of learning and continuous professional development beyond initial training: "the process of becoming a teacher, from the emergence of motivation to choose a profession and its maturation, to fuller identification with the profession, takes place throughout the entire period of professional activity" (Dróżka & Madalińska-Michalak, 2016, p. 162). It is paramount to carefully consider the aspiration to become a teacher amidst the evolving socio-economic landscape. It is worth emphasising that there are many factors behind the choice of the teaching profession and its

attractiveness. These are both internal (individual) factors and external factors, i.e. work organisation, social situation and educational policy. "Analysing external conditions from the macro-social level implies the need for the researcher to pay attention to factors such as the characteristics of the school system and its socio-cultural environment, and therefore to the educational policy of a given country, its internal legal regulations, internal cultural diversity, history, economy and professional requirements" (Madalińska-Michalak, 2021, p. 96).

In Poland, there has been a decline in the number of individuals pursuing pedagogical studies, contributing to an aging teaching profession. This trend is underscored in the Education and Training Monitor 2023 report, which highlights various factors contributing to the aging demographic of the teaching staff, surpassing the EU average. As highlighted in the report, the teaching staff is ageing more than the EU average: "While in 2015 the proportion of schoolteachers (ISCED levels 1–3) aged 55 and older was 12.6% (EU 23.4%), in 2021, it increased to 21.3% (EU 24.4%). At the same time, the proportion of teachers aged 25–34 decreased from 18.8% in 2015 (EU 16.6%) to 12% in 2021, below the EU average (15.8%)" (European Commission, 2023, p. 6).

School-based mentoring in Poland operates within a framework of legal regulations that outline the roles, responsibilities, and parameters of the mentorship process. This mentoring initiative was introduced in 2022 as part of the professional development for Polish teachers, aligning with recent regulations governing professional advancement in the country. Detailed guidelines and the course of professional promotion are defined in Poland by the following documents: Act of January 26, 1982, Teacher's Charter, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of September 6, 2022 on obtaining professional promotion grades by teachers, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of on August 25, 2022 on the evaluation of teachers' work. The mentor now assumes responsibilities formerly held by the internship supervisor, as outlined in the Teacher's Charter (Act of January 26, 1982). The legislator has defined the mentor's tasks, which include:

"1) supporting the teacher on an ongoing basis in the process of introduction to work in the profession, including familiarising the teacher with the documentation of the course of teaching, educational and care activities and other documents applicable at school;
2) providing teachers with assistance in selecting appropriate forms of professional development;
3) sharing knowledge and experience with the teacher to the extent necessary for the effective performance of the teacher's duties;
4) enabling the teacher to observe the classes he conducts and discuss these classes with teacher;

5) observing classes conducted by a teacher and discussing them with the teacher;
6) inspiring and encouraging teachers to take up professional challenges" (Act of January 26, 1982, Teacher's Charter).

Moreover, the mentor participates in observing classes conducted by the novice teacher during the second and final years of their preparation for the profession.

According to current regulations, the school principal, mentor, methodological advisor, teacher-consultant, or representative of the pedagogical supervision body, along with a certified teacher, are present during the observations of the classes conducted by a teacher. In the second observation, which occurs in the final year of preparation, an expert from a designated list or an appointed or certified teacher with qualifications in psychology, pedagogy, or special education, may replace the mentor. The committee then issues a positive or negative opinion, as outlined in the Teacher's Charter (Act of January 26, 1982).

Furthermore, the school principal evaluates the work of beginner teachers twice, as stipulated by the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science dated August 25, 2022, on the evaluation of teachers' work (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 1822). These evaluations occur in the second and final years of preparation for the profession. While the opinions of the mentor and the parents' council are considered, it is important to note that their absence does not impact the assessment by the school principal. The regulation specifies detailed evaluation criteria, categorised into mandatory and additional criteria. Mandatory criteria encompass aspects such as the substantive and methodological correctness of teaching, education and care activities, maintenance of safe and hygienic learning environments, knowledge of children's rights, collaboration with colleagues and parents, and adherence to legal provisions and internal school regulations. Additional criteria for assessing teacher performance may include, for example: diagnosing the needs and capabilities of the student and individualising work with the student, undertaking innovative organisational, programme or methodological solutions in conducting teaching, analysing one's own work, ability to resolve conflicts among students, ability to recognise and use non-verbal communication and improving communication skills (Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of August 25, 2022 on the evaluation of teachers' work). What is important is the degree to which all criteria are met, including one indicated by the principal and one given by the beginner teacher.

The final stage of professional promotion to an appointed teacher is an examination. It is important that during preparation for the profession, the teacher demonstrates knowledge and skills in the field of:

- knowledge of legal provisions regarding work organisation, tasks and principles of operation of the institution, conducting classes, recognising students' needs and individualising teaching;

- applying knowledge in the field of psychology, pedagogy and didactics at work,
- knowing the students' environment and taking into account the issues of the local environment and contemporary social and civilisation problems in their work,
- using multimedia and IT tools at work, especially during classes.

It is important to highlight that mentors should continuously develop their knowledge and skills through lifelong learning. The mentor serves as a guide and role model for novice teachers. With the mentor's guidance, support, and experience, a teacher at the outset of their career can acquire valuable insights and build self-confidence. Effective collaboration between a novice teacher and a mentor is grounded in trust, safety, mutual assistance, and reciprocal learning.

Methodology and methods

The research conducted by the authors aims to provide a comprehensive understanding, description, and interpretation of mentoring phenomena, with a focus on the subjective experiences and interpretations conveyed by participants. Additionally, it aims to discern the benefits and challenges inherent in mentoring practices within the school learning environment.

The research objectives encompass:

- Analysing the phenomenon of mentoring in schools, encapsulating the perspectives of both pre-service teachers and school principals.
- Exploring the experiences of beginning teachers regarding their engagement in mentoring processes and the significance they attribute to these experiences.
- Identifying the benefits and challenges arising from mentoring practices within the school educational setting.

The adopted research approach, qualitative interviews following Kvale's methodology, focuses on understanding the role of mentoring from two essential perspectives: school principals, who wield significant organisational influence, and teachers undergoing professional development, who directly benefit from mentoring support. Qualitative interviews, guided by Kvale's approach, prioritise attentive listening to discern the underlying meanings conveyed by study participants (Kvale, 2001). This approach allows for adaptability in the interview process, aligning with the direction provided by participants' narratives.

The main research problem is encapsulated in the following question: What are the experiences and opinions of school principals and pre-service teachers about the role of mentoring in their professional development?

In addressing the primary research question, several specific inquiries were articulated:

1. How do school principals perceive their role in introducing and developing mentoring in the context of teachers' professional development?
2. What are the principals' main expectations regarding mentoring as a support tool for teachers?
3. What are the benefits of having a mentor for beginning teachers?
4. What challenges and difficulties are identified by beginning teachers in the mentoring process?
5. What suggestions do principals and teachers have for improving the effectiveness of mentoring in the school educational environment?

Study participants and data analysis

Two distinct groups were engaged in interviews for this study. The first cohort consisted of pre-service teachers, specifically teacher students in their final semester, enrolled in long-cycle master's programmes in preschool and early childhood education, comprising a total of 40 individuals. The second group consisted of school principals and vice-principals representing schools and educational institutions from the Masovian Voivodeship. These principals were participants of courses and postgraduate studies in education management and leadership, comprising 33 individuals, of whom 28 were women and 5 were men, aged between 31 and 46. The deliberate selection of beginning teachers and school principals aimed to ensure a diverse array of perspectives and capture a broad spectrum of viewpoints.

The discussions were conducted in congenial settings facilitated by a moderator, allowing study participants to influence one another through their contributions. Kvale (2001) addresses and responds to common objections regarding the quality of research conducted through interviews. It is pertinent to consider the subjective experiences of respondents and the role of the moderator. Firstly, interviews are inherently flexible and contextualised within specific temporal and spatial parameters. Secondly, interactions between the moderator and participants should be viewed as a means to enhance understanding. However, it is crucial for the moderator to possess a requisite level of knowledge, empathy, and competence.

Prior to commencement, study participants were briefed on the research objectives and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The moderator explicitly disclosed the recording of the conversation and secured consent from all present individuals. The interviews were documented using a voice recorder. Subsequently, the recorded statements were transcribed to generate a structured text document for analysis and result processing. As conventionally

practiced, interview transcripts serve as the primary empirical data upon which research projects rely for analysis and interpretation. "It is interview transcripts that are usually treated as solid empirical data on which a given research project is based" (Kvale, 2021, p. 154). MAXQDA software was utilised for data processing and thematic analysis.

Subsequently, the analysis of the interviews commenced, employing a meaning-oriented approach. The meaning condensation technique was employed, and the analysis followed the five stages delineated by Kvale (2021). In the initial stage, the authors meticulously read through the interview transcripts multiple times, facilitating the identification of meaning units as the second stage. Subsequently, the main topics within individual meaning units were determined, and respondents' statements were categorised accordingly. The identified topics included the benefits of mentoring, challenges and difficulties associated with mentoring, expectations regarding mentoring, suggestions for enhancing mentoring effectiveness, and the role of management in implementing mentoring in schools. Throughout the analysis, the study's objectives were carefully considered. Finally, the most salient interview topics were synthesised into a cohesive framework in the last stage.

Mentoring at school – research findings

The following section presents the findings derived from an in-depth exploration of mentoring practices within educational contexts. Addressing the key research questions outlined earlier, this segment sheds light on the nuanced perceptions, expectations, benefits, challenges, difficulties surrounding mentoring as perceived by school principals and beginning teachers, and suggestions for enhancing mentoring effectiveness.

Through an exploration of the research findings presented below, a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping mentoring relationships in educational settings emerges, offering valuable insights for stakeholders invested in fostering effective mentorship programmes.

Principals' perspectives on mentoring implementation

This subsection examines how school principals perceive their pivotal role in introducing and nurturing mentoring initiatives for teachers' professional development. It looks at the challenges and complexities they encounter in orchestrating the mentoring process, including issues related to organisation, duration, and mentor selection.

School principals in the context of their role in introducing and developing mentoring in their institutions, they drew attention to the challenges and difficulties related to this. The first area concerned the organisation of the mentoring process. Several of them pointed out problems with answering teachers' questions regarding the duration of preparation for a profession, taking into account breaks in work or cases of starting an internship before the entry into force of the new regulations: "The headmaster may get confused about who should start and finish professional promotion for particular degrees".

The management staff are also aware of the need for appropriate selection mentor for a beginner teacher. Referring to their experiences, the directors emphasised several related issues. In their opinion, the mentor should be a teacher from the same area of education (e.g. early childhood education or from a field (humanities/science). "If, for example, a teacher of Polish receives a chemist as a mentor, it is also a challenge. It may be a good idea to think about it when choosing a mentor for a given person." Moreover, the mentor should express their willingness to be one. This is about not having to be a guide for a novice teacher. "It is also difficult to force the role of a mentor, because the great one already has a lot of responsibilities, including young teachers." "A mentor should want to become a mentor, not just because the principal told a mentor to perform this role. This young teacher feels like he can't learn anything. A mentor should be open and have something to share. And here the issue of the mentor's competences is also important: "A clear distinction exists between a guardian and a mentor. While the supervisor oversees the teacher's internship, a mentor, on the other hand, is expected to possess leadership qualities and establish a personal connection with the mentee. This is about, for example, charismatic skills. In addition, the school principals focused on organising work regarding the mentor's and novice teacher's lesson plans. "It often happens that the mentor and the novice teacher have classes at the same time and cannot go to each other's place for observation." Therefore, when planning classes, it is worth taking this fact into account and ensuring that these people have the opportunity and time to talk to each other. "A mentor has to spend time with the person. Additionally, both people need to have some time to do something together."

The principals' challenges also included those related to the young teacher's approach, which influences the work with it and the subsequent formulation of the assessment. "I was the guardian and my teacher (the young one) didn't want to learn, didn't want to listen. He wanted to get promoted as quickly as possible. Later, I had a problem writing a diplomatic opinion about this person. Moreover, the young teacher's reluctance to cooperate translates into the atmosphere in the teaching team/group. This is a challenge for the institution's management staff:

"The teacher does not allow her guardian to come near her at all. The teacher is a calm and subdued teacher. And there were many situations where she did not react to her and claimed that she did not need help. And now the risk is that the person who is the caregiver is wondering whether to leave because she feels unnecessary. The atmosphere in the team is getting weaker and weaker." In such cases, it is the director's responsibility to take action, but it must be appropriate to the situation. Therefore, the organisation and course of preparation for the teaching profession also include certain challenges for management staff.

Principals' expectations of mentoring

Here, we explore the principals' primary expectations regarding mentoring programmes as supportive mechanisms for teachers. This section investigates the criteria principals prioritise when selecting mentors for novice teachers, considering factors such as educational background, subject expertise, and willingness to mentor.

In the context of expectations, principals most often indicated the benefit of having a mentor for a novice teacher. They emphasised help at the beginning of work, the possibility of support and exchange of experiences. "A beginner is introduced to work, becomes familiar with the operation of the facility, gains experience, improves his or her skills, and becomes familiar with the documents available at the school. He has a person to whom he can turn with all his doubts, consult something and talk, which certainly gives a great sense of security. "A young teacher may feel well introduced to the teaching staff, he may become part of the team faster than he does it alone." Interview participants based their observations on this issue on their own experiences. When cooperation between a mentor and a pre-service teacher takes place, numerous benefits are noticed. "The person who was my guardian introduced me to school life from the very beginning. She showed what is important in this school, what to pay attention to, what to avoid, what not to do. I wouldn't read this in any book. You can learn such things from someone who has been working with us for several years." It is also worth emphasising the negative experiences that directors would like to avoid in their facility: "My supervisor's tasks were limited to signing documents. It definitely bothered me, but my parents were teachers."

The management staff also have expectations regarding the personal and professional development of the mentor due to performing this function. They emphasised the fact of learning from each other, the possibility of transferring knowledge and the mentor gaining experience that he can demonstrate in his

promotion. "As a supervisor, I have positive experiences because there was an exchange of experiences, because I, as an older teacher, could share something and learn, for example, communication technologies from a young teacher. I could always learn something, not just show it." "We pass on to others a part of ourselves, our system of values, our approach, the way we conduct lessons." Moreover, principals paid attention to the relationship between the mentor and the novice teacher, as they are part of the teaching staff. "I was the internship supervisor and a bond is created that lasts for the remaining years, even after the internship ends. It's something that brings you together, something that gives you such energy, it's something invisible that allows you to join the team." The mentor's task is to help a novice teacher introduce them to teaching and educational work. It is necessary to listen to each other and support each other along the way. "When I had a signal that there was too much help or that it was unnecessary for this person, I focused on helping to solve the problems that appeared. So that there would be a margin of freedom and independence for the young teacher."

It is important that the management staff's expectations regarding mentoring during the professional advancement of beginning teachers included the issue of possible benefits to be gained. In addition, these benefits applied to both the beginning teacher and the mentor.

Teachers' perception of mentoring benefits

Focusing on novice teachers' viewpoints, this segment elucidates the perceived benefits of mentoring in preparing for the teaching profession. It examines how mentors contribute to their professional growth, emotional support, and overall readiness to navigate the challenges of pre-service training.

Students who are about to start their professional career advancement as teachers show great interest in having a mentor. From their perspective, it brings benefits for both them and the mentor. In their statements, they emphasised the role of a mentor and the fact that they would feel safe when starting work in the institution when they could count on an experienced teacher. "It's definitely less stressful because there is someone who will guide us through the whole process. And if there are any questions that will probably arise, he is there and can answer them. It will support us in the first months of work", "we are not alone, we do not have to wipe the glass alone", "we can count on someone in case of problems". Moreover, young teachers also see the benefit of observing classes by mentors and talking to them. "The benefits are knowing the opinion, the other point of view, I can receive tips, suggestions for action that I do not notice." "A mentor as

an observer can help us and suggest a different solution to the problem. We say A, mentor says B, and together we develop strategy C. The perspective of another person who can suggest changes."

In the context of the benefits they can achieve, young teachers talked about their expectations from a mentor. Most of them focused on cooperation as the basis for joint activities with a mentor and on feedback received from an experienced teacher. "I would like a mentor to tell me what I am doing wrong, what I need to improve, what I am doing right, i.e. to give feedback on my actions." "I expect support and understanding, but without imposing my opinion, so that I have time to think. Giving several options, possibilities, not imposing what to do, but to figure it out together." Students also commented on the person of the mentor, i.e. what he should be like and what is important to them. They paid attention to character traits and competences. "He was understanding, so he wouldn't discourage us at the beginning and show us that we can develop, he saw us as a partner, not a person he was given by force." "So that the mentor does not impose his opinion, so that he also listens to our opinion, so that the principle of cooperation works." Among the expectations, there was also the issue of time devoted to observing lessons or talking to parents, exchanging experiences and inspiring each other to create materials and/or use those that the mentor/beginner teacher already has. "Time to talk, to observe lessons, even to talk to parents." "For me, it would be important to have support in conversations with parents, because it is difficult for us, i.e. the mentor stands on the side and then I receive feedback from the mentor about what I could have done differently, how I did." "Assistance in selecting methods, what is important, what will actually be useful." Many times, pre-service teachers emphasised help in getting acquainted with documents, school rules and work organisation.

Moreover, the students' comments mentioned the benefits for the mentor. First of all, the opportunity to learn from a novice teacher. "(The mentor) is up to date with everything and can learn from the younger teacher." "A beginner teacher can be an inspiration to use new working methods and a fresh perspective." Moreover, they emphasised the possibility of sharing experience and knowledge: "one can share one's experience and gain self-esteem", as well as taking into account the performance of this function in one's own professional advancement (if an appointed teacher).

It is worth noting that in the statements of novice teachers there were benefits related to the sense of security and emotional support received. Moreover, they feel the need to cooperate, get feedback from the mentor and learn from each other. They are therefore aware of the benefits for themselves, but also for the mentor, which shows that they also want to share knowledge and reflect on their actions.

Challenges faced by beginning teachers in mentoring

Lastly, this subsection delves into the challenges and difficulties novice teachers encounter in their interactions with mentors during pre-service training. It analyses barriers such as mismatched mentor-mentee pairings, role ambiguity, and the delicate balance between mentor responsibilities and existing workload. Beginning teachers based on internships and conversations with other educators and, in accordance with their own needs, identify challenges that face effective cooperation with a mentor. They paid attention to two issues: the selection of a mentor, his qualifications and the approach to pre-service teachers.

Students emphasised the importance of choosing the right person to act as a mentor. This decision is made by the director and, in their opinion, he should take into account the competences of this person, experience, as well as the subject/educational area of the novice teacher and mentor. "Individual selection. Not everyone wants to be a mentor or have a job on top of that." "I need appropriate competences to perform this function." "I would like mentor to have expertise in early childhood education to effectively guide the mentee." "Staff shortages (are such a difficulty), then it is not taken into account whether a person is suitable (as a mentor) or has experience. Sometimes it happens that there is no predisposition to share experience and support. In the context of mentor competences, young teachers focused on their knowledge and communication skills related to transferring knowledge and creating feedback. "A mentor must have knowledge and communication skills so as not to be afraid to express his or her opinion, and we cannot be afraid." "I need the appropriate competencies to perform this function." "It can be challenging to open up about our problems to a mentor, as it may feel like admitting failure."

Hence, it is imperative to consider the perspectives of pre-service teachers, who hold high expectations for their mentors and thus seek individuals with substantial experience and specific competencies.

Exploring recommendations for enhanced mentoring efficacy in school settings

This section investigates the valuable insights and recommendations provided by both principals and teachers aimed at optimising the effectiveness of mentoring within the educational milieu. Exploring their recommendations for improvement, this segment offers practical strategies and actionable measures to enhance the impact of mentoring programmes on teacher professional development.

Principals and pre-service teachers based on their experiences and needs provided several specific suggestions to make mentoring more beneficial in the career advancement process. First of all, they emphasised the need for appropriate organisation and selection of a mentor. It is a lesson plan enabling observation of classes, meetings and conversations between the mentor and the novice teacher. The management staff made the following suggestions: "a plan adapted to the possibility of classroom visits"; "if the principal appoints a mentor, it would be good if this teacher could go to his classes and vice versa. That they could see each other at all"; "a mentor should conduct open lessons for his mentee. It's important for the teacher to see someone experienced in working with students. Teacher should be able to participate in these classes. Maybe a replacement for this time if it is not possible to arrange such a plan"; "the solution for greater accessibility is for teachers to work together, e.g. class teacher, lead teacher and support teacher. They see each other often, they have more to say about each other"; "the mentor should teach the same, related subject as the teacher-student." Techers also emphasised the importance of organising a lesson plan and receiving a mentor from early childhood education: "Mentor must have time to observe classes. So mentor can give us feedback."

Recommendations from principals and young teachers also concerned the appropriate selection of a mentor. Starting from consent to be a mentor, his competences, to establishing rights and obligations and respecting them. "I thought about the mentor's consent, because I observe such coercion. Voluntary consent or option to refuse. Someone who is forced will not be a good mentor. Nobody asked us, they just informed us. Sometimes these duets form themselves and this is also a good solution or asking the teacher who he would like to see as his mentor"; "greater remuneration for this, but if someone does not feel like they are a mentor, even money won't change that" (principals' statements). For students, it is important: "not to impose the role of a mentor, it may not necessarily be a choice, but an opportunity to get to know each other", "that it be an early childhood education teacher", "to determine what I can expect – responsibilities, and for the director to check it", "not to choose a person as a mentor who does not feel capable or has no competence. I think interested people should have training for mentors."

In their suggestions, principals and pre-service teachers also referred to the need for conversations between the mentor and the novice teacher. In their opinion, they are important at the beginning of professional advancement and during it, as feedback. The staff's statements included: "introductory conversations are important"; "is for the principal to draw the mentor's attention to the fact that the teacher sometimes does not know what questions to ask. To oblige the mentor to conduct such guiding conversations"; "to hold a meeting of the principal, mentors

and teachers, where he will present his expectations and how he sees the work. To clearly communicate what he will expect from the teacher and mentor at what stage." In turn, pre-service teachers indicated feedback as crucial in the learning process. "For the mentor to share at the end of the day, summarise immediately, feedback on an ongoing basis. Not only was it bad and bad. You're doing it wrong, but let me tell you how to fix it." "Formulating feedback, paying attention to what we did well, what needs to be improved and how it can be improved."

Principals and novice teachers agreed with the statements made by each other. In order to increase the effectiveness of mentoring in the process of teachers' professional advancement, principals paid attention to the selection of a mentor and the organisation of the timetables of the mentor and the novice teacher. Moreover, according to them, conversations based on motivational messages can increase effectiveness.

Summary and conclusions

Upon analysing the research results, it becomes evident that the experiences and needs of school principals and beginning teachers align closely. They underscore the importance of appropriate organisation and the selection of a mentor, as well as the mentor's competencies and experiences. Additionally, they highlight the benefits for the teacher preparing for the profession and their mentor. Both management staff and students advocate for a mentoring model rooted in constructivism. This model emphasises the collaboration between a mentor and a novice teacher, focusing on the exchange of views, feedback, and joint problem-solving. They also stress the significance of mutual learning and the active involvement of both partners. Novice teachers express a desire for guidance, learning opportunities, and emotional support. School principals emphasise the necessity for openness and a willingness to foster the development of young teachers. Hence, the mentor's competence in this regard, along with the novice teacher's engagement, is pivotal.

The importance of mentorship is echoed in the statements of teacher students who seek assistance during their initial tenure in a given institution. They rely on mentors to guide and support them. Therefore, the effectiveness of mentoring in a teacher's professional development process hinges on the organisation and selection of the mentor, responsibilities that lie with the facility's management staff. Effective collaboration requires openness to others, joint activities, classroom observations, and proficiency in giving and receiving instructions. Thus, dialogue and a willingness to learn from one another are crucial. Consequently, the research results advocate for the adoption of a constructivist-oriented mentoring model to

benefit both the mentor and the novice teacher. The efficacy of mentoring depends on the involvement of all stakeholders—principals, mentors, and beginning teachers.

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Katarzyna Brzosko-Barratt
*University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education**
E-mail: k.brzosko-barratt@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-5636-8416

Professional development of CLIL teachers in Poland**

Summary

Supporting CLIL teachers in developing skills for content and language integration is not an easy task as most of them were trained either as language or as content specialists. With CLIL teaching becoming more popular in Poland, there is a growing interest in providing more opportunities for continuous professional development. The aim of this paper is threefold, to explore the current research literature on CLIL teachers' professional development, to present the results of survey research exploring the professional development needs of CLIL teachers in Poland and finally to formulate some recommendations for organizing professional development initiatives for CLIL teachers.

Keywords: CLIL approach, in-service professional development, teacher collaboration, forms of professional development

Introduction

Despite the differences among bilingual approaches around the world, research confirms the importance of well-prepared teachers for effective instruction (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Papaja, 2013, Pavón Vázquez & Ellison 2013; Pérez-Cañado, 2018). There are many different labels used in reference to bilingual education programs. These include, among the others, immersion, content-based

* Address: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Pedagogiczny, ul. Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warszawa, Poland

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instruction (CBI), English medium instruction (EMI), or most frequently used in the European context, content and language integrated learning (CLIL). In all of them, the teachers' knowledge base and pedagogical skills have been found to be extremely complex (Lo, 2020; Lyster & Tedick, 2014; Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Tedick & Zilmer, 2018). As CLIL was defined as "(…) a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010, p. 1), it is exactly its duality of focus that becomes the challenge for learners, and teachers, as well as teacher educators.

Supporting bilingual teachers in the development of skills for content and language integration is not an easy task because teachers, who currently practice, were trained either as language or as content specialists. Therefore, they received a limited preparation to integrate content and language skills (Tedick & Zilmer, 2020). Also, teacher education institutions do not sufficiently address the integration as they fail to include dual focused learning tasks or assessments. This difficulty is also exacerbated by the shortage of faculty members with bilingual teaching experience. While subject content teaching faculties does not often have sufficient language awareness, language teaching educators also do not have the needed subject content area expertise (Lo, 20017; Villabona & Cenoz, 2021).

In addition, CLIL teacher education is troubled by many institutional constraints, which could also prevent developing skills in content and language integration. These constraints include lack of standards of CLIL teacher education, segmentation of teacher education to content and language subjects, or disconnect of theory and practice (Brzosko-Barratt, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018).

In Poland, the first sections of bilingual education date back to 1991 and were originally limited to high-school levels. In 1999 bilingual education was also broadened to include lower secondary schools' level (Polish: *gimnazjum*). In 2017, in the light of the newest educational reform in Poland, which eliminated middle schools, bilingual education has been moved to the last grades of primary school (grades 7–8). According to the CLIL provision in Poland, anyone with the content subject qualifications and the language certificate at B2 level can provide instruction bilingually. There are no other qualification requirements for the teachers.

With CLIL teaching becoming more popular in Poland, there is a growing interest in providing teachers with more opportunities for continuous professional development. The aim of this paper is then threefold, to explore the current research literature on CLIL teachers' professional development, to present the results of survey research exploring the professional development needs of CLIL teachers in Poland, and finally, to formulate some recommendations for organizing professional development initiatives for bilingual teachers.

Literature review

Frameworks of CLIL teacher education

With the growing popularity of CLIL teaching around the world, researchers attempted to draw up some theoretical conceptualizations of CLIL teacher knowledge and skills. There are two available frameworks that attempt to present professional development areas needed for CLIL teaching: The CLIL Teachers Competencies Grid (Bertaux et. al., 2010) and The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (Marsh et al., 2010). The first document attempts to chart key competences to support CLIL development in a variety of contexts. This framework is divided into two primary sections: "Underpinning CLIL" and "Setting CLIL in motion". The first related to "laying the foundation for establishing and maintaining a CLIL programme", the second explores the skills needed for implementing CLIL, i.e., the first relates to theoretical, administrative, and policy issues and the second to CLIL practice. In the European Framework for CLIL Teaching, the authors provided areas for both experienced and less experienced teachers. In this framework, CLIL related areas include: CLIL fundamentals, content and language awareness, methodology and assessment, and learning resources and environment. They are according to the authors the key competences for CLIL practitioners and relate to the practice of integrating different aspects inherent to CLIL in a professional manner, and ability to implement them in a classroom. In addition, the authors included personal reflection, classroom management, and research and evaluation. Although they contribute to specific CLIL points, they also pertain more to general competences. They were both created as tools for developing teacher training programs and serve as "points of reference for discussions pertaining to CLIL teaching and teacher development" (Bertaux et al., 2010). As these frameworks were helpful in identifying professional development needs, they were not designed to embrace many contextual variables, the actual classroom practice regarding CLIL teachers' professional roles, their everyday teaching challenges, and professional learning needs.

CLIL teachers' professional development areas

As CLIL approach is used in a variety of settings at all levels of education ranging from early primary to tertiary, CLIL teachers themselves do not constitute a homogenous group. Previous research showed that to some degree their teaching insecurities were related to educational backgrounds and teaching contexts (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Lo, 2020; Pérez-Cañado, 2018). Most often, CLIL teachers fit the two categories: they are L2 teachers, who obtained subject content qualifications, or they are content subject teachers who have L2 language

skills that allow them to teach a subject content in this language. With so much variation among the teachers, any professional development activities will have to address their diversified needs.

L2 proficiency of CLIL teachers is one area that was broadly debated in research, specifically at the onset of CLIL popularity. Immersion teachers are known to be the native speakers of L2, while CLIL teachers are usually non-native speakers of the target language. However, native-like language competence is not required from CLIL teachers. Many European countries require some language qualifications frequently at a minimum of B2 level. Their language proficiency depended on such factors as teachers' education but also on the study abroad experience (Pérez-Cañado, 2018). Research confirms that a lack of sufficient language skills brought some uneasiness to them (Pavon-Vazquez & Ellison, 2013). In the Spanish studies CLIL teachers felt insecure about their fluency and their general level of English (Fernández & Halbach, 2011; Lorenzo et al., 2009). In a large European survey, the preschool and early primary teachers also experienced problems in various linguistic competences, especially language for communication, but also in pronunciation and fluency (Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Ruiz-Gomez, 2015). In addition, researchers also explored the nature of competence that is needed when undertaking CLIL teaching. Morton (2018) attempted to conceptualize the types of language knowledge and proficiency for successful content and language integration. He argued that simply improving general language proficiency does not sufficiently prepare for CLIL teaching. Therefore, he introduced the construct of "language knowledge for content teaching", which was seen as necessary when teaching specific subjects. This type of linguistic knowledge, closely related to the content, was found to be more important for CLIL teachers to obtain than general language proficiency.

Another area of research, which received much attention in recent years is the integration of content and language which constitutes the core of bilingual teaching. The studies in immersion contexts showed that developing teachers' skills in content and language integration cannot be limited to obtaining practical skills (Lyster & Tedick, 2014; Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). The complexity of the integration was further conceptualized in the European context by Nikula et al. (2016) on three perspectives. These three perspectives included: curriculum and pedagogy planning, participant perspectives and beliefs, and finally actual classroom practices (Nikula et al., 2016). Integration of curriculum and pedagogy planning perspective concerns both what and how to integrate on all levels reaching from the curriculum level to lesson planning. This perspective is specifically difficult to implement into educational practice as it requires much collaboration on institutional and individual levels. The second perspective relates to the teachers' own beliefs regarding their perceptions about integration. As CLIL teachers are

frequently content teachers they might not see the language component as their teaching responsibility, or they might not feel they have necessary language for supporting language instruction while teaching content. The final perspective is related to classroom practices and concerns how content and language are learnt in integration. Research focusing on teacher development in content and language integration is scarce, and the existing studies confirm that the transition that teachers undergo requires deeper transformation and has to be supported by ample time and resources (Tedick & Zillmer, 2018). The professional development activities contributed however to better understanding of connections between language and content (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012).

Collaboration is one of the pillars of effective CLIL instruction. It is hoped that it would allow the teachers who do not always have the same expertise in both language and content to provide the dual focused instruction. Despite these strong arguments for collaboration, research studies indicate that there are many obstacles of effective collaboration in CLIL settings. These constraints include a lack of central policy, differences in teachers' perceptions of their expertise or lack of communication channels. Some studies pointed out that some differences in the teachers' willingness to collaborate were related to the teachers' beliefs. In the study from Hong Kong secondary content teachers were more focused on covering content dictated by the syllabi in order to prepare their students for external examinations and did not see the need for such collaboration with language specialists (Lo, 2020). Content teachers expressed their opinion that language teachers are responsible to prepare students for content learning. This attitude was very different in case of the language teachers, who were generally more open for collaboration as they felt that only through collaboration with content teachers, such results could be accomplished.

Forms of professional development for CLIL teachers

The design of professional development programs has some influence on its effectiveness (Lo, 2020). The most used professional development formats for CLIL teachers are short term, intense workshops on various topics. They usually provide participants with some theoretical knowledge and practical teaching strategies. While they are not usually followed by on-sight follow up activities, teachers frequently discard the newly acquired knowledge when they do not find it useful, or when they were not given sufficient support in its implementation (Lo, 2020). More meaningful for CLIL teachers are the workshops, which are accompanied by on-sight support with the means of lesson observations as well as post-teaching discussions and reflections (Guskey, 2002; Short, 2013). Activities which provide

opportunities for teachers to co-plan lessons, implement, and debrief seem to bring better results (Cammarata & Haley, 2018). In a similar vein, Tedick and Zilmer (2018) put forward the characteristics of the assignments which support integration and content. According to them these assignments must have the following features: be meaningful, involve feedback, involve enactment, involve opportunities to practice, result in observable changes, involve collaboration, and include the opportunities for reflection.

Methodology and methods

Context and participants

This research was conducted by the University of Warsaw in cooperation with the Association of Bilingual Schools and Teachers "Bilinguis" and Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce and was a part of a larger study exploring the contexts of bilingual teaching in Poland. The first part of the study was conducted in 2018–2019 with the means of two questionaires distributed to both the headmasters and bilingual teachers.

There were 198 study participants who filled out the survey – 60 headmasters and 138 bilngual teachers. 42 of the headmasters (70%) who participated in the survey were from well-established schools where bilingual education programs were part of the curriculum for at least 3 years. The schools they represented were mainly public high school and primary schools with bilingual programs in grades 7 and 8. Only five headmasters came from schools with bilingual programs starting in early primary grades. 76% of the schools carried rather small or medium size bilingual programs with up to five teachers. A small number of schools had more than 10 bilingual teachers. In the surveyed schools, bilingual instruction was offered in English, and also in German, French, and Spanish. The most common taught subjects bilingually were biology, history, geography, and mathematics. Less often taught subjects included chemistry and physics as well as social sciences.

More than half of the teacher participants had at least six years of teaching experience. The majority of these teachers worked in public schools in larger metropolitan areas. 14 teachers worked in private schools. 76 teachers worked in high schools and 62 teachers in primary schools, mainly teaching grades 7–8 according to the CLIL provision regulations from 2017. Only five teachers worked in early primary grades (1–3). The qualifications of the participating teachers were in agreement with the Ministerial requirements. They were either the graduates of language studies with master's degree, who obtained the qualifications through additional postgraduate studies in the content areas, or they were content areas specialists with master's

degree and with language certificates ranging from B1 to C2. The most common was teachers with B2 (35) and C1 (19) certification. In the sample there were also six teachers who held a PhD in the subject they were teaching.

Procedure and data collection

The research was conducted in the transitional moment when junior secondary schools were eliminated, and bilingual programs were moved to grades 7–8 of primary schools. The data came from the two online surveys designed for obtaining information about the contexts of bilingual teaching. It was sent to 158 bilingual schools listed in the Ministry of Education information center (SIO) in Poland. The survey included closed- and open-ended questions exploring various areas related to bilingual education. One survey was aimed at bilingual teachers and one survey was directed to school headmasters.

Findings

Bilingual teaching practices

When the participants were asked about the most prominent challenges of conducting bilingual lessons, teachers were divided into those who identified the students' lack of linguistic competences as the most serious difficulty in their everyday practice, and those who indicated the difficulty of the subject content to be the main challenge in their teaching. With bilingual teaching practices, the surveyed teachers reported that they spend most of their time finding ways to introduce the subject content in a way that would be adjusted to the students' actual language abilities (47%). They also mentioned problems of finding suitable teaching materials (31%). Content description and explanation were also the sources of difficulty (27%) as well as the students' lack of appropriate content terminology (16%). Bilingual teachers also pointed out the assessment as the area which was a challenging in their bilingual practice (14%).

Regarding the target language use, 57 of 138 teachers declared that they use L2 less than 50% of the time. 55 teachers indicated that the target language is used between 50–80% of their teaching time. 26 teachers use it between 90–100% of the class time. Teachers were also asked about the reasons behind their choice of language of instruction. Most of the teachers stated that the difficulty of the subject content was the primary reason for their switching back to L1 (83%). Other reasons mentioned by the teachers were students' weak language skills (73%), lack of teaching materials which were appropriate for the students' needs (30%), and the teachers' own insufficient language skills (17%).

Areas of professional development

Both headmasters and teachers felt that professional development is strongly needed by bilingual teachers. However, there were some discrepancies between the two groups of respondents in relation to which area needed a greater support. These differences could be observed in Figure 1. More than 90% of teachers confirmed willingness to participate in professional development. The area which seemed to be most desired by them involved developing skills in bilingual teaching methodology (72%), followed by enhancing language skills (47%) and finally developing knowledge and strategies in the subject content teaching skills (37%). Similarly, all of the headmasters emphasized the need for professional development of bilingual teachers. Their three main areas of concern were developing skills in bilingual teaching (92%), developing language skills (73%), and subject content teaching (68%). Interestingly, the headmasters felt a stronger need than the teachers to provide professional development in the area of subject content teaching.

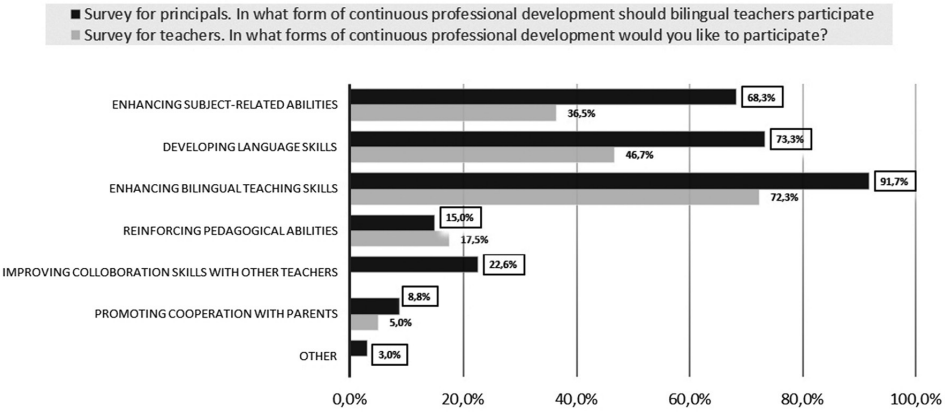

Figure 1. Perceived professional development needs by headmasters and bilingual teachers.

Both groups agreed that professional development opportunities for bilingual teachers are limited and should target the specific needs of bilingual teachers. In fact, bilingual school headmasters considered the opportunities for professional development as a significant factor in determining the success of bilingual education. 68 % of headmasters also supported the idea of required compulsory training preparing them for bilingual teaching. When asked for the justification of their answers, the headmasters who were in favor listed such arguments as the specificity of bilingual teaching strategies and methodology, the lack of bilingual training on preservice levels and the different role of language in bilingual teaching,

which requires special bilingual training. Training would make an easier start to working as a bilingual teacher. Those who were against compulsory training indicated that this would complicate the process of finding new teachers, that the initial qualification obtained at the university are quite sufficient, that practice is more is than sufficient and does not require any additional training, and the quality of the potential training.

Forms of professional development

When bilingual teachers were asked about the preferred forms of professional development activities, 69% of participating teachers declared workshops and short-term courses; 57% conferences and seminars; 55% online professional development sessions. 48% of teachers wanted to participate in study visits. Interestingly, only 17% of surveyed teachers wanted to participate in peer observation and the same number, 17% wanted to participate in action research. Only 10% wanted to participate in mentoring. Headmasters see the need for cooperating with other schools in the area of professional development. Teachers also listed the following types of training they participated in. These could be grouped in the following categories:

- General language teaching methodology workshops organized by language coursebook publishers,
- General CLIL courses organized and co-financed by Erasmus,
- Focused subject content CLIL workshops organized by PD organizations locally in Poland,
- Foreign language courses and private tutoring,
- Intercultural organized by cultural Institutes and embassies,
- Study visits in target countries,
- Qualification courses in the area of language studies,
- IB courses.

Discussion and conclusions

The study strongly indicated the need for professional development opportunities for bilingual teachers in Poland which would be centered on CLIL instruction. Both teachers and headmasters commented on several occasions about limited professional development initiatives in this area. A few teachers participated in some training sessions focused on CLIL teaching. These were mainly in a form of short and intensive CLIL training sessions offered abroad as part of the Erasmus exchange, without any follow-up support. Study participants also

mentioned taking part in some courses centered on their subject content topics, but they also were short-term. Research on teacher change shows that it frequently is a dynamic process depending on many factors. Of course, it cannot be assumed that participating in professional development will result in all teachers' change of beliefs and practices. It is therefore essential to build in more time and space in the professional development activities to support the process of change.

Similar to other countries, Polish CLIL teachers expressed their struggle to balance between the difficulty of the content and the students' language proficiency. They mentioned the limited content vocabulary in L2, which required from them additional teaching practice, but also observed that students have problems with the academic language needed to explain and describe the topics. Additionally, teachers spent much time preparing suitable teaching materials adjusted to the students' linguistic competence and the core curriculum. CLIL teachers also declared that the L2 use depends on the difficulty of subject content, the abilities of students, and also on their own language proficiency. The study also inquired about the most desired forms of professional development. Teachers chose short-term courses and workshops followed by the seminars and conferences as preferred. Many of them were also interested in participating in the study visits and being involved in online learning communities. It is also important to note which forms of professional development were not popular among the teachers as many of the disliked forms involved closer cooperation either with other teachers or other institutions, such as universities. Teachers were not keen on participating in peer observations, action research engagement, or mentoring.

These results should be interpreted in the context of the organizational realities of Polish bilingual education. The surveyed teachers work in isolation, more than 70% of teachers work in small or medium schools with up to five bilingual teachers. Frequently each of them represents a single subject. They also are the only teachers, i.e., they do not work in tandems (content and language subjects). The process of collaboration is not frequently settled in everyday work as the teachers have limited opportunities to collaborate with each other due to organizational hurdles and a lack of culture of collaboration.

In case of bilingual teaching, it has been established to be a valuable element. Bilingual teaching is known to help teachers become more aware of their students' needs. Content teachers might not know what the challenges students have regarding the language. Language teachers do not always know what kind of content students need to have. Bilingual teaching is also said to aid curriculum mapping and expand teachers' pedagogical foci. Through collaboration the language teacher can better understood the need for subject content language. Content teacher

can incorporate more language activities. Collaboration can enhance teachers' language awareness, ongoing evaluation, and development of the curriculum as well as changes in the curriculum.

Implications for professional development for CLIL teachers

Short term and intensive courses which are most desired by the teachers are helpful in addressing some basic information about CLIL or equipping them with some new strategies. However, research confirms that they should not be organized as standalone events but rather be accompanied by follow-up activities, such as observation sessions and opportunities for post teaching discussions. The follow-up sessions could be supported by the experts who organized the workshops. It is also important to mention that professional development initiatives should not only be organized for bilingual teachers, but also for language teachers to create more opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration. The follow up activities taking place in the school sights, could also aid in creating small learning-based communities addressing the specific needs of a particular school CLIL program.

In addition to the short-term intensive courses, research indicates that teachers should be involved in long-term professional development activities. These should have cross-curricular character, and address the three perspectives: the curricular, teacher beliefs, and classroom perspectives. They are shown to be specifically valuable since most bilingual teachers need to not only gain specific skills but also broaden their own beliefs about the integration of content and language. Therefore, providing them with such opportunities, creating the support, and motivating them to participate is necessary.

Collaboration should be the means and the central point of the professional development. Training should not only be encouraged but also become the content of the sessions as content and language teachers could be shown some technical aspects of collaboration. There are some available models how they may work together to design integrated curricula or develop teaching or assessment materials (Lo, 2020).

In addition, one of the characteristics of the Polish bilingual schools, is that it consists usually of a small number of bilingual sections/classes located in a school. In our sample, the majority of the surveyed schools (76%) has up to five teachers who provide instruction in various subjects. This fact that bilingual education is spread out among many schools, seems to naturally support the idea of creating opportunities for teachers from different programs/schools to cooperate.

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Nigora Mamadaminova
*University of Warsaw, Faculty of Education**
E-mail: n.mamadamino@student.uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-0422-8585

Sabina Khadjikhanova
*Westminster International University in Tashkent***
E-mail: skhadjikhanova2@wiut.uz
ORCID: 0009-0004-3020-0457

Navigating continual progress: Insights into teacher professional development in Uzbekistan***

Summary

This study investigates the landscape of teacher professional development (TPD) in Uzbekistan, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of educators within the country's dynamic educational context. Utilising qualitative research methods and drawing on secondary data on global trends and ongoing reforms in teacher professional education in Uzbekistan, the study explores the experiences and challenges of school teachers within a prominent educational institution in Uzbekistan. Participants, predominantly female, expressed enthusiasm for CPD training programs but cited limitations in accessing relevant courses and balancing heavy workloads with personal responsibilities. Despite these obstacles, there was widespread recognition of the importance of CPD for career advancement and the cultivation of teaching skills. The findings underscored a nuanced understanding of work-life balance among Uzbek female teachers, who strived to juggle professional commitments with household responsibilities. This

* Address: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Wydział Pedagogiczny, ul. Mokotowska 16/20, 00-561 Warszawa, Poland

** Address: Westminster International University in Tashkent, Istiqbol street 12. 100047, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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study anticipates that its findings will inform policy decisions and enhance Uzbekistan's Public Education System. By highlighting practical challenges, particularly in time management, the research aims to offer valuable insights for improving the educational landscape in the country.

Keywords: school teachers, teacher professional development, Uzbekistan

Introduction

In the age of globalisation and information technology, in which a country's level of development is not only determined by socio-economic and cultural indicators, but also strongly depends on its intellectual potential, the field of education is of particular importance worldwide. After all, scientific and technological progress, the foundations of which are laid in the educational environment, is the central link for a country's sustainable development and prosperity. Globally, the significance of education for both individual and societal success has experienced a rapid escalation, coinciding with the emergence of a knowledge-based economy. Consequently, nations worldwide have actively undertaken substantial reforms within their education systems, with a particular emphasis on enhancing teacher education. This emphasis stems from the acknowledgment that the cultivation of adept educators capable of proficiently instructing diverse learners to elevated standards is imperative for both economic viability and political resilience.

According to global surveys, educators dedicate an average of 10.5 days annually to participate in various professional development activities such as courses, workshops, conferences, seminars, observation visits, or in-service training (Sellen, 2016). The rationale behind this considerable commitment to professional development (PD) is evident: advancements in student achievement correlate with enhanced outcomes in terms of income, well-being, and health (Chetty et al., 2014; Hanushek, 2011; Lochner, 2013). Nevertheless, the optimal design for such professional development remains somewhat ambiguous. Furthermore, teacher professional development (PD) is commonly acknowledged as a pivotal factor in elevating student achievements and fostering increased equity. Consequently, governments on a global scale allocate substantial financial resources, totalling billions annually, towards teacher PD endeavours, aiming to augment the knowledge and pedagogical skills of educators (Birman et al., 2000; Bowe & Gore, 2017).

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the present landscape, advancements, and challenges in Teacher Professional Development (TPD) within Uzbekistan. Through a thorough examination, it addresses the evolving state of TPD, highlighting both progress and areas requiring further attention. By delving into the complexities of TPD within the Uzbek educational context, this article

offers valuable insights into the strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the professional growth of educators. It outlines the country's educational landscape post-independence in 1991, with a particular focus on reforms initiated since 2017. Despite concerted efforts by the government to enhance teacher education and CPD, existing systems require further refinement. Drawing on qualitative research methods and secondary data, the study delves into the experiences of school teachers within a prominent educational institution in Uzbekistan.

Literature review

The importance of continuous professional development

> *… persons who wish to reform educational practice cannot simply tell teachers how to teach differently. Teachers themselves must make the design changes. To do so, they must acquire rich knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, and subject specific pedagogy; and they must come to hold new beliefs in these domains. Successful professional development efforts are those that help teachers to acquire or develop new ways of thinking about learning, learners, and subject matter, thus constructing a professional knowledge base that will enable them to teach students in more powerful and meaningful ways.*
>
> (Borko & Putnam, 1995, p. 60)

Recent studies have affirmed that the provision of high-quality education to students is intricately linked to the dedication and resilience of well-informed and skilled teachers (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007). However, professional development is characterised by non-continuous progress and lacks a uniform trajectory (Huberman, 1993). Moreover, expertise growth is not solely dependent on age and experience. To effectively engage and retain teachers, it is imperative for employers to offer continuous professional development (CPD) that aligns with teachers' cognitive and emotional needs, addressing their concerns and commitments across various stages in their professional journey, and adapting to diverse school, classroom, departmental, and organisational contexts (Day et. al., 2007; Huberman, 1993). Continuing Professional Development (CPD) remains an essential requirement for individuals employed in educational institutions. Nevertheless, the nature and speed of CPD vary across countries and within diverse policy frameworks. Various nations have formulated distinct policy documents with specific objectives. In England, the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) has devised a professional code centred on the concept of teachers as "reflective practitioners." The OECD (1998) has proposed a policy that sees teachers as role models for lifelong learning for their students, as discussed by Day and Leitch (2007).

What is teacher professional development

Day (1999) defines professional development as purposeful and organised learning opportunities and actions designed to bring about direct or indirect advantages for individuals, groups, or educational institutions, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in the classroom. Teacher training is increasingly viewed through the lens of lifelong learning. While initial education establishes the foundation, ongoing professional development serves as a vital mechanism for enhancing workforce quality and retaining effective staff. It facilitates the seamless integration of new teachers into their roles and addresses gaps in their initial preparation. Given the demanding nature of teaching and evolving expectations, a lifelong learning approach to teacher development is imperative (Madalińska-Michalak, 2018). This is particularly crucial in adapting to the growing diversity of learners, increased inclusion of students with special needs, and the rising significance of information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. In vocational education, teachers and trainers must stay current with the evolving demands of the modern workplace (OECD, 2023).

A lifelong learning approach necessitates continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities and incentives throughout one's career. These initiatives aim to allow staff to refresh, develop, and broaden their teaching knowledge, enhance skills, and improve practices. CPD activities may include formal courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, online training, mentoring, and supervision. Institutions or external providers, such as training institutes and higher education institutions, can offer professional development, with funding from governments, employers, or individuals, sometimes through co-funding arrangements. Governments can implement various requirements and incentives to encourage staff participation in CPD, such as funding training costs, providing financial support, tying training to higher qualifications, or making CPD a prerequisite for salary increases and career development. The effectiveness of CPD depends on the quality of programs and the feedback and follow-up support they offer (OECD, 2023).

The concept of "continuous professional development" (CPD) may elicit varied interpretations among key stakeholders in education. Potential areas of divergence encompass:

1. An individual teacher's perspective on CPD, reflecting their personal perception of professional needs.
2. The school's interpretation, encapsulating the policies and mechanisms governing CPD implementation.
3. Official regulations and recommendations outlined in documents from responsible entities.

4. Diverse interpretations among fellow teachers, both within the same school and across different educational institutions.

In essence, divergent understandings of CPD exist among teachers, schools, and official bodies, influencing how professional development is conceptualised and pursued (Morgan & Neil, 2003).

Professional development for school teachers is a crucial aspect of ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide quality education to their students (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Madalińska-Michalak, 2019). It involves ongoing training and learning opportunities that enable teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest teaching methods, technologies, and best practices. In numerous nations, engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) is considered obligatory. Teacher advancement is mandated either as a criterion for promotional considerations (e.g. in Poland) or as a requirement to attend a specified number of training hours annually (e.g. Bulgaria, Spain, Italy). Nevertheless, the efficacy of CPD is significantly curtailed when teachers participate without genuine interest (Reynolds et. al., 2014).

The challenge in education lies not in the lack of teacher participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) but in its frequent ineffectiveness. Ineffectiveness is not primarily due to teachers' knowledge gaps, which can be addressed through methods like lectures to impart new methods, strategies, or content. Rather, the difficulty arises in the application of this newfound knowledge or approach within the classroom setting. Additionally, a prevalent issue is the persistence of deeply ingrained yet outdated or inaccurate teachers' beliefs, which can only transform when educators observe the positive impacts of changes in their students' learning (Quattlebaum, 2012).

According to Madalińska-Michalak (2019), teacher education needs to be forward-thinking and equip educators with the skills to be lifelong learners. It should encourage teachers to consider the type of education that is valuable and applicable to the evolving needs of students in modern learning settings. The effective integration of 21st-century skills by teachers, both for personal application and imparting them to students, relies on their attitude, awareness, and willingness to learn and apply these skills. Additionally, the ease with which teachers can incorporate these skills is a determining factor (Reynolds et al., 2014).

Compulsory education system in Uzbekistan

It is imperative to underscore that the educational policy undertaken by Uzbekistan is inherently directed towards the consistent and systematic realisation of the principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

At its core, this policy is aligned with the constitutional commitment articulated in Article 41, which affirms the right to free universal education for all citizens. The strategic pursuit of this constitutional mandate reflects a resolute dedication to providing equitable and accessible educational opportunities, thereby reinforcing the foundational values embedded within the legal framework of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (Muminov, 2019). Since gaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan has undertaken a comprehensive overhaul of its public education system. Under the leadership of Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2017, a series of significant reforms were implemented to further enhance the educational landscape.

The structure of Uzbekistan's education system follows a systematic progression. It initiates with pre-school education designed for children aged three to six years. This is succeeded by a continuous phase of general secondary education spanning from six to fifteen years. Following this, the educational trajectory extends to vocational secondary education, targeting individuals aged fifteen to eighteen years. The culmination of this educational journey is marked by higher education offerings tailored for individuals embarking on primary and secondary education from the age of eighteen. This structured delineation reflects a nuanced and multifaceted approach aimed at addressing the varied educational needs and developmental stages of the populace within the Republic of Uzbekistan (Shaturaev & Bekimbetova, 2021).

Table 1. Number of public educational institutions in Uzbekistan per academic year

	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021
Total	9691	9942	10008	10130
Urban	2830	2709	2739	2722
Rural	6861	7233	7269	7408

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

In accordance with data compiled by the National Statistics Agency, a discernible trend in the expansion of public education infrastructure has been observed over the past two consecutive academic years, specifically during the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 periods. The reported figures indicate a notable increase, reaching a total of 10,522 public education institutions. This statistical augmentation underscores the dynamic evolution and growth within the educational landscape during the specified timeframe.

By the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, the number of students studying in public education institutions in Uzbekistan was about 6.5 million. This was reported by the Statistics Agency.

Table 2. Number of students in public education institutions (in thousands)

	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021
Total	5237.3	5819.7	6137.5	6255.0
Urban	2768.3	3069.9	3256.3	3300.2
Rural	2469.0	2749.8	2881.2	2954.8

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

Table 3. Student school ratio in the academic year 2020–2021

	Number of students		Number of schools		Students/ School
Total	6255000	100%	10130	100%	617.5
Urban	3300200	52.8%	2722	38%	1212.4
Rural	2954800	47.2%	7408	62%	398.9

Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

The presented statistics indicate a notable surge in student enrolment at schools, notwithstanding concerted governmental efforts to establish new public education institutions. The Ministry of Public Education, as reported, underscores that despite these endeavours, the student-to-classroom ratio remains consistent, with no discernible reduction. Specifically, each classroom continues to accommodate 35 students, as outlined in the ministry's report. This observation underscores the ongoing challenge of effectively managing the burgeoning student population within the existing educational infrastructure, necessitating continued attention to optimise the learning environment.

In the educational framework of Uzbekistan, secondary education is bifurcated into two distinct segments. The initial phase comprises a mandatory nine-year education program. Subsequent to the completion of this initial phase, a second tier ensues, strategically designed to cater to the requisites of both general and vocational education. This phase encompasses conventional secondary education alongside specialised secondary education.

Notably, during their tenure in the tenth and eleventh grades, students work towards the attainment of a general secondary school certificate. Successful completion of the prescribed curriculum culminates in the issuance of a certificate of completion of secondary school. It is noteworthy that, as of 2017, a significant adjustment was made in the duration of schooling in Uzbekistan, transitioning from 12 to 11 years. The mandatory period of primary and secondary school

education spans eleven years, commencing at the age of seven. This academic restructuring reflects a conscientious endeavour to align the educational system with the evolving needs and preferences of both parents and students within the Uzbekistani context (Ismatullayeva, 2021).

Employment and pedagogical personnel

The evolving socio-economic landscape of Uzbekistan has necessitated a re-evaluation of the Republic's education system. The modernisation process of the transitioning economy, coupled with the demand for highly educated personnel to adapt to modern forms of work organisation, underscores the importance of education and training. This aligns with the adopted Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" and the National Program for Education, which emphasise the need for professional development and improvement of skills. In response, Uzbekistan's higher educational institutions are actively engaged in formulating and executing a strategy for enhancing teacher training in the country. (Khamidova & Safoeva, 2018)

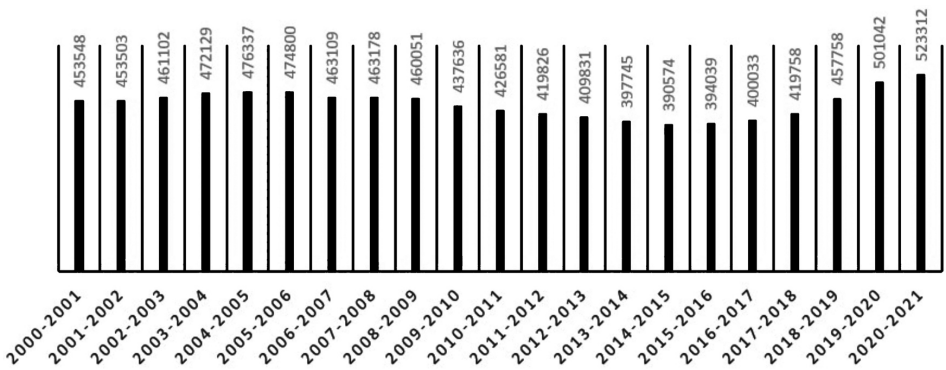

Figure 1. Number of teachers in public educational institutions.
Source: State Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics.

Continuous professional development of teachers in Uzbekistan

The Former Director of the Department of Teacher Training and Re-training at the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mr. Makhmudov Miraziz (cited in Shaturaev & Bekimbetova, 2021), articulated that the enhancement of public education quality in the country confronts a spectrum

of challenges. These challenges encompassed inadequate funding, inefficiencies and ineffectiveness within the financing system, issues of corruption, outdated curriculum frameworks, obsolete methodologies for student assessments, a dearth of highly qualified educators, and antiquated teacher training and re-training programmes. This comprehensive overview delineates the multifaceted hurdles that warrant strategic attention and systemic reform to fortify the quality of public education in Uzbekistan.

Previous continuous professional development system in Uzbekistan

In the realm of Teachers' Professional Development, a myriad of challenges stemming from both objective and subjective origins has persisted throughout the years as it was claimed by Bakhramov (2021). The organisational principles governing advanced training, established during the Soviet era, particularly for public education workers and teaching staff, have given rise to inherent issues. According to these principles, administrators of educational institutions were mandated to undergo qualification improvement every three years, while teaching staff were required to engage in a 144-hour training program every five years. (Bakhramov, 2021; Radjiev, 2021; Shaturaev & Bekimbetova, 2021). Notably, this training often necessitated a temporary departure from their professional duties and residential locales, as the courses were conducted by advanced training institutes situated in regional centres. This approach has presented significant challenges, including the logistical complexities of replacing teachers during their training periods, the disruption to teachers' family and home life, and the imposition of additional financial burdens (Bakhramov, 2021; Davronov, 2023). Consequently, the reluctance of teaching staff to participate in advanced training courses has become a noteworthy concern.

Recent research has brought to light subjective challenges within the realm of teacher competency, particularly stemming from deficiencies in knowledge and skills among certain educators (Bakhramov, 2021; Davronov, 2023). This highlights a discernible absence of autonomous efforts directed towards enhancing professional expertise. The suboptimal performance observed among teachers and school principals can be attributed not solely to a lack of inclination for self-improvement but also to the inadequacies inherent in the current frequency of advanced training for personnel within public education institutions.

The prevailing model of conducting training sessions at intervals of 3–5 years proves insufficient in keeping abreast of the contemporary pace of knowledge evolution within the field of education (Bakhramov, 2021; Radjiev, 2021; Shaturaev

& Bekimbetova, 2021). This temporal misalignment renders the knowledge acquired during these courses swiftly outdated. Consequently, educators find themselves lagging behind the progress curve and remaining uninformed about innovations pertinent to their respective disciplines, teaching methodologies, and educational technologies. The discernible result is a noteworthy gap between the evolving educational landscape and the proficiency levels of educators.

In response to the aforementioned challenges and their underlying causes, the country's leadership has instituted a series of normative documents outlining the restructuring of the advanced training system (National Legislation Database — lex.uz). This restructuring entails a shift from the conventional periodic model to a more dynamic and continuous framework, thereby ushering in an era of continuous professional development for public education workers.

At the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, the following were adopted: 6 November 2020 Decree "On Measures for the Development of Education and Science in Uzbekistan in a New Development Period", 25 January 2021 Resolution "On Measures to Support Research Activities in Public Education and the Introduction of a System of Continuous Professional Development", which set concrete tasks for further improvement and scientific support of reforms in the system of public education. These documents also pay special attention to issues of retraining and continuing education of managers and teachers of public education and set the task of creating the necessary conditions for the continuous improvement of professional skills and efficiency of teaching staff and improving the system of continuing education according to the principle of "education throughout life" (Radjiev, 2021).

In accordance with the Presidential Decree, the Institute for the Retraining and Advanced Training of Public Education Managers and Specialists, named after Abdulla Avloni, has been transformed into the Research Institute for the Study of the Problems and Determination of the Prospects of Public Education, named after A. Avloni.

Pursuant to recent regulatory mandates, a fundamental reconfiguration of the professional development framework for public education practitioners is underway. Departing from the erstwhile practice of periodic advanced training, the contemporary approach espouses a system of continuous development. In adherence to the revised directives, public education professionals are now obligated to augment their skills annually, committing a minimum of 36 hours to this endeavour (Bakhramov, 2021).

In order to introduce a needs-based CPD system, the practice of training public education employees in differentiated CPD programs that correspond to their level of qualification, knowledge, scientific and pedagogical potential, professional

experience, psychological preparation and individual professional development paths are introduced (Radjiev, 2021). Distance learning and other forms of professional development are offered in addition to traditional harmonised training, which is conducted simultaneously with the work process (Radjiev, 2021).

It is noteworthy that henceforth, public education practitioners will no longer be restricted to improving their skills solely within training institutions overseen by the Ministry of Public Education. Instead, they will have the option to pursue skill enhancement opportunities in higher education institutions situated across various regions or in non-governmental educational establishments. This transformative measure aims to dismantle the existing training monopoly, fostering a conducive environment of healthy competition and offering greater autonomy of choice to educators. Moreover, this training initiative will be rendered entirely cost-free and will be facilitated through an electronic platform – "onlinedu.uz", affording flexibility in scheduling and accessibility (Radjiev, 2021).

Thus, as mentioned above, an online platform was created called "Continuous Professional Education" (onlinedu.uz) to help employees with their professional development. This platform assesses their knowledge and training needs, and then creates a personalised plan for each employee to improve their skills (onlinedu.uz). The platform offers training modules for employees, which they can complete to earn credits. This personalised approach caters to the different professional development needs of individuals in the public education sector. A credit system has been established to measure and validate skills and knowledge. A set number of credits is required to earn a certificate of advanced training. This system allows for individual progress and ensures that achievements are recognised within the professional development framework (onlinedu.uz). Electronic portfolios are also created for each public education employee, which include information on individual learning paths, professional development outcomes and curricula mastered by employees (Radjiev, 2021).

The training sessions in continuous professional development courses encompass a diverse range of activities aimed at fostering professional growth among public education workers. These activities include, but are not limited to (lex.uz):

- Authoring and publishing scientific and methodological articles in indexed journals.
- Developing educational textbooks by individual employees.
- Successfully completing professional development courses available on open educational platforms.
- Actively participating in training programs that contribute to the preparation of champions for international and national Olympiads for schoolchildren.

Each of these endeavours represents valuable opportunities for educators to enhance their skills and contribute to the advancement of education within Uzbekistan. Under this innovative system, the noteworthy achievement of an employee in any of these alternative forms is deemed equivalent to the successful completion of a traditional advanced training programme. This approach not only incentivises diverse avenues for professional growth but also establishes a comprehensive and inclusive framework for acknowledging and rewarding the multifaceted contributions of educators within the continuum of continuous professional development (Bakhkramov, 2021).

Challenges in the system of teachers' continuous professional development in Uzbekistan

While strides have been made in the realm of continuous professional development for teachers in Uzbekistan, significant areas for improvement persist. According to the findings of the "Adapting and Scaling Teacher Professional Development Approaches in Uzbekistan" Research Project conducted by UNESCO in 2023, a cadre of experts, including tutors, district officials, and methodologists, is available to support teacher professional development initiatives. However, a critical issue highlighted in the reports is the competencies and skills of many of these experts. It was noted that a considerable number lacked recent classroom experience, exhibited limited proficiency in digital skills, and demonstrated limited recent engagement in professional learning activities themselves. This underscores the pressing need to address these deficiencies to ensure the efficacy and relevance of teacher professional development programs in Uzbekistan (unesco.org). A notable observation from the research findings suggests that school leaders, comprising principals, head teachers, and school directors, are not widely recognised as pivotal figures in Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Moreover, there appears to be a prevailing tendency among school leaders to perceive the leadership of TPD as peripheral to their role, resulting in limited involvement in ongoing initiatives. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in Uzbekistan, where a significant proportion of school leaders indicated a lack of awareness regarding the programs offered through online platforms. Such a disconnect between school leaders and TPD initiatives significantly curtails the potential contributions of TPD to enhancing teaching and learning outcomes at the school level. Addressing this disparity is essential for fostering a more integrated and effective approach to TPD that fully leverages the leadership capacity of school leaders to drive improvements in educational quality and outcomes (Wolfenden, 2023).

As highlighted in the report, various factors play a role in teachers' active participation in Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-mediated Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Specifically, in Uzbekistan, the language used in TPD materials is a key concern for educators. Many express a preference for materials in languages other than Uzbek, emphasising the importance of addressing linguistic diversity. This linguistic aspect is identified as an equity issue, indicating the necessity for inclusive approaches to accommodate educators' diverse linguistic preferences. Moreover, another equity concern arises regarding the suitability of TPD activities for teachers' classroom realities. Teachers stress the significance of ensuring that TPD activities are relevant to their everyday teaching experiences. They highlight mismatches between TPD content and classroom contexts as obstacles to meaningful engagement. Besides, teachers voice dissatisfaction with TPD initiatives characterised by an excessive emphasis on theoretical underpinnings, coupled with a dearth of practical examples illustrating the application of theory in the planning of teaching and learning activities. This theoretical orientation, devoid of practical applicability, engenders a sense of disillusionment among educators, who perceive TPD opportunities as disconnected from their professional learning needs and classroom exigencies. Addressing these concerns is imperative for fostering a more inclusive, relevant, and engaging TPD framework that resonates with teachers' professional aspirations and instructional realities (Wolfenden, 2023). On one hand, teachers demonstrate a keen appreciation for opportunities to engage in collaborative discourse with their peers and access expert support through digital platforms, as underscored in a study by UNESCO (Wolfenden, 2023). Notably, social media platforms have emerged as popular avenues for such interactions among educators.

Conversely, the ubiquity of computer technologies imposes new imperatives upon the contemporary educator. Gorshkova (2022) posits that a modern teacher must possess a robust IT competence, proficiency in navigating the latest technologies, and adeptness in managing the influx of information within the digital sphere. Such competencies are imperative for leveraging online platforms effectively to cultivate and enhance professional skills. While it was previously noted that school leaders often do not play a significant role in organising Teacher Professional Development (TPD) activities, it is essential to acknowledge that this is not uniformly the case. As highlighted by Khayretdinova & Narkulov (2020), school leaders encounter a myriad of challenges in facilitating and providing professional development opportunities for their staff. One prevalent obstacle is the difficulty in finding adequate time during the school day for teachers to engage in professional development activities. Additionally, securing sufficient funding, particularly amidst constrained or reduced school budgets, remains a persistent challenge. The allocation of funding for professional development can vary significantly across

states, districts, and schools, with some institutions having surplus funds while others struggle to secure necessary resources.

Furthermore, common challenges include inadequate support for professional development from administrative leadership, lack of interest or motivation among teachers, and excessive workloads for educators. These multifaceted challenges underscore the complex landscape in which school leaders navigate the provision of effective professional development opportunities for their staff (Khayretdinova & Narkulov, 2020). Amidst the comprehensive reforms underway across various sectors in Uzbekistan, with particular emphasis on the realm of education, noteworthy insights have emerged from Professor Pirnazar Davronov, affiliated with the Regional Centre for Retraining and Professional Development of Public Education Staff in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. In a recent article, Davronov (2023) offered valuable suggestions aimed at further advancing the educational system. These insights hold promise for informing and enhancing ongoing efforts to bolster the educational landscape in Uzbekistan. Davronov's collaboration with teachers seeking to enhance their qualifications has led him to the conclusion that "the implementation of teachers' qualifications should occur directly within their respective workplaces" (p. 210). It has been observed that many educators who undergo training courses and acquire new teaching methodologies often fail to apply these newly acquired skills in practice. For instance, in a particular school where the administration actively supported and motivated teachers to take initiative, only three out of 27 subject teachers were able to effectively integrate modern teaching methods. The remaining 24 science teachers persisted in utilising traditional approaches despite the opportunities for professional growth and development.

Another example is that the team of experts conducted master classes at an institute in the Samarkand region for schools, lyceums, and colleges affiliated with the institute. While all participants acknowledged the importance of implementing the demonstrated new methods in their educational practices, they ultimately failed to do so. This reluctance to adopt modern teaching techniques can be attributed to a resistance to change among trainees who are entrenched in traditional methods. These examples underscore the critical need for not only continuous professional development for educators in public education, but also a state policy that supports the practical implementation of modern educational methods. Without the application of innovative teaching approaches in school settings, quality education will remain elusive. By implementing a training program for pedagogues within the schools they are employed in, significant savings can be achieved in the state budget allocated for their professional development. This approach not only allows teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge directly in their work environment but also ensures that the acquired expertise is immediately

put into practice. Additionally, it is essential to incentivise pedagogic scientists and innovative teachers who have contributed novel methods to the field. Recognising their valuable contributions through appropriate financial rewards will further motivate them to continue their groundbreaking work, as it is unrealistic to expect one individual to generate a multitude of innovative methods throughout their career (Davronov, 2023).

In summary, ongoing decrees and reforms underscore the dynamic evolution within the domain of teachers' continuous professional development, with notable acceleration catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic towards digital integration. Beyond the confines of training institutions administered by the Ministry of Public Education, teachers now enjoy expanded avenues for professional growth, including participation in workshops and training sessions, alongside online platforms tailored for enhancing teaching skills. While the value of peer collaboration is acknowledged, it is pertinent to acknowledge that not all educators possess proficient computer skills, thus impeding their ability to fully leverage online courses, as indicated by existing literature. Moving forward, a deeper examination of primary data collected by the authors promises to provide additional insights into the current landscape and challenges surrounding teachers' professional development in Uzbekistan.

Methodology and data

In this section of the article, we present the methodology and findings derived from a pilot study involving interviews conducted among teachers in one of Uzbekistan's esteemed high schools, commonly referred to as lyceums. The primary objective of this study was to elucidate the experiences and challenges encountered by teachers within this prominent educational setting. The research questions guiding the pilot study were as follows:

- Are teachers in Uzbekistan motivated to participate in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training programs?
- Do teachers perceive CPD programs as beneficial and engaging for their career advancement?
- What are the primary obstacles hindering teachers from attending PD courses or impeding their ability to participate in such programs?

Through a rigorous analysis of interview data, we aimed to provide insights into the motivations, perceptions, and challenges experienced by teachers regarding their engagement with CPD initiatives in the context of Uzbekistan's lyceums. The researchers opted to conduct brief face-to-face interviews with high school teachers,

selecting a prestigious educational institution located in the capital city of Tashkent for investigation. Due to ethical considerations, the name of the high school remains undisclosed. The chosen high school is renowned for its esteemed reputation and commitment to delivering quality education within Uzbekistan. To initiate the study, a pilot phase was implemented, targeting approximately one-third of the teaching faculty. With a total of 32 teachers at the high school, 11 teachers volunteered to participate in the interviews. Qualitative data collection took place in May 2023, providing a snapshot of the teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding CPD initiatives within the educational context of Uzbekistan. The eleven participants in the study represent diverse age ranges and geographical regions. Notably, all participants are female, reflecting the predominant demographic composition of the teaching staff at the high school under investigation. Each participant is highly qualified, having graduated from universities in Uzbekistan. The interviews were conducted in the Uzbek language, notwithstanding the fact that some respondents were proficient in English. This decision was made to ensure a seamless and fluent conversation, allowing for a more natural exchange of ideas and insights. By utilising the native language, the interviews aimed to foster a comfortable and conducive environment for effective communication and expression of thoughts among all participants. The subject areas of expertise among the participants encompass mathematics, physics, philology, IT, and history, showcasing a broad spectrum of academic disciplines. Moreover, the teaching experience of the research participants spans from 5 years to 31 years, indicating a range of professional backgrounds and levels of tenure within the education sector.

Findings and discussion

The findings from the pilot study indicate that the teachers are seasoned professionals who exhibit a genuine passion for their vocation. They demonstrate a strong commitment to enhancing their professional competencies, driven by a desire for continuous improvement. However, challenges arise primarily from the heavy workload and constraints on time, coupled with limited availability of training courses. Consequently, despite their fervent motivation, teachers perceive constraints that inhibit their ability to fully capitalise on professional development opportunities.

When queried about their participation in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training programs, all research participants affirmed their engagement in such initiatives. Several respondents provided the following insights regarding their experiences with CPD programs:

"It is unimaginable not to participate in continuous professional development training programs and time does not stand still. New students come and it is important to learn new methods and apply them.".

"Of course, I attend. I attend the basic training course, previously I was attending once every three years, now every year, especially I attend Foxfort online training courses. I also attend foreign courses, I like to work on myself."

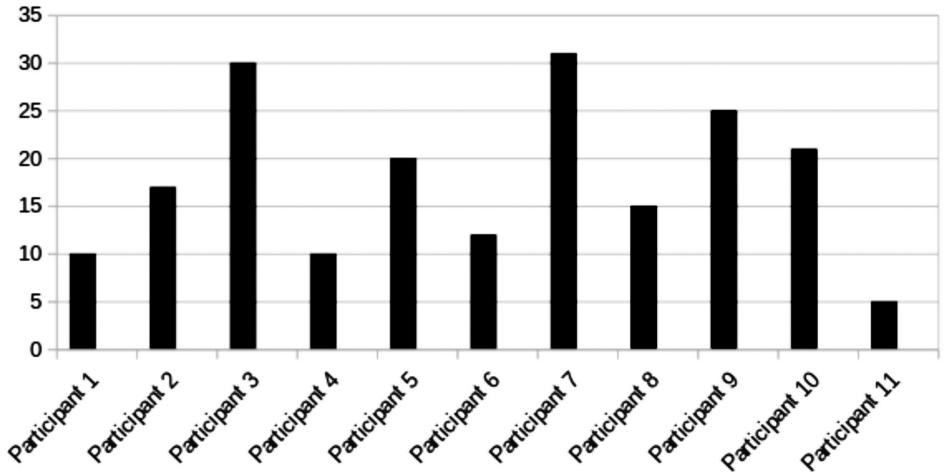

Figure 2. Years of teaching experience of research participants.

We sought to discern the aspects of CPD courses that participants found appealing. The responses were predominantly affirmative, with participants highlighting the following favourable aspects of the courses:

"I communicate with colleagues. I learn the latest news. But I don't think I get much news in general".

However, a subset of respondents expressed concerns regarding the applicability of certain course contents or teaching methods. In response to inquiries about their preferences in CPD training programs, participants conveyed mixed sentiments. While acknowledging their regular participation, some noted a lack of novelty in the material presented, indicating that the primary benefit lay in fostering communication among colleagues and providing a mental refreshment. One participant lamented a perceived lack of new insights gleaned from recent training courses, while another highlighted the value of engaging in discussions and gaining diverse perspectives on pertinent issues. Despite these reservations, positive feedback emerged regarding online learning platforms such as Coursera, with participants citing the acquisition of new and engaging teaching methods.

Additionally, favourable remarks were made about incorporating practical activities alongside theoretical instruction, emphasising a preference for a balanced approach to teaching methodology. Furthermore, one participant expressed appreciation for learning about changes and reforms within the education system, particularly in conjunction with normative documents.

Subsequently, participants were queried about the extent to which CPD training courses influenced their motivation in their teaching career. Approximately half of the respondents responded affirmatively, indicating a positive impact on their motivation levels. Conversely, one participant asserted a lack of motivation following the courses, stating, "The current training courses do not provide any meaningful benefits. We are only burdened with paperwork." This sentiment underscores the divergence in experiences and perceptions among participants regarding the efficacy and motivational influence of CPD training courses. Please refer to the graph below for a visual representation.

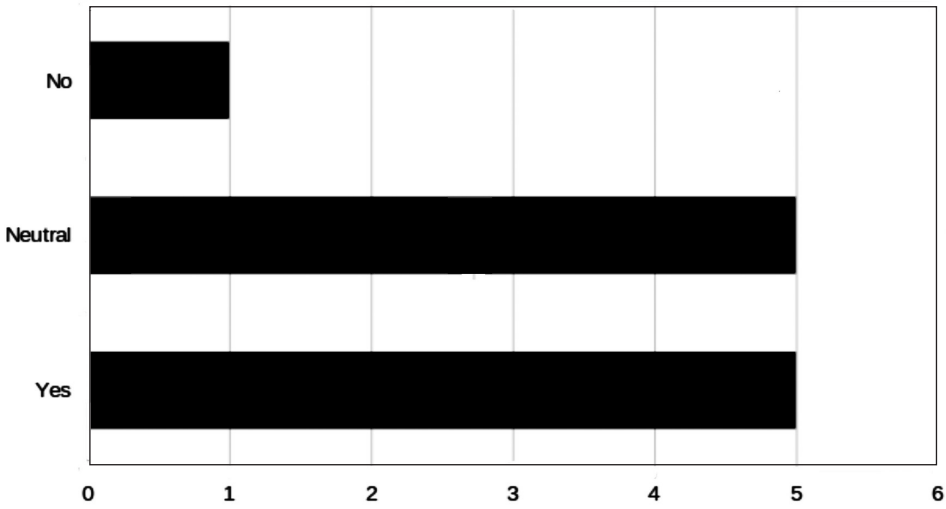

Figure 3. Motivation of teachers after receiving CPD training courses.

Additionally, several respondents highlighted the positive impact of receiving certificates for their achievements upon completing a course, noting that it instils a sense of accomplishment and motivates them to pursue further professional development opportunities.

Next, our focus shifted towards online courses to gauge interest and participation levels among participants. While the majority expressed enthusiasm for online learning, three participants expressed difficulty in finding suitable

courses within their subject areas. Specifically, teachers of history and Uzbek philology cited a lack of available courses tailored to their disciplines. Another participant cited language barriers, noting that most online courses are conducted in English, thereby hindering their ability to participate in additional online learning endeavours. These insights underscore the nuances and challenges associated with accessing online educational resources within specific subject domains.

Recognising the importance of foreign language acquisition, particularly English proficiency, within the educational landscape of Uzbekistan, we sought to explore participants' experiences and engagement in learning English or other foreign languages. The responses revealed that while many participants are fluent in Russian as a second language, the pursuit of English language proficiency poses significant challenges, primarily attributed to their demanding workloads. Specifically, older participants aged around 50 years and above expressed difficulty in acquiring a new language at their age. Despite initiating and completing beginner-level courses, they found it challenging to sustain their language learning endeavours amidst their professional responsibilities. The participants underscored their recognition of the significance and potential benefits associated with acquiring proficiency in the English language to advance their teaching practice. However, they lamented that the substantial workload they encounter impedes their ability to devote sufficient time and energy to language acquisition endeavours. This finding underscores the prevalence of English language learning aspirations among educators and professionals in Uzbekistan, tempered by practical constraints and age-related considerations. While government support and encouragement for foreign language learning are evident, navigating the logistical and cognitive demands of language acquisition presents notable hurdles for some individuals, particularly those in later stages of their careers.

Uzbek female teachers voiced challenges in maintaining a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal life commitments. Their perception of balance revolved around reconciling household duties or traditional women's roles with the demanding workload at their workplaces. Many respondents indicated that they dedicate extensive hours to their jobs, often surpassing typical working hours, while others emphasised the importance of delineating boundaries between work and home life by refraining from bringing work-related tasks home.

When asked about their aspirations for professional development, all participants expressed a desire to engage in online courses offered by foreign universities. Additionally, some articulated a keen interest in pursuing advanced degrees and enhancing their research skills. These insights underscore the aspirational goals of Uzbek female teachers to augment their knowledge and skills

through diverse avenues of professional development, particularly through online learning platforms and academic pursuits.

In conclusion, research participants demonstrated a keen interest in professional development initiatives, underscoring the significance of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training programs. Moreover, they expressed a willingness to not only partake in such programs but also to contribute to organising them for their colleagues. Recognising the pervasive influence of technological advancements and globalisation on the contemporary education landscape, participants affirmed their awareness of the myriad opportunities available for learning and development within this dynamic context.

Conclusion

When comparing the results of our data analysis with the conclusions drawn from the literature review, a clear alignment becomes apparent. Indeed, there is evident acknowledgment among educators at all levels regarding the ongoing changes and advancements within the education system and teacher education domain within Uzbekistan. While it is encouraging to witness their active engagement in these developments, it is equally apparent that further reforms and enhancements are warranted. The common sentiment emphasises the need for ongoing progress and enhancement in the education sector. It is worth noting the proactive efforts of the government in focusing on education and teacher training, which is praiseworthy. This instils a sense of optimism about the direction of educational reforms and the shared commitment to creating a vibrant and effective education system that benefits all stakeholders. As endorsed by Davronov, a more strategic approach to teacher education is recommended, emphasising the benefits of conducting educational sessions within the teachers' workplace, organised in small groups tailored to address their individualised needs. This targeted approach not only enhances effectiveness but also optimises government budget allocation. Additionally, he proposes incentivising innovation in teaching methodologies by offering financial rewards to teachers and academics who introduce novel approaches. Professor Davronov emphasises the importance of implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation system for CPD training programs to ensure their effectiveness in achieving quality education outcomes.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the current study, which was conducted as a pilot study with primary data collected on a limited scale. To address this, future research endeavours should employ both quantitative and qualitative methods on a larger scale, encompassing diverse regions of the

country. Furthermore, the perspectives of school administrators and CPD program organisers should be incorporated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of CPD in Uzbekistan. These recommendations highlight the need for further investigation and collaboration to enhance teacher professional development practices in the country.

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Notes about the Authors

Katarzyna Brzosko-Barratt – PhD, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Education at the University of Warsaw, Poland. She has received her PhD at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the University of Minnesota. Since 2015 she has been the director of the Graduate Programme in Teaching English to Young Learners, which specialises in preparing teachers for language and content integration at primary levels. Her research interests include language teacher education, content and language integration and literacy development. Recent publication: Teachers' perceptions, classroom practices and needs in developing students' FL literacy skills. In S. Mourão & C. Leslie (Eds.), *Researching Educational Practices, Teacher Education and Professional Development for Early Language Learning: Examples from Europe* (pp. 48–66), (co-authors: M.D. Fojkar and R. Fernandez-Fernandez; 2024).

Sabina Khadjikhanova – a lecturer at Westminster International University in Tashkent. Her research interests include exploring modern methods of teaching foreign languages, enhancing student motivation, and promoting teacher professional development.

Joanna Madalińska-Michalak – Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw. Her interests centre around teacher education, teacher education policy, higher education, teacher professionalism and development, and educational leadership. She is the recipient of the Institute of Republica Award for outstanding research achievements and international collaboration. She is a former vice president of the World Education Research Association (WERA). Selected book publications: *Pedeutologia. Prawno-etyczne podstawy zawodu nauczyciela* (*Pedeutology. Legal and ethical bases of the teaching profession*, 2021); *Quality in teaching and teacher education. International perspectives from a changing world* (2023); *Pedagogika (w) nauce i praktyce* (*Pedagogy (in) science and practice*, 2024).

Nigora Mamadaminova – PhD student, Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw. Her background is in Economics and International Business and Management. Her scientific interests lie in the fields of education management, women's leadership, distance education, and teacher professional development.

Barbara Murawska – PhD, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw. Her research interests include monitoring students' academic achievements, early childhood and early school education, teacher education, and social aspects of education. She is a co-author of the programme supporting the development of education at the local level, known as "the Kwidzyn experiment"; and the programme supporting education in Ostrołęka. Selected book publications: *Monitorowanie osiągnięć szkolnych jako metoda doskonalenia edukacji.* (*Monitoring academic achievements as an educational method*; co-authors: E. Putkiewicz, M. Żytko, R. Dolata; 2007, *Pozwólmy dzieciom czytać* (*Let children read*, 2011), *Edukacja wczesnoszkolna* (*Early school education*, 2014).

Alistair Ross – Senior Professor in Politics and Education at the London Metropolitan University, where he worked full time from 1985 to 2009, and part-time thereafter. He holds a Jean Monet Chair in Citizenship Education (2009 to date) and is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He established and coordinated the European Commission Academic Network Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe from 1998 to 2007. He formed and directed the Institute for Policy Studies in Education at his University from 2000 to 2009. He has published widely, including *Curriculum construction and critique* (2000), *Understanding the construction of identities by young new Europeans: Kaleidoscopic selves* (2015), *Finding political identities: Young people in a changing Europe* (2019), and *Educational research for social justice: Evidence and practice from the UK* (2021).

Ewelina Rzońca – PhD, an assistant professor at the Department of Preschool and Early School Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. She is an expert in the UNICEF project *Accessible School for All – Szkoła dostępna dla wszystkich* carried out by the Educational Research Institute. Her research interests include preschool and early school pedagogy, children and youth learning, pedeutology, and media pedagogy. She is the author of the book *Pokolenie Z – aktywność na portalach społecznościowych a więzi społeczne* (*Generation Z – Social media activity and social bonds*, 2023).

Monika Skura – PhD, an assistant professor, pedagogue, and special education teacher at the Department of Special and Inclusive Pedagogy at the Faculty

of Education at the University of Warsaw. Her main research interests include professional development of teachers, diverse and inclusive education, as well as the education and upbringing of students with special educational needs. She publishes in both Polish and international journals.

Anna Wiłkomirska – professor at the Faculty of Education of the University of Warsaw. In the years 2012–2020, Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Warsaw. Her scientific interests focus on: education policy and sociology of education and youth socialization. She was the manager and co-implementer of Polish and international research projects. Among international projects, two editions of research on young people's knowledge and civic attitudes are of particular importance: "Civic Education Study" (1999–2003) and "International Civic and Citizenship Study" (2009–2012). Author of the monographs: *Nauki społeczne wobec zmiany – alternatywa scalania: inspiracje dla współczesnej pedagogiki* (*Social sciences in the face of change – Prospect of integration. Inspirations for contemporary pedagogy;* co-authors: K. Marzec-Holka and A. Radziewicz-Winnicki, 2018); *Jaki patriotism?* (*What patriotism?;* co-author: A. Fijałkowski, 2016); *Ocena systemu awansu zawodowego nauczycieli w Polsce* (*Evaluation of the teachers' professional advancement system in Poland*; co-author: A. Zielińska, 2013); *Wiedzieć i rozumieć, aby być obywatelem* (*Know and understand to be a citizen,* 2013).

Daniela Worek – PhD, head of the Unit for "Cooperation and Special Measures in Teacher Education" at the Hessian Teachers' Academy, and Coordinator of ENTEP. Her research interests centre around education and digitalisation, internationalisation and diversity in Teacher Education, coping with change and crises, systemic counselling, conflict resolution, and mediation.

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