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Teacher Education Policy Issues in Poland: Recommendations for Building a High-Quality Teaching Profession¹

KEYWORDS

bologna process, teacher education policy, high-quality teaching profession, Poland

ABSTRACT

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While there is general agreement that we need to increase the quality of education, there is less agreement on the measures to be taken. This paper focuses on the need to build the high-quality teaching profession to respond to the changing role of teachers in the twenty first century. It is argued that changes in the system of education should include a central place for the teacher and the quality of teacher education. The paper looks at selected aspects of teacher education policy in relation to the Bologna process and changes that were implemented at different levels of the system of education in Poland. A specific concern of this paper is policies that contribute to raising teacher education quality in a way which responds to the challenges of teachers preparation, recruitment, work and careers, and especially teachers' lifelong learning. The implications of the analysis are that teacher education policy development in Poland should focus on further actions for attracting to the teaching profession the best candidates and for retaining the best teachers in the school system in order to build a high-quality teaching profession. Some measures for achieving these goals are proposed.

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Introduction

Poland became a member state of the European Union in 2004. Since 2005 in Poland, as in other European countries, huge attention has been paid to a number of quality-related policy issues within the area of teacher education, which should be treated as an integral part of higher education. Taking into account the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)¹, considerable progress has been made in the area of quality assurance as well as in other Bologna action lines such as qualifications frameworks, recognition and the promotion of the use of learning outcomes, the promotion of high-quality learning and teaching, the promotion of lifelong learning, or the mobility of students, teachers and researchers.

Twenty years after the Bologna Declaration, it is worth considering and highlighting successes as well as challenges in achieving the core objectives of the Bologna Process. There is a need to look carefully at teacher education as a critical issue, considering the complex and changing role played by teachers in society, the demands directed to them for high quality education, and the desirability of creating a European Teacher Education Area (ENTEPA / Dimitropoulos, 2008; Iucu, 2010), parallelly to European Higher Education Area.

In this paper a comprehensive definition of Teacher Education is adopted (see: Madalińska-Michalak, 2019a). According to it, teacher education is understood as an education that includes pre-service, induction and continuing professional development of the teacher. Teacher education is perceived as a process that refers to career-long education rather than something that happens at university during the initial teacher education phase. It is as a highly complex process raising many challenges as well as many opportunities in the process itself.

This chapter looks at selected aspects of teacher education policy issues in initial teacher education, in-service teacher education and continuous professional development of teachers in Poland in the context of policy development in re-

¹ The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were adopted by the Ministers of different European countries responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area in 2005 following a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA). On the basis of several consultation rounds involving both the key stakeholder organisations and ministries the revision of ESG has been made. In May 2015 the ESG 2015 were adopted. They show how to take forward quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area and, as such, provide a firm basis for successful implementation of the policies connected with creating European Higher Education Area.

sponse to the Bologna Process. Some examples of school and teacher-oriented reforms are presented in order to illustrate the changes that have been introduced in the education system in Poland to work on the quality of education and shaping of the teaching profession.

A specific concern of this chapter is policies that contribute to raising teacher education quality in a way that responds to the challenges of teachers preparation, recruitment, work and careers, and especially teachers' lifelong learning. It is assumed that the quality teacher education is one of the key factors influencing the quality of teachers and their daily work, and it is argued that a high quality teacher workforce requires deliberate policy choices that are concentrated on attracting, preparing, and supporting high-quality teachers and nurturing educational leadership at different levels of education system.

The context for teacher education in Poland

Teacher education is part of a Polish educational system, especially higher education system, and it reflects the characteristics of this system. The current context for teacher education in Poland is the result of a radical reform processes, driven by repeated state interventions, which are visible in changes within the legal environment of education.

Following the downfall of the socialist regimes in 1989, system transformations have taken place in political, social, cultural and economic areas across Poland. New political legislation became the basis for changes in Polish education. From being a centrally planned, hierarchical and closed educational system, it has been transformed into a more open and highly decentralised system of governance. In 1991 among the first new legislation introduced was the Educational System Act (introduced on 7. September 1991). It permitted the development of non-state schools (at all levels of education) and changes in the structure of enrolment at the upper secondary level (higher percentage of young people attending general secondary schools), as well as the doubling of the number of students attending higher education institutions (Madalińska-Michalak, 2017). The reform of the State administration system and the education reform assumed that only the national educational policy will be developed and carried out centrally, while the administration of education and the running of all types of schools, pre-school institutions and other educational establishments are decentralised: each school is administered locally and possesses a high degree of autonomy. Decentralisation of the management of the education system with a focus on local authorities stimulated local educational

ambitions and helped to lift the burden of debts regularly incurred to finance educational tasks when these fell within the remit of central governmental administration. Decentralisation in the management of education has been reinforced by steadily increasing autonomy of schools and higher education institutions (HEIs). A policy based on learning outcomes has been introduced in school and higher education in line with the European Qualifications Framework, arguably providing schools, HEIs and teachers with greater autonomy in the organisation of the education process. Considering the implemented reforms of education and their impact, one can also state that the Polish education system moved from an emphasis on the transmission of information and on vocational education and training that prevailed under communism towards an education system that aimed to equip its citizens with a more rounded education focused on knowledge construction, development of skills and competences. The system of education has been constructed in such a way that it is intended to enable learners to adapt to a rapidly changing world, especially to adapt to the pace and scope of economic, social and cultural change.

Regarding the system of higher education and science in the current context, the issues connected with these systems are regulated in the university bill so-called 'Constitution for Science'. The main assumptions of the Act on Law of Higher Education and Science from 30 August 2018, which came into force on 1 October 2018, is a pro-quality development and visibility of Polish science in the world. The law was introduced in order to release the potential of Polish science, increase the quality of education offered to students and doctoral students through provision of full support to students, as well as systematically raising the level of teaching in Polish universities. The Act pays attention to a sustainable development of Polish universities in the use of this potential depending on the capacity of the centres and it gives universities greater freedom in using funds, science and internationalisation in higher education are treated as inseparable terms in order to talk about the quality matching the best. The solutions that are the base for this newest university bill are in line with the priorities of Bologna process and visible changes in the higher education in Europe.

The portrayal of Polish education in the context of Polish educational reality and proposed government's changes in higher education and science, not only in the aforementioned Constitution for Science, but in the previous legal regulations like Higher Education Act of 12 Sept. 1990, or the Act of 27 July 2005 Law on Higher Education, the Act of 1. October 2011 on Higher Education, and the Act on Scientific Degrees and Titles of 14 March 2003, indicates that the notion of quality is one of key ideas for debate on education as a whole in Poland (see more: Michalak, 2011).

On the basis of reforms that were introduced between 1990 and 2005 in higher education it is worth mentioning that the number of students has increased almost fivefold and more than one third of this rise consists of students from the non-public institutions of higher education. In total, over a half of all these students participate in commercial forms of education. This impressive and abrupt increase in the number of university and college students in Poland has brought about many various positive effects: made higher education more accessible, postponed introduction of great numbers of young people into a very difficult job market and improved the earnings of numerous university and college teachers. However, it has also produced negative outcomes: manifold and long-lasting overburdening of higher education teachers, delaying their development and constraining the level of their scientific work. In 2010 we observed that while identifying the weaknesses of the Polish system of higher education, the following elements should be considered and investigated further:

- *Lack of qualitative mechanisms in the financing system*: there was no special financial support that would reward the institution for its quality of research and education, and also the significance of qualitative elements in the algorithm for dividing stationary financial support is negligible.
- *Low rate of internationalization of studies*: the ratio of foreign students to the whole student population indicated that in Poland it amounted to 0,5%, while it was 0,9% in Slovakia, 3,3% in Hungary, 6,3% in the Czech Republic and the average index for the OECD countries amounted to 9,6% in 2010.
- *Incorrect structure of educational specializations*: social and pedagogical specializations were disproportionally popular, especially in the non-daily form of studies. There were too few graduates from scientific, technological and health-oriented specializations. For the state, it meant endangering future rate of socio-economic development, and for individuals it meant that having a degree increases earnings in Poland only by 28%, while in the USA by 76,8%, in Portugal by 68,8%, and in France by 64,4%.
- *Complicated academic career path*: between 1991 and 2010 the number of defended doctoral dissertations has risen threefold, which has not been reflected in an equally rapid increase of university teachers with the title of a habilitated doctor – permitted to, for example, do their independent scientific research or performing supervisory functions. As a result of this slowing down of an academic career, the age structure of the Polish academic and scientific community is recognised as very unfavourable. University teachers and scientists gained independence at a very late age.

- *System of managing the institutions of higher education*: almost all international organizations' reports, such as OECD's or World Bank's, stressed the need to modernize structures of the institutions of higher education, which did not facilitate building up their international position.
- *Weak link between the institutions of higher education and their socio-economic environments*: the collaboration of the institutions of higher education with the employers' community from public, commercial and non-governmental sectors has been recognized as too weak (Michalak, 2011).

The absence of Polish institutions of higher education in the group of universities and colleges recognized worldwide for their high-quality research or teaching was the most visible result of the lack of policy in the past directed at improvement of qualitative indexes. Thus, according to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, increasing the quality of studies and of efficiency of the higher education system and science becomes a priority. The legal regulations the Act on Higher Education introduced in October 2011 and the Law of Higher Education and Science from 30 August 2018 were needed for adjusting Polish higher education system to the developmental challenges of current and future context of education and also to harmonize it with the solutions introduced in the European High Education Area. One of the key means aimed at achieving the efficient model of managing higher education, dynamic model of academic career, high quality higher education and science is to integrate curricula with the European High Education Area and thus increase students' and university teachers' mobility. The proposed systemic solutions endeavour to provide: (i) better quality for Polish students, thus better preparation for changing economy, (ii) opportunity for Polish scientists and researchers to participate in the greatest world research projects, (iii) prospects of steady development of Polish institutions of higher education and constant increase in their teaching and research potential.

Teacher Education in Poland – selected aspects

Teacher education in Poland, especially Initial Teacher Education, is part of – as it was stressed before – higher education system. The rapidly changing context of education and higher education over the last thirty years has brought about significant changes in relevant legislation, which has become the basis for introducing important reforms in teacher education in order to make the system of teacher education in Poland more adapted to the challenges of the contemporary world. Teacher education was adjusted to more clearly align with the principles of

pluralist democracy and a market economy. Initial teacher education institutions became more autonomous, centrally prescribed curricula were abandoned and changes in both methodology and content of study occurred. All teacher educational institutions operate in both the public and non-public education sectors.

In Poland, from 1990 up to 2015 initial teacher education was provided within two sectors of the education system: in the higher education sector and the school education sector. The degree programmes, including first-, second- and long-cycle programmes, were offered within university type HEIs, namely in universities, technical universities, polytechnics and academies. Non-degree postgraduate programmes were offered in non-university HEIs (with no rights to confer the academic degree of doctor). In the school education sector were offered the college programmes, including teacher training colleges and foreign language teacher training colleges. From 2015, initial teacher education has been offered only at higher education institutions.

Initial teacher education and training standards were formulated in the Regulations of the Minister of Science and Higher Education on initial teacher training standards (2012, 2019). This legislations regulate initial teacher education for school education teachers, thus defining training models or paths which lead to qualifications required to practice the teaching profession. However, with a huge autonomy leaving to the universities that were responsible for designing the whole program for prospective teachers.

In the current context the minimum qualification for teaching at pre-primary and primary level (the first stage: grades 1–3) is still a tertiary education degree at bachelor level, which lasts three years. However, pursuant to the regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 27 September 2018 the Regulations of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 25 July 2019 regarding initial teacher education studies, studies in the field of pre-school and early school education are conducted – again as it was before 2005 – uniform 5-year master's studies. This has obvious consequences for teacher education in this field.

For those intending to work at primary schools (the second stage: grades 4–8) and at upper secondary level, the final qualification is a master's degree. At present, teachers who hold a higher education diploma (a Bachelor's or Master's degree) represent 98% of all teachers working in the school education sector. Master's degree studies seem to be the most popular route of training for teachers in school education of all levels. In Poland high quality of pre-school education is guaranteed by a very well-prepared teaching staff at nursery schools. Mostly they are university graduates holding a Master's degree (84,0% of teaching staff), and less often holding a Bachelor's degree (11,8%) (see: Madalińska-Michalak, 2017).

Reflecting international influences, the emergence of competence-based approaches to teacher education, not only to initial teacher education but across the continuum may be noted in Poland. Teacher competence frameworks have been introduced recently and they specify what candidates for teachers should know, understand and be able to do in the form of 'learning outcomes'. They contain a description of skills and competences a teacher should have.

Initial teacher education is organised according to two models, i.e. a concurrent model and a consecutive one. The concurrent model of initial teacher education is a dominating model in Poland. Teachers for ISCED 0 and grades 1–3 of ISCED 1 are trained exclusively according to the concurrent model. The minimum requirement for professional workplace training in schools for future pre-primary teachers (ISCED 0), primary teachers (ISCED 1) and lower secondary teachers (ISCED 2) amounts to 13,8% of the whole programme (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013: 26).

The part of professional workplace training in schools within initial teacher education for the lower secondary teachers is less than 10% of the whole programme (around 8,3%). This proportion of professional training for upper secondary teachers in Poland is quite low in comparison with the average that is around 20% in a majority of EU countries. Only in Belgium (Flemish Community) we can find the same very limited time spending on professional training during initial teacher education. The amount of professional training provided for secondary teachers is more closely linked to the level prospective teachers are intending to teach (lower or upper secondary) than to the level of the programme and final qualification (bachelor's or master's). Reform of study programs at universities, developed and gradually implemented from October 2019, should provide internships lasting one semester as part of three-year bachelor studies, which gives 720 hours of professional workplace training in schools. Thus, it seems likely that practical education will become an important element of initial teacher education at the universities in Poland.

Admission to initial teacher education

Since 2015 initial teacher education with the degree programmes, including first-, second- and long-cycle programmes, has been provided only within university type HEIs, namely in universities, technical universities, polytechnics and academies. Prior to 2015 there were, as it was indicated earlier, alternative training college and school-based routes.

Admission to initial teacher education is governed by the general entrance requirements for entry to tertiary education rather than by specific selection criteria for teacher education. The main prerequisite is holding the final upper secondary examination certificate. For access to masters' programmes, the performance at bachelor level is taken into account. Alternative pathways to a teaching qualification are rare in Poland and are only available for future foreign language teachers. They have been introduced because of the shortage of qualified foreign language teachers and an urgent need for their recruitment. In order to become a language teacher, in this way, it is necessary to obtain a certificate confirming language skills at 'proficient' or 'advanced' levels as well as a certificate in foreign language teaching awarded upon completion of a non-degree postgraduate programme or a qualification course.

The lack of specific recruitment criteria for prospective teachers and no monitoring of the suitability of candidates for the teaching profession during education is one of the main concerns of current policy reforms connected with teacher education in Poland. In 2017, the report of The Supreme Audit Office on teacher education in Poland highlighted a trend of negative selection for the teaching profession in Poland since the academic year 2012/2013 (NIK, 2017). In total, more than nine percent of the total number of candidates admitted to faculties with teaching specialties (in the period covered by the audit) were upper secondary school graduates who obtained the lowest scores at the matriculation examination, i.e. from 30 to 49 points (University of Wrocław accepted 28 percent of people with this result).

As one can see, the admission requirements and process for initial teacher education generally do not address skills or competences of the candidate such as interpersonal competences, previous work with children in the form of volunteering (e.g. in a scout team or an artistic or tourist group), or competences demonstrated by the candidate in the after-school system or in the process of self-education.

Passage from the university lecture hall to the school classroom

The right to employ teachers in a Polish school is a privilege of the school principal, which is a solution not often practiced in most countries (see: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018: 39–40). It implies that 'the responsibility for advertising vacant posts, requesting applications and selecting the best candidate is

decentralised” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018: 39). Under open recruitment, the process is managed by schools.

In Poland, the school principal is a person who recruits but also employs a new teacher. The Act – Educational Law of 14 December 2016 decides that the school principal is the head of the workplace for teachers and non-teacher employees employed in the school or in other educational institution. The school principal decides in particular on the following matters:

- 1) employing and dismissing teachers and other school or institution employees,
- 2) awarding prizes and imposing ordinal penalties for teachers and other school or institution employees,
- 3) submitting motions, after consulting the teachers’ council and school or institution council, in matters of national decorations, prizes and other distinctions for teachers and other school or institution employees.

Teachers are employed by the school principal in an open recruitment procedure. Entrants to the teaching profession are awarded the position of trainee teacher on the date of entering into an employment relationship with a nursery school or school.

Without a doubt, when choosing a candidate for a teacher at the school, the school principal is bound by the candidate’s compliance with the statutory requirements for having the appropriate qualifications. Thus, in the case of several candidates who meet this condition, the school principal can use his or her experience in working with other teachers and be guided, sometimes, by his/her intuition. It can therefore be assumed that the school principal is fully autonomous in making this decision. Importantly, the law does not provide for any appeal proceedings against a decision that is unsatisfactory for rejected candidates. From this point, the school principal’s decision about the employment of candidate for being a teacher is final and indisputable.

Teachers are required to hold a qualification (degree) at a relevant level, and a teaching qualification confirming completion of initial teacher training (a diploma or certificate awarded by an HEI, a diploma from an initial teacher training institution, or a certificate of completion of a qualification course awarded by an in-service teacher training institution). Teachers working in special nursery schools and schools and integration schools are required to hold a qualification at a relevant level and a qualification corresponding to a given type of disability. Starting from the school year 2017/2018, teachers in preschool institutions and primary schools are required to hold at least a Bachelor’s degree or a diploma from an initial teacher training institution. A Master’s degree is required at all higher

levels of education. At present, teachers who hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree represent 98% of all teachers working in the school education system. Apart from formal qualifications, teachers are required to observe the basic moral principles and meet the health conditions necessary to practice the profession.

Teacher career advancement

In 2000 a four-stage teacher's career progression structure was established in Poland. According to it, we can distinguish:

- trainee teacher (*nauczyciel stażysta*),
- contract teacher (*nauczyciel kontraktowy*),
- appointed teacher (*nauczyciel mianowany*),
- chartered teacher (*nauczyciel dyplomowany*).

Chartered teachers who have outstanding professional achievements may be awarded the honorary title of education professor.

In order to be promoted to a higher grade, a teacher should:

- hold the required qualifications;
- complete a “probation period” (the period preceding an application for promotion) and receive a positive assessment of his/her professional achievements during this period (the teacher follows an individual professional development plan during the probation period);
- have his/her application for promotion approved by a so-called qualifying board or, in the case of a contract teacher, pass an examination before an examination board.

Teachers are employed on the basis of an employment contract or so-called appointment which is a kind of tenure ensuring greater legal protection. The employment relationship with trainee and contract teachers may be based only on an employment contract. Trainee teachers have a contract for one school year.

Teachers must successfully complete a probation period before promotion to a contract teacher position. The contract with a contract teacher is signed for an indefinite period. Appointed and chartered teachers employed on the basis of appointment are not covered by the legislation on civil service. All teachers, in performing their duties, are entitled to legal protection provided for police officers and civil servants; the body managing a nursery school or school is obliged to defend the teacher when their rights are infringed.

In Poland, in the school year 2017/18 among the whole group of teachers (696 039 teachers) there were 5% trainee teachers, 16,5% contract teachers,

21,9% appointed teachers, 52,1% chartered teachers, and the remaining teachers 4,5%. In comparison with the school year 2015/2016 these figures show an increase in the amount of trainee teachers (by 0,2%), of contract teachers (by 0,9%) and of chartered teachers (by 1,4 percentage point). There was a drop in the share of appointed teachers (by 2,9%). In total, appointed and chartered teachers in the 2017/2018 school year accounted for 74% of all employees, with 75,5% in the 2015/2016 school year (a decrease of 1,5%). This structure of teacher employment shows that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of all employed teachers demonstrated the activity required to obtain the status of appointed and chartered teacher, including the increase of professional competence and effective actions aimed at improving the quality of their own work and the quality of the school's work.

Assessment and Promotion

The legislation which is still in force until the end of the school year 2017/2018 makes a distinction between teacher performance assessment, which is an element of internal quality assurance, and assessment of the teacher's professional achievements, which is related to professional promotion. In both cases, assessment is conducted by the head of a (nursery) school who consults other internal bodies on a mandatory or optional basis as stipulated by the law. Teachers dissatisfied with the outcome of an assessment may lodge an appeal to the head of the regional education authorities. The period between two assessments may not be shorter than one year.

Teacher performance assessment is mandatory for all teachers, except trainee teachers as they apply for promotion to the second professional position at the end of their first school year and, thus, undergo an assessment of professional achievements. It focuses on the extent to which teachers have fulfilled their education- and care-related and other statutory tasks. It ends with one of three descriptive marks or grades: outstanding, positive or negative.

The assessment of professional achievements is carried out only when the teacher applies for promotion to a higher professional position and takes place at the end of a so-called probation period, i.e. the period of work preceding the promotion process. The process assesses the extent to which the teacher has implemented an agreed professional development plan and leads to a positive or negative outcome. If a 'negative' grade is given after an appeal, where lodged, the employment relationship with the teacher concerned is terminated.

The new legislation, which will be in force from the school year 2018/2019, integrates the two types of assessment into performance appraisal. It will be obliga-

torily conducted (i) at the end of the probation period leading to promotion to the contract, appointed or chartered teacher position; (ii) at the end of an additional probation period (for teachers who failed in the previous promotion process and are required to complete another probation period).

Induction programme

A new national induction scheme was introduced in 2000, designed to support newly qualified teachers during their first four years of teaching. The scheme is extensive and it is school-based. Its introduction marks a shift in awareness of the continuing need of the newly qualified teacher for professional development and support, and a greater emphasis on the professional responsibility of established teachers towards newcomers to the profession.

Each newly qualified teacher in Poland is employed as a trainee teacher for the first 9 months and is supervised and mentored during this time by a mentor, an experienced teacher employed in the school at Appointed or Chartered Teacher level. A mentor is appointed providing personal, social and professional individualized support to the beginning teacher to help teachers overcome the difficulties they may experience as newcomers to the profession, and thus help to reduce the likelihood that they will leave the profession early. Support measures include regular discussions of progress and problems, assistance with the planning and assessment of lessons, participation in other teachers' class activities and/or classroom observations, special compulsory training and visits to other schools/resource centres. In the next phase the contract teacher is again supervised and supported, this time for a period of 2 years and 9 months.

The induction phase is seen as a support programme for beginning teachers. During induction, newly qualified teachers carry out all the tasks incumbent on experienced teachers, and they are remunerated for their work. Induction has important formative and supportive components for beginning teachers as they receive additional training, personalised help and advice at the school site. The function of this induction process is to help beginning teachers to construct their professional identity and develop professional practices suited to the realities of school and integrated into their conceptions of good teaching. The induction period is intended to encourage and motivate beginning teachers to be active agents instead of passively applying ideas or practices suggested by other people. Within schools, the most important elements of this induction procedure include peer coaching, quality evaluation, appraisal, portfolio evaluation and collaboration on practical tasks.

Observation of daily school life shows that induction is a key phase in the professional development of a new teacher – from empathy, attitude, professionalism and involvement in relationships and in the work of the mentor (internship supervisor), it influences who the new teacher will be in the future. A serious drawback of this solution, adopted twenty years ago in Poland, is leaving the mentors without professional preparation and substantive support. It is difficult to disagree with the claim that this is a key stage in the development of the teacher, but both law and practice failed in this regard. This area requires serious re-evaluation.

Continuing professional development

In-service training or continuing professional development (CPD) is not obligatory for teachers in Poland. However, pursuant to the legislation, teachers should continuously expand their knowledge and skills, and the professional promotion procedure (see below) includes an assessment of the teacher's professional achievements, based on the implementation of an agreed professional development plan. *There are two strands of CPD activities:* (i) further training: programmes and courses where teachers may gain higher level or additional formal qualifications; (ii) in-service training: various activities which improve teachers' working methods (for example, a teaching methodology or ICT course) as part of the formal qualifications already held. Further training is provided by HEIs as part-time degree programmes and as non-degree postgraduate programmes. Teachers choose the field of study or specialism depending on the level of qualifications already held and their individual needs. In-service training opportunities are offered mainly by in-service teacher training institutions, though teachers may also choose a non-degree postgraduate programme or another course in an HEI.

Continuing professional development refers to formal and non-formal training activities, which may, for example, include subject-based and pedagogical training. Staff training is provided by higher education institutions within post-graduate studies and teacher training colleges, which offer relevant courses, but the main providers of this type of in-service training are in-service teacher training establishments. Higher education institutions provide complementary education and staff development courses independently within their autonomy. The National In-Service Teacher Training Centre, called Centre of Education Development (Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji), functioning within the school education sector, supports reforms in teacher professional development and provides special conferences, meetings and staff development courses for the whole country, often

together with foreign institutions or within the framework of international educational programmes. The Regional Centres of Teaching Methodology, run by respective regional self-government authorities, provide staff development courses and, though on a limited scale, complementary educational courses within specialisations which are in short supply in a given region.

In-service training is provided within two paths: as complementary education that enables teachers to obtain higher or additional qualifications, and as staff development that enables teachers to update or upgrade their skills. Complementary education covers the courses of study which lead to a higher level of education or additional qualifications, and staff development covers the forms of refreshment, which enrich the working techniques of teachers within the qualifications they already have. The financing of complementary education and staff development is guaranteed in the Teachers' Charter, which provides that the state budget allocates for this purpose an amount equal to 2,5% of the planned expenditure on teachers' salaries. These amounts can be increased through additional allocations by local authorities, donations and sponsoring.

Continuing professional development (CPD) has gained considerable importance over the years in Poland. Although teachers' engagement in CPD is not stated in terms of professional duty, CPD in Poland, like CPD in Denmark, Ireland, Greece, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, is clearly linked to career progression (see: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013: 58). Therefore, even if CPD is not explicitly required for promotion, it remains an important advantage. Participation in CPD activities is viewed positively in teacher evaluation.

Towards high-quality teaching profession – recommendations

The education system in Poland has had to cope with unprecedentedly and increasingly high educational aspirations of citizens in the last two decades. This results in its outstandingly high levels of participation in education at higher levels, i.e. after the completion of compulsory education, as compared to other highly developed countries. Poland stands out in the EU in the scale of improvement of tertiary education attainment. More than twenty-five years of reform in teacher education in Poland has brought a number of very significant changes. For historical and political reasons, Poland has introduced major reforms in its education system and in the initial education and on-going professional development of its teachers.

Introducing major reform in order to make quality education and quality teacher education is never unproblematic, and there has been considerable debate within Poland on some aspects, not least the new demands being made on higher education, teacher educators, school teachers and school principals. It is worth stressing that the basic premise of the policy on teacher education in Poland is that a teacher education is perceived as continuum within lifelong perspective. Such assumption can make a difference in quality teachers and quality teaching at school.

The analysis of teachers' education in Poland contrasted with other European solutions and the findings, presented in OECD report "Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers" from 2005, which are still valid, shows that it is worth – in addition to benefits brought about by changes introduced by educational authorities – considering a few solutions/policy initiatives within teacher education which have not yet been used in Poland. These initiatives should be considered at least as two sets of strategies: (i) the first needs to be directed to the teaching profession as a whole and seeks to improve its status and labour market competitiveness, and to improve teacher development, and school work environments; (ii) the second is more targeted, and it focuses on attracting and retaining particular types of teachers, and attracting teachers to work in particular schools (OECD, 2015). For sure, any reform of teacher education should be directed by the assumption, that the quality of teaching is determined not just by the "quality" of the teachers – although that is clearly critical – but also by the environment in which they are educated and they work. Teachers can reach their potential in settings that provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge and reward. This kind of issue will always be complex because teacher quality and teaching quality may hinge on myriad different perspectives ranging from emphasis on teachers' learning and development, teachers' competences and qualifications, as well as teachers' attitudes towards their professional responsibility, their performance in the given conditions and effects on students' learning outcomes (see: Chi-Kin Lee, Day, 2016: 1).

The analysis of the current situation of the system of teacher education in Poland and the state of teaching profession with the regards of the abovementioned assumptions, shows that it is worth – in addition to benefits brought about by changes introduced by educational authorities – considering a few solutions which have not yet been used in Poland:

- Limiting the number of students/candidates for teachers in institutions of higher education depending on the demand for teachers and simultaneous significant increase of funds for education (introducing independent financing line). The Ministry of Education would sign contracts with uni-

versities offering particular teachers' education curricula (a kind of licence for educating teachers). Universities would declare their annual recruitment limits. Non-governmental agency would probably be better, but this is not established in Poland and would require significant new legal regulations. Both these solutions require a prospective policy of employing teachers, constant monitoring of needs and flexible response to any threat of teacher deficits (Michalak, 2011).

- Developing selection within an institution of higher education not only at the level of entrance exams, but also in relation to those students choosing to pursue teachers' education. Universities should take into account a student's academic achievements prior to the recruitment process so that only the best can have a chance to become teachers. A smaller total number of students should then be provided with very good preparation for work in schools through enhancing current programmes (Michalak, 2011).
- Increasing the level of support for the professional development of teacher mentors in schools. The current lack of adequate professional preparation and substantive support for mentors needs serious consideration and investment.
- Strengthening the socio-professional position of the teacher. This measure is indispensable in actions aimed at improving the quality of education. In many countries, including Poland, more should be invested in the development of teachers and competitive conditions of their employment and work. Striving to strengthen the profession should become a priority in the activities of both state and local authorities, as well as the work of teacher training universities.

Regarding the above-mentioned recommendations, it worth stressing that education, including teacher education, is one of the most important assets and one of the crucial tasks of the state, hence it should be given priority. The teacher has been assigned a strategic role in the functioning and effectiveness of the education system. Playing this role, should be supported by state actions to build high-quality teaching profession (see: Madalińska-Michalak, 2019b).

Conclusions

The implications of the presented analysis and proposed recommendations show that a specific concern of the teacher education policies in Poland should focus on further actions for raising teacher and teacher education quality. A special concern

should be to attract to the teaching profession the best candidates and to retain the best teachers in the school system in order to build a high-quality teaching profession. Teaching should be perceived as an attractive career choice – therefore, the improvement of the image and status of teaching, the improvement of teaching's salary and employment conditions is a vital issue for teacher education policy in Poland. This is crucial, especially in the context of the teacher strike of 2019 which is regarded as the largest strike in the history of Polish education since 1993 – this action was aimed at encouraging government to introduce salary increases for teachers and it was also a form of protest against some changes in education introduced after 2015.

Policies aimed at attracting and retaining effective teachers need both to recruit competent people into the profession, and also to provide support and incentives for professional development and on-going performance at high levels. Teachers should be equipped with high-quality initial and in-service teacher education. Any educational offer directed to teachers who develop their career should meet the needs of teachers for professional development. At the same time teacher education is more likely to be effective in supporting high quality teachers who are dedicated to response to increasing demands on schools to prepare students for a changing world and foster holistic student learning and well-being when it also plays a powerful, deliberate, and consequential role in developing teacher professionalism. Teaching must become, and be seen to become, a well-rewarded and highly valued role that attracts some of the best graduates into a teaching career (Madalińska-Michalak, 2019b).

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