
Management of Teachers' Professional Careers in Poland and in the Czech Republic: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract:

Purpose: The paper aims to present the issues related to management of professional careers of teachers in Poland and the Czech Republic from a theoretical and empirical perspective.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The Evaluation of Polish and Czech teachers' career management considering questionnaire surveys. The survey makes use of non-probability (non-random) sample selection, i.e., purposeful sampling. The survey was performed between November 2020 and February 2021 on a group of 80 respondents (teachers from Poland and the Czech Republic) via a diagnostic study using a signature CAWI questionnaire. On account of the applied sampling method, the results of this survey cannot be generalized to the entire population. They constitute specific characteristics of reality and present certain symptomatic opinions of Polish and Czech teachers.

Findings: The presented survey results show the opinions of Polish and Czech teachers about professional promotion and its impact on the development of the professional career of teachers.

Practical Implications: Conclusions from the survey constitute recommendations for Polish and Czech teachers.

Originality/Value: The paper fills a gap in the studies on teachers' professional careers in European countries. The survey constitutes an important source of information that may be used as an essential new model of teachers' professional jobs.

Keywords: Career, professional career, career management, professional career of teachers, professional promotion.

JEL Classification: E24, J23, J24, O15.

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1. Introduction

In education, similarly to organizations, future planning is carried out based on the supply and demand for teachers (EACEA, 2018). In Poland, like other countries, the central educational authorities are responsible for this task (Zielińska, 2014). Furthermore, own plans are also prepared by the local authorities in five different systems (Belgium in the Flemish Community, Austria, Sweden, the United Kingdom in Scotland, and Switzerland) (European Commission, 2017).

Systems of education rely on short-term planning. In seven education systems, only long-term planning is performed, with an advance of over ten years, e.g., in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, and Norway (Lynch *et al.*, 2016). To a great degree, future planning relies on data about already employed teachers and not candidates for the profession. In the systems of education that perform future planning, data about professionally active teachers are used.

The future planning also uses data on the potential demand for teachers, which primarily rely on the forecasts of growth in the number of students. This is supplemented with data about the subjects taught, which offer a better picture of the investments in the education of teachers that are going to be required (Worth, 2017). The purpose of the paper is to present the issues related to the management of professional careers of teachers in Poland and the Czech Republic from a theoretical and empirical perspective, examined in the context of professionalism and determinants of the educational labor market.

2. Literature Review

Modern professional careers have a multi-profession, multi-task, and multi-dimensional range. A career is an interdisciplinary term addressed in management and quality sciences, pedagogical sciences, and psychology (Gawroński, 2015; Patton and McMahon, 2014). The term career derives from the Latin word "Carrera," which means a race or a road (Bsoul-Kopowska, 2017). According to Poczowski, a "career" means a "model sequence of stances and behavior of an individual, related to his/her experience of work or, in other words, professional development of an individual in the course of his/her life" (Poczowski, 2018).

Hence, the obligation of planning and developing a career and managing it rests with the individual and not the organization (Alman and Barusz, 2012). The perspective of both entities, the individual and the organization is reversed when the organization becomes an instrument for developing an individual (Forstenlchner and Baruch, 2013; Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2021). Greenhaus and Callanan made a slightly different differentiation of the term "career." They indicated career as an attribute of a profession, an attribute of an organization, and an individual. In this approach, the authors view the career as a model of experiences related to work, which affect the

direction of the individual's life. People are planning their careers individually as a professional development plan (Afaq, Sharif, and Ahmad, 2017).

As a result of literature studies, it was determined that the issue of a professional career is rarely tackled in the context of the teaching staff. The causes of such situation result from the fact that the path of promotion and accomplishment of new degrees by teachers are standardized in the ministerial regulation and the provisions contained in the Teachers' Charter about the establishment, changes, and termination of employment relationships with teachers. The requirements include conditions for pursuing one type of a career, the so-called protean, i.e., employment at a single workplace, one school, throughout professional life, and compilation and improvement of educational and didactic competence in the subject taught (Piróg, 2018).

The problems of transformations in the professional careers of Polish teachers, resulting from changes in the education system, have been analyzed to a slight degree to date. Only Kędzierska's study showed that the changes in the education system prompted the emergence of new models of teaching careers (Kędzierska, 2015). This conclusion overlaps with the determinants of foreign researchers of professional careers of teachers who concluded that the above-listed determinants of constancy of the path of promotion and development of the professional career are subject to significant changes with diverse dynamics when such factors as changes in the birth rate start to play a role, which condition the number of pupils who are subject to compulsory school attendance (Barbieri, 2007).

Demographic tendencies are critical determinants of staff policy and an impulse for evolution (Crehan, 2016). The second factor comprises systemic changes in the system of education and educational policy. Reforms of the education systems result in reorganization of the network of schools, implementation of new plans and curricula. Thus, they affect changes in the demand for teachers at specific school subjects and induce them to verify and sometimes change (at various scales) their hitherto plans related to their professional career (Pirog and Jania, 2013; Dacko-Pikiewicz and Walancik, 2016).

2.1 Professional Career of Teachers

Career planning determines the development of employees within an organization in line with the needs and results, potential, and preferences of employees. Planning management aims to create a state when the organization has managers at its disposal who will be needed to satisfy its needs in the future (Armstrong, 2010). Career management has three main goals, to satisfy the needs of an organization concerning replacements at managerial positions, to hire promising employees and to provide them with adequate training and experience, which will help them in meeting their obligations, providing employees who manifest good aptitude with guidelines and

incentives that they need to use their skill and to pursue a career that would correspond to their talents and aspirations (Armstrong, 2010).

It seems interesting to ask whether professional milieus at schools can promote a teacher's career? Research indicates that the school context, where teaching and learning occur, may have severe consequences for teachers and students. Study results document the impact of the school context on teachers' professional decisions, efficiency, and students' accomplishments (Johnson, Kraft, and Papay, 2012).

As a result of literature analysis, it was also determined that beginner teachers are less efficient than those with long-term teaching experience. This is a significant challenge for beginner teachers who take the effort to pursue a professional career and the school managers, whose task is to create conditions for teacher learning (Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor, 2007). Simultaneously, study results indicate that the path of promotion is too short, making people accomplish the highest level at quite a young age and depriving them of the incentive for further self-improvement (Magda-Adamowicz, 2017). Attention was also paid to the studies carried out in Germany and Belgium, which showed that the frequency of taking actions related to professional development decreases along with age (Richter *et al.*, 2011; van Daal, Donche, and De Maeyer, 2014).

In the last decades, growth in the significance of efficient, professional development programs was noted. The study results show that professional development is most efficient when teachers are provided with active possibilities of learning, focusing on discrete skills that are consistent with the curriculum and grades and applied in the context of a promotion (Correnti, 2007). Evaluation of a teacher's work may be motivating and contribute to the constant improvement of teachers' efficiency in the middle of their career (Rockoff *et al.*, 2011). Belgian studies have shown that for young teachers, the possibilities of sharing knowledge and support from senior teachers, informal mentors, whose feedback offered an opportunity for quick and efficient development in a safe, partner-like atmosphere, is very motivating (Colognesi, Nieuwenhovenb, and Beusaert, 2020).

In the conventional forms of professional improvement and personnel development, the external experts speak while teachers listen. In the new approach to professional development (PD), teachers talk, think, and learn. Discussion is the primary tool for sharing and analyzing ideas, values, and practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2010). The authors of studies from Australia suggest that continuous professional improvement of teachers should be handled by teachers themselves and believe that they can designate their own professional goals, determine how to accomplish them, and jointly work on them, thus accepting responsibility for their professional advancement (Gore *et al.*, 2017).

The authors of a report prepared by the Irish Institute for Economic and Social Research on the professional improvement of primary school teachers suggest that

professional advancement became the main priority of policies in systems of education around the world (Banks and Smyth, 2011). It was accompanied by innovations in professional improvement practice, including professional improvement of schools as a learning community, establishment of networks of contacts, studies in action, inquiry-based learning, evidence-based practice, and reflective practice as essential dimensions of professional development of teachers (Bottery, 2006).

The results of an opinion poll among teachers concerning the impact of professional development on their results and career progress are interesting. A teacher was described as a professional, a trained and qualified expert, who manifests practical competence (Leung, 2009). Professional development is an educational experience related to work and practice. In education, studies have shown that leadership at school and quality of teaching are the main factors affecting the improvement of students' outcomes (Wayne *et al.*, 2008). Principals are continually trying to introduce and implement best educational practices, while professional development is the primary strategy, thanks to which the school system reinforces the teachers' results (Mizell, 2010; Schratz and Weiser, 2002; Barber, Chijioke and Mourshed, 2010).

The driving force of the quality of education is the quality of teachers implementing it (Boyd *et al.*, 2011). Even though there is no consensus in the literature as far as the definition of quality is concerned, it is believed that improving the teacher training systems improves teachers' productivity (Johnson, Kraft, and Papay, 2012). At every stage of their career, teachers need adjusted training to improve specific skills or acquire new ones. This means that the demand for professional development programs is growing (Rockoff *et al.*, 2011).

As noted by many authors of studies, educational reforms are the problem of the authorities (Harris and Sass, 2011; Herbst, 2013). The reforms are enforced top-down and imposed on teachers without prior consultations, even though they require teachers to change their model of behavior, and sometimes even values and premises related to the process of education (Kirovová, 2011). About the great diversity of professional career development, multiple models, classifications, etc., have evolved. One of the basic ones is dividing into three types, vertical career, horizontal career, and inclusion. Such models may be combined and penetrate one another.

However, it is essential to bear in mind the tendencies that emerge in career planning. The first, vertical career, refers to the promotion to higher positions. This is usually enabled by work in organizations with a hierarchical structure. A horizontal job entails developing skills in a given area, expanding overt and covert knowledge related to experience, using the understanding, team cooperation, specialization, e.g., the transmission of knowledge, using teaching, communication, and others. Inclusion means appreciation gained as a result of job seniority. Instead, it results from the experience gathered over time than from noticeable promotions within the structure of an organization (Hooley, Wats, and Andrews, 2015).

Researchers dealing with professional careers, career planning, and management issues distinguish several other models. Here, it is worth mentioning the so-called "career anchors" (Schein, 1996). Schein divided the potential expectations and desires of an individual related to professional life. He listed such directions as a desire to be a professional, searching for independence, focus on management, the possibility of creative work, searching for stabilization and safety, and focus on challenges. It is also essential to leave some leeway for error/ changes when planning a career, as one may be pushed aside from the path or set out an entirely new way to succeed.

2.2 Professional Career of Teachers in Poland and in the Czech Republic

In Poland, the Teachers' Charter sets out the rights and obligations of teachers. It covers all teachers working in educational establishments, public kindergartens, schools, teachers' professional improvement facilities, and correctional facilities. In their professional careers, teachers can win the following degrees of promotion: trainee teacher, contract teacher, nominated teacher, certified teacher. In the Czech Republic, the attempts at putting the teaching profession "in order" are still underway. The actions taken rely primarily on the "first career stage" persons, i.e., young teachers who work in the profession. "Kariérní řád učitelů" puts forward three degrees of professional promotion for teachers: first degree: automatically assigned to every beginner teacher when starts working at a school (adaptation period lasts two years). After completing the second-degree adaptation period, the teacher applies to the initiation of the licensing procedure and presents a professional development plan. The third degree is available to the persons who completed the second degree and have been working in the profession for at least nine years.

According to the studies of the National Institute for Further Education (NIDV), 1/5 of the young teachers in the Czech Republic begin internship without a supervising teacher; many also do not have an adaptation plan that could make the start of work easier for them and allow for completing the subsequent stages of professional promotion. Approximately 12% of persons embarking on their professional career as teachers consider leaving the school or education system in general. At schools where teachers' support system does not operate, many more young teachers are considering this option. The official support system for teachers should be ready in 2021 (Skutil, 2018).

In the Czech Republic, in line with the applicable law, the teaching profession can only be practiced by persons with pedagogical education. The Czech act on teachers sets out the requirements to be fulfilled by a candidate for a teacher in detail, separately for various stages of education and types of schools. A universal model may be noted there, in line with which a teacher can be a person, who:

- completed master's studies in pedagogy focused on a specific stage of education (e.g., early school education);

- completed studies in a field that corresponds to the nature of the subject taught and supplementary studies to improve pedagogical qualifications;
- Even though the professional promotion system of teachers proposed in the Czech Republic comprises fewer stages, its completion would last 13 years in practice. On the other hand, in Poland, despite a more significant number of locations and titles, the process of a professional career can be completed within nine years.

Both processes are very similar. The most significant difference is the additional stage of a career in Poland and the requirement of a 10-year professional experience in the Czech Republic. Apart from these aspects, the processes operate on a very similar principle. The teacher receives the first title at the start of professional work. Every degree of promotion is preceded by preparing a plan of development, and the teacher must account for its fulfilment during the internship/ adaptation period. The receipt of the title is conditioned by a positive grade from the examination supervised by a committee having a similar composition.

3. Research Methodology

The survey was performed between November 2020 and February 2021 on a group of 80 respondents (teachers from Poland and the Czech Republic) in the form of a diagnostic survey using a signature CAWI questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised closed and open-ended questions. Given the small size of the sample, the survey was a pilot one. The survey's primary purpose was to identify the impact of professional promotion on the development of teachers' professional careers. To guarantee proper performance, a general research hypothesis was also formulated, the system of professional promotion dramatically contributes to the development of professional careers of teachers. The demographic data of the questionnaire included questions referring to the following features of the respondents: sex, age, place of work, and job seniority.

Table 1. Characteristics of study population (N=80)

Sex	Poland		Czech Republic	
	Number	%	Number	%
Women	37	92.5%	35	87.5%
Men	3	7.5%	5	12.5%
Age	Poland		Czech Republic	
	Number	%	Number	%
< 25 years of age	0	0%	0	0%
25-35 years of age	6	15%	11	27.5%
36-45 years of age	11	27.5%	10	25%
Above 45 years of age	23	57.5%	19	47.5%
Place of work:	Poland		Czech Republic	
	Number	%	Number	%
Village	1	2.5%	8	20%
City up to 50,000 residents	1	2.5%	13	32.5%

City from 50,000 to 200,000 residents	35	87.5%	12	30%
City from 200,000 to 500,000 residents	3	7.5%	7	17.5%
Job seniority in the teaching profession (number of years)	Poland		Czech Republic	
	Number	%	Number	%
<1	0	0%	2	5%
1-5	3	7.5%	4	10%
6-10	3	7.5%	4	10%
11-15	4	10 %	5	12.5%
16-20	4	10 %	12	32%
>20	26	65%	13	32.5%
Total	40	100%	40	100%

Source: Authors' own compilation based on the results of questionnaires.

Eighty respondents took part in the survey, forty from Poland and forty from the Czech Republic. The respondents' sex confirms that most teachers are women over 45 years of age working in cities. There are significant differences among the respondents as far as job seniority is concerned. The respondents from Poland predominantly have over 20 years of experience in the profession (65%). In the case of the Czech teachers, job seniority is slightly different. The teachers from the Czech Republic represent job seniority that can be divided into two groups: 32.5% are teachers with over 20 years of experience; a large group is also made of teachers with experience ranging between 16 and 20 years. Detailed characteristics of the study population are presented in Table No. 1. The object of the survey is the process of development of the professional career of teachers in Poland and the Czech Republic.

4. Results

The survey has shown significant differences in identifying the impact of professional promotion on professional careers among teachers in Poland and the Czech Republic. Polish teachers believe that the effort put into accomplishing the subsequent stages of professional development is significant, which is testified by 90% of the respondents. As a comparison, in the Czech Republic, most respondents believe that the effort to be devoted to accomplishing subsequent degrees of promotion is slight (22.5%) or average (50%). This results from the differences in the systems of professional promotion of teachers in both countries.

When asked about the primary motives of the professional promotion system, the respondents in both countries most often listed financial benefits. Positive answers were given by 87.5% of Polish and 80% of Czech respondents. The second motive indicated by Polish teachers was the desire for further education, which is confirmed by 67.5% of the respondents. Stimulation of activity (47.5%), acquisition of new knowledge (42.5%), and feeling of professional satisfaction (32.5%) are also advantages listed by the Polish teachers. In the Czech Republic, the system of professional promotion offers motivation to learn (37.5%), the feeling of professional

satisfaction (40%), and the acquisition of new knowledge (50%). Hence, it may be concluded that financial benefits are considered the main advantage of the professional promotion system by the Polish and Czech teachers.

The next question referred to the defects in the systems of professional promotion of teachers that are in force. In Poland, the responses selected most willingly by the respondents were: excess bureaucracy (85%), consumption of time (70%), lack of relationship with the teacher's accomplishments (50%), and lack of motivation for further improvement after gaining the highest level of promotion (42.5%). The options: too low financial incentive and no flaws in the system were chosen least frequently, by 8% and 2.5% of the respondents, respectively. On the other hand, the Czech respondents most frequently indicated a lack of relationship with the teacher's accomplishments (62.5%) and consumption of time (50%). As opposed to the Polish teachers, as many as 17.5% of Czechs believe their system is flawed. No respondent in either country claimed that the system had no flaws.

Concerning the evaluation of the current system of promotion functioning in both countries, the Polish system received better grades than the Czech one. However, it does not mean that the Polish respondents believe that the current system is ideal. The highest rate was given by only 5% of teachers, 4 points by 37.5%. Almost a half (47.5%) accessed the system at three on the scale from 1 to 5. No respondent decided to give it the lowest grade. The system functioning in the Czech Republic is completely different. 20% of the respondents chose to assign the lowest rate to it; 2 points were given by 25% of the respondents, while 3 points by 40% of the respondents. Positive steps, i.e., 4 and 5 points, were given by 12.5% and 2.5% of the respondents, respectively. Based on the received results, it may be concluded that the Czechs are not satisfied with the professional promotion system of teachers in their country. On the other hand, most Poles evaluate their system of promotion as good/ quite good: 3 and 4 on a scale from 1 to 5.

5. Conclusions

The results of the performed survey confirm that the Polish and Czech teachers are familiar with the principles of professional promotion. However, according to 65% of the Polish and 47% of Czech teachers, the path of professional advancement is not easy to complete. The effort that must be devoted to gaining subsequent degrees of advertising is significant, according to 57.5% of the respondents. Despite it, 97.5% of the respondents believe that it is worth striving to complete the subsequent stages of professional promotion. Even though the evaluation of the professional promotion system made by the Polish teachers was not too critical, most of the respondents believe that it requires changes.

Additionally, most respondents claimed that the changes should be thorough, as the system does not correspond to reality. Hence, conclusions can be drawn that the Polish teachers like the professional promotion system because it has clearly defined

principles. In the opinion of the Czech teachers, the current professional promotion system was not positively assessed; they see the necessity of changes.

Summing up the above, it may be concluded that in the opinion of the Polish and Czech teachers, professional promotion is a vital component of the professional career. Yet, in Poland, it plays a more critical role than in the Czech Republic, where it is undergoing integration.

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