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The Development of Teachers' Competencies Within Polish Pre-Service Teacher Education. The Analysis of the Legal Act From the Perspective of International Baccalaureate

Abstract

The article presents the results of the analysis of the legal foundations of pre-service teacher education in Poland. The inspiration for this study was our previous research on teachers implementing international programmes in Poland. Our findings show that these teachers do not feel prepared to work in international schools that require specific competences. Therefore, we decided to analyse the main legal act regulating pre-service teacher education and to verify if and to what extent the Polish legislator took into account competencies especially needed in international schools. The results of our analysis show that the Polish law puts special emphasis on the development of teachers' cognitive competencies (teaching subject knowledge, teaching methods, goals of the Polish education system) and interpersonal competencies (communication, reflection on the professional practice). On the other hand, leadership competencies are less emphasised. It is also difficult to find competencies related to global awareness, understood as the ability to understand the contemporary world, combined with the recognition of global and local

connections. Intrapersonal competencies were not considered at all. We do not treat this legal status of the pre-service teacher education as a weakness, but rather as its specificity, resulting from the fact that international schools constitute a small percentage of all schools in Poland. Presenting here the polish example, we are curious how it is in other countries, and we are convinced that further comparative research on pre-service teacher education in Europe will be interesting and necessary for a better understanding of this process and its effects.

Keywords: teachers' competences, pre-service teacher education, international baccalaureate.

Introduction

Among the different types and levels of schools, the educational experience of teachers working in international schools seems to be of particular interest. These teachers mostly rely on learning from each other because pre-service teacher education prepares them mainly to implement the national programme. At the same time, there are too few teachers to institutionally organise training or courses for themselves.

This study¹ considers the three most popular international programs in Poland: International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). In the school year 2020/21, these three programs were offered at all education stages in Poland. The IB program was implemented in Poland in 60 schools, AP in 6 schools, and IGSCSE in 10 schools.

1. Teachers' Competencies – the Theoretical Background

Teaching in school is not a transfer of knowledge to student minds, but a type of communication and a result of communication between the teacher and the student [...]. Thus, the importance of teachers' multidimensional competencies has increased. According to the definition proposed by the European Commission (European Commission 2013, p. 9) competencies constitute a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes, and aspirations, conditioning effective actions taken by an individual in a given area. Important components of competencies are the skills that enable performing complex activities with ease, precision, and in a manner adapted to the current requirements. Studies preparing to work as a teacher are only the first of many stages in the process of becoming a teacher, which, due to the specificity of this profession, is de facto permanent.

¹ The inspiration for this paper came from the project entitled 'Comparative study on functions of international programmes in Poland' [grant number 2020/38/E/HS6/00048] funded by the Polish National Science Centre.

For the purposes of this study we adopted the original classification of competencies proposed by Jim Soland, Laura S. Hamilton and Brian M. Stecher (2013, pp. 3–8). This classification has two levels. The first level (*superior*) denotes the competencies that best meet the requirements of the present day, whereas the second (*subordinate*) level is an extension of the first one. The second level consists of specific competencies, crucial for efficient operation in the overarching dimensions of human activity distinguished on the first level. This classification takes into account competencies that teachers can develop and shape both at home and with their students.

Soland, Hamilton and Stecher distinguished and characterised:

1. *Cognitive competencies* – they are the most closely related with traditionally understood education, although their scope goes far beyond issues closely related to the school area. They include, among others specialist subject knowledge, reading and mathematics proficiency, and competencies necessary in the process of using new technologies. They are divided into:
 - a) Academic mastery – complete mastery of the teaching content, which is the foundation of education. It is based on fluent reading and counting, fast learning, and the use of foreign languages. It is the basis for developing other groups of competencies;
 - b) Critical thinking – this means inductive and deductive reasoning, analysis, inference, and evaluation. These competencies allow a deep understanding of school knowledge and condition professional development;
 - c) Creativity – the ability to take actions diverging from the usual patterns and the ability to adapt depending on the situation. These competencies result in the development of new solutions, ideas, concepts, and a general enterprising attitude;
2. *Interpersonal competencies* – i.e. empathy, tolerance, and sensitivity. Nowadays, they are necessary for establishing and continuing interpersonal relationships, as well as using the potential of other people and opportunities. Interpersonal competences are divided into:
 - a) Communication and collaboration – they are prerequisites for effective communication and activities in cooperation with interaction partners. They fall into one category because they are interdependent. The ability to communicate is the clarity of the message aimed at the development of a common position, sharing information and ideas with interaction partners, and the ability to maintain a balanced commitment of the communicating people, while the ability to cooperate is the ability to communicate plus the ability to negotiate meanings and mediate, resolve conflicts, and efficiently make the right decisions;
 - b) Leadership – another competency in this group, including elements of the previously mentioned competencies, and additionally a vision of fu-

ture activities and undertakings. Leadership is a complex competency (a conglomerate) enabling people to lead in various circumstances and deal with challenges and crises;

- c) Global awareness – it determines the ability to understand the complexity of the contemporary, dynamic, and changing world. This competence is developed on the basis of interdisciplinary and deep knowledge of the interdependence of people, various institutions, and systems. The basis for this competency is therefore the ability to see relationships between actions in various dimensions of life and effects in other dimensions of reality, as well as the ability to identify the determinants of changes with a global effect on the local dimension and vice versa. Although the character of global awareness is primarily that of a cognitive competency (which allows it to be also included in the first group of this classification), the authors classified it as an interpersonal competency, mainly because its use is largely determined by the level of empathy, which is purely interpersonal. Empathy determines a person's ability to understand people living in different geographic, political, social, and cultural conditions;
3. *Intrapersonal competencies* – a group of competencies which includes various attitudes and behaviours influencing behaviour and the level of performance tasks by an individual in various situational contexts (school, professional and other). These competencies help in solving problems and dealing with everyday challenges. This group includes:
- a) Growth mindset – people characterised by a high level of this competency perceive intelligence as a modifiable property, shaped by individual activity and efforts. On the other hand, people with a low level of this competency believe that intelligence is strictly innate (genetic), so it cannot be developed. Focus on growth is therefore a competency that favours human activity in various dimensions of life and taking up various challenges;
 - b) Learning how to learn – sometimes also referred to as metacognition – a high level of this intrapersonal competency means the ability to accurately determine the optimal approach to a given task, to estimate the accuracy of understanding the task, and to constantly evaluate progress in the solving process. A high level of this competency means strong motivation to act, proper responses to the feedback from the superior, and development of a stronger need for achievements in professional and private spheres;
 - c) Intrinsic motivation – a high level of this competency is expressed in strong internal motivation. This means that the impulses to take up activity are subjective (internal) factors located within the individual, and

not objective (external, situational) factors. The authors of this classification cite studies that show that although both types of motivation are important for the development of an individual, it is mainly internal motivation that determines professional and private successes;

- d) Perseverance (grit) – a competency related to internal motivation, the level of which allows to predict the future performance of the unit. While motivation relates mainly to the process of initiating activity, persistence determines its sustaining in the long term and successful finalisation. This is especially true for jobs and tasks that require long-term commitment.



Figure 1
Teachers' competencies

Source: Own study based on Soland, Hamilton and Stecher (2013).

The above-mentioned taxonomy of twenty-first-century competencies was brought up in the context of the teaching profession because it concerns competencies related to the process of teaching and learning, which fits in with the contemporary understanding of the teacher as a person who teaches but also constantly learns. At the same time, the authors of this classification included competencies that make up a high level of self-awareness, reflectivity, self-knowledge, needs, aspirations, and a value system, which are all elements of the concept of the teacher as a reflective practitioner. Teachers' communication competencies are individual, they need to be developed in specific sequences, in combination with tasks set by the job of a teacher.

2. International Programmes in Poland

International education programmes are an increasingly popular way to provide children with the highest level of education and then an international professional career. Education within these programmes is based mainly on student activity. Teachers prepare lessons so that students can work independently and stay engaged. Learning in the system is largely project-based, which encourages

students of all ages to think critically, to challenge assumptions, and to see the world in both local and global contexts, at the same time developing multilingualism. International education programmes are implemented and developed independently of government and national systems, based on practices resulting from mutual cooperation of teachers from almost all over the world. According to Leek (2022),

Poland displays several features that make this country relevant to the special issue of the International Baccalaureate movement in a time of global crisis. Firstly, focusing on the limits and possibilities of International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes in a global context requires more research and knowledge about how educational policies come to life in the prevailing educational situation, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe where there is a tendency for 'democratic backsliding' [...]. Secondly, studies on IB in Poland present a promising picture of IB as an alternative to the national programme (Leek, 2000) that affords a chance to promote leadership among teachers and in a more general sense, in the global context of education, advocates promotion of leadership in teacher pre-training within the national teacher training system (Leek 2000, p. 2).

The main international programmes in Poland are International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE).

The International Baccalaureate (IB) offers four international educational programmes known as IB programmes. They include the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP), the Diploma Programme (DP), and the Career-related Programme (CP). The IB programme focuses on the individual needs of students, their critical thinking and responsibility. According to the International Baccalaureate Organisation, there are currently more than 5,000 IB schools worldwide and the programme is implemented in more than 140 countries.

Advanced+ Placement (AP) is the second popular educational programme, developed by the College Board, an American association of schools in the United States. The AP programme is intended for high school students and allows them to gain specific knowledge in a variety of areas. The AP is oriented towards learning the contents of the curriculum. AP courses are focused on a specific academic discipline and are completed with an exam. In Poland, completion of the AP programme is often associated with preparation for the International Baccalaureate (IB).

The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) is the third programme. The IGCSE was developed more than 30 years ago by the University of Cambridge. This is a recognised programme of education for students aged from 14 to 16 years. Students follow 5–6 subjects and each subject is certified separately. The programme is not a package that needs to be implemented in its entirety. Schools can combine it with elements of local educational programmes. The IGCSE places emphasis on building subject-related knowledge,

but also on developing skills in critical thinking, independent research, problem-solving, and collaboration. This programme prepares students for international diploma programmes such as the IB.

The official IB website states that in 2022 there were sixty-five schools implementing IB programmes. Thirteen of them offered the Primary Years Programme, sixteen – the Middle Years Programme, and fifty-six – the Diploma Programme (<https://www.ibo.org/country/PL/>). However, there are no statistics on international schools in Poland implementing AP and IGCSE programmes. I estimate there are about fifteen of them. There is also no official data on the number of teachers working in international programmes.² According to our records, there are about 1,200 such teachers.

3. Research Design

The teachers' experiences presented in the findings were a part of a larger multi-institutional case study on international educational programmes in Poland. In the quantitative research we have conducted so far, teachers declared that they had strong possibilities of learning and professional development and that they intensively explored these possibilities because generally Polish pre-service teacher education did not prepare them for implementing international programmes (Rojek, Leek, Kosiorek, Dobińska 2023). Teachers working in international schools learn especially intensively in the first months and years of work, because in their experience, not only Polish pre-service teacher education, but also state forms of professional development ignore the development of competencies needed for implementing international programmes and do not take into account the specificity of international programmes. Therefore, we decided to verify if and to what extent the legislator took into account the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies proposed by Soland, Hamilton, and Stecher (2013) within the Polish pre-service teacher education, and whether the Polish law really ignores the development of competencies needed for international programme implementation.

To answer these questions, we used document analysis based on the qualitative approach (Bowen 2009). We perceive document analysis as a kind of a systematic procedure for reviewing a document to identify data of interest to

² The research team carrying out the project 'Comparative study on functions of international programmes in Poland' [grant number 2020/38/E/HS6/00048] asked the Ministry of Education and Science about the number of teachers working in international programmes. The Ministry replied that there is no such data, because many teachers work in the national curriculum and in the national programmes parallelly. Therefore, it is difficult to unambiguously determine whether these teachers are teachers of the national programme or international programmes.

us, and finally to gain understanding and knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In qualitative research, a document represents a wide spectrum of textual and other materials. This group also comprises various types of official documents, including public records and legal regulations (Coffey, 2014). The document that governs Polish teacher education is the *Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019 on the standard of education preparing for the teaching profession* [Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 25 lipca 2019 r. w sprawie standardu kształcenia przygotowującego do wykonywania zawodu nauczyciela, Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1450] (Regulation, 2019).

4. Results

Applying the competency classification to document analysis allowed us to analyse the regulation in an orderly and non-random manner. The unit of analysis in this study was the entire text of the regulation. Referring to the fact that document analysis is not about comprehensively capturing the research material, but about finding an answer to the research question posed, the following summary has been prepared. As a result of the analysis of the document, parts of the regulation corresponding to each competency were identified. Each competency is accompanied by examples of requirements included in the regulation. When studying an official document, such as the regulation, we analysed the explicitly stated content, which means that we took the literal content of the documents and analysed the silent content. The literal content allows us to understand the document, while the silent content that is missing from the regulation allows us to reflect on the reason for its absence.

1. Cognitive competencies:

a) Academic mastery:

- Correct use of the Polish language,
- Correct use of subject-specific terminology,
- Correction of one's language mistakes,
- Knowledge of the core curriculum of a given subject, educational objectives, and teaching content,

b) Critical thinking:

- Observing pedagogical situations and events,
- Subjecting them to analysis and proposing solutions to problems,
- Drawing conclusions from work and observation,
- Formulating ethical evaluations related to the practice of the teaching profession,
- Self-reflection on one's own professional development,

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- c) Creativity:
 - Using teaching methods and selecting effective didactic means,
 - Designing and implementing teaching programmes,
 - Designing and implementing educational and preventive programmes,
 - Creating educational and didactic situations,
 - Using both conventional and unconventional teaching methods.
 - 2. Interpersonal competencies:
 - a) Communication and collaboration:
 - Showing empathy to students and providing them with support and assistance,
 - Knowledge of interpersonal and social communication processes,
 - Animating and monitoring team activities of students,
 - Using assessment and feedback processes to stimulate students in their work on their own development,
 - Adhering to universal ethical principles and norms,
 - Showing respect for every human being,
 - Building relationships based on mutual trust between all parties involved in the education and training process,
 - Communicating with people from different backgrounds and in different emotional states,
 - Resolving conflicts through dialogue,
 - Creating a good atmosphere for communication in and outside of the classroom,
 - Establishing cooperation with teachers,
 - Establishing cooperation with the community outside of school,
 - b) Leadership:
 - Designing activities aimed at developing the school,
 - Stimulating the improvement of the quality of the school's work,
 - Animating the social and cultural life of the class,
 - Organising work in school forms and groups,
 - Coping with difficult situations,
 - c) Global awareness:
 - Recognising the specificity of the local environment and engaging in cooperation for the benefit of students and the community,
 - Adapting teaching methods to a diverse classroom with varying cognitive, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds,
 - Working in a team with other members of the school and local community,
 - 3. Intrapersonal competencies:
 - a) Growth mindset:

- Independently developing pedagogical knowledge and skills,
 - Being prepared for continuous improvement of one's subject matter knowledge,
 - Seeking out new resources that can enrich the teaching content,
 - Planning actions for professional development based on conscious self-reflection and feedback from others,
 - Designing a path of one's own professional development,
 - Collaborating with other teachers and specialists to improve one's teaching skills.
- b) Learning how to learn,
c) Intrinsic motivation,
d) Perseverance (grit).

In The Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (Regulation 2019) on the standard of education preparing for the teaching profession, one can identify examples illustrating the competencies that a graduate should possess after completing education, which were also specified in the classification presented in this article. Cognitive competencies, demonstrating knowledge of the subjects taught, the use of various methods, and reflection on one's work, are clearly described. The graduate should be familiar not only with the subject matter but also the issues related to the education system, pedagogy, and psychology, and should use their knowledge when working with students. In terms of interpersonal competencies, great emphasis is placed on communication and cooperation as a way of building relationships with students, other teachers, school staff, parents, and representatives of the local community. Leadership competencies are less emphasised and relate more to managing the classroom rather than to a broader understanding of leadership. It is difficult to find competencies related to global awareness, defined as the ability to understand the contemporary world, combined with the recognition of global and local connections. In this aspect, respect for differences between individuals, communities, and cultures is rather emphasised. The area of intrapersonal competencies has been significantly overlooked by the legislator. The regulation mentions the teacher's professional development, independent career planning, and readiness for continuous self-improvement. Therefore, the teacher should be oriented towards development and work on their professional competencies. However, the regulation does not identify competencies such as the ability to learn, internal motivation, or perseverance. It is difficult to clearly determine whether these skills can be defined legally or are rather related to individual aptitudes. Internal motivation, understood as the impulse to take action, and perseverance, meaning the willingness to consistently continue activity, are areas of competencies not included in the standards of education preparing for the teaching profession.

Summary

The results of our analyses presented here allow us to identify the reason for the insufficient preparation of Polish teachers to work in international schools. This reason seems to be the specific nature of the legal basis for pre-service teacher education. The legislator intends Polish teachers to be most of all prepared to effectively transfer knowledge of the subject they teach to student minds, to communicate easily, and to have knowledge about the principles behind the Polish education system. In addition, the education system is designed mainly to prepare them for work within the national programme. Although the Polish education system provides for the possibility of the existence of intergenerational schools and implementation of international programmes, it does not prepare teachers for it. Thus, the opinions and experiences of teachers from our previous research have been confirmed and can be considered legitimate. Due to the lack of adequate preparation during the teacher training period, these teachers learn intensively in the school as a workplace, implementing international programmes in practice.

We do not treat the legal status of the pre-service teacher education identified here as a weakness or a defect of the Polish pre-service teacher education. It is its specificity, resulting from the fact that international schools constitute a small percentage of all schools, and only a few thousand students attend them, compared to five and a half million students covered by the national programme.

When conducting further research, we will be interested in the preparation for the implementation of international programmes in other countries and what we can learn from each other.

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Rozwój kompetencji nauczycielskich w polskim systemie kształcenia nauczycieli. Analiza aktu prawnego z perspektywy matury międzynarodowej

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki analizy podstaw prawnych kształcenia nauczycieli przed podjęciem pracy w Polsce. Inspiracją były wcześniejsze badania dotyczące nauczycieli realizujących programy międzynarodowe w Polsce. Z naszych ustaleń wynika, że nauczyciele ci nie czują się przygotowani do pracy w szkołach międzynarodowych, które wymagają określonych kompetencji. Dlatego też postanowiliśmy dokonać analizy głównego aktu prawnego regulującego kształcenie nauczycieli przed podjęciem pracy oraz sprawdzić, czy i w jakim stopniu polski ustawodawca wziął pod uwagę kompetencje szczególnie potrzebne w szkołach międzynarodowych. Wyniki analizy pokazują, że polskie prawo kładzie szczególny nacisk na rozwój kompetencji poznawczych nauczycieli (znajomość przedmiotu nauczania, metody nauczania, cele polskiego systemu edukacji) i kompetencji interpersonalnych (komunikacja, refleksja nad praktyką zawodową). Z drugiej strony mniejszy nacisk kładzie się na kompetencje przywódcze. Trudno też znaleźć kompetencje związane ze świadomością globalną, postrzeganą jako umiejętność rozumienia współczesnego świata, połączona z rozpoznawaniem powiązań globalnych i lokalnych. Kompetencje intrapersonalne w ogóle nie były brane pod uwagę. Nie traktujemy tego statusu prawnego kształcenia nauczycieli jako słabości, ale raczej jako jego specyfikę, wynikającą z faktu, że szkoły międzynarodowe stanowią niewielki odsetek wszystkich szkół w Polsce. Prezentując tutaj polski przykład, jesteśmy zainteresowani rozwiązaniami przyjętymi w innych krajach, i jesteśmy przekonani, że dalsze badania porównawcze dotyczące kształcenia nauczycieli przed podjęciem pracy w Europie będą interesujące i potrzebne dla lepszego zrozumienia tego procesu i jego skutków.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje nauczycieli, przygotowanie zawodowe nauczycieli, matura międzynarodowa.