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Public Policy and Public Administration in the Field of Education: A Comparative Analysis of Ukraine and Poland

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses the issues of public policy and public administration in the field of education in a comparative perspective of Poland and Ukraine, taking into account Ukraine's European integration course and the current security, social and economic challenges. The methodological rationale for choosing Poland as a reference model for Ukraine is substantiated by the common post-socialist legacy combined with different stages of institutionalisation of European education policy standards. Drawing on an analysis of recent publications devoted to the governance of general secondary and higher education, international quality assurance standards, the role of local self-government bodies, and the ability of education systems to respond to migration and humanitarian crises, the paper identifies a set of common factors of public governance in education in Poland and Ukraine and delineates the key differences between them. It is noted that both countries are building their education systems, taking into account EU documents, OECD recommendations, Bologna Process requirements, and international quality indicators and international standards, albeit with different levels of involvement. It is shown that both countries share such factors as the Europeanisation of legal and managerial frameworks, the massification of education, gradual decentralisation, a declared focus on quality, the use of external evaluation instruments and a growing importance of the local level of governance. At the same time, it is argued that the Polish model is characterised by a higher degree of institutional stability, a more mature culture of evidence-based policy and the real autonomy of educational institutions and local self-government, whereas the Ukrainian system operates under conditions of fragmented regulation, severe resource constraints and war-related shocks. On this basis, the main problems of public education management in Ukraine are outlined and directions for the adaptive use of Polish experience related to the stabilization of educational policy are formulated. Such as: an external evaluation system, quality assurance mechanisms, basic financing models; support for decentralization through training and professionalization of local management teams, institutionalization of the quality assurance system, strengthening the management capacity of territorial communities, and meaningful integration of migration and language dimensions into educational policy through mechanisms developed in the education system for the integration of migrants and refugees.



KEYWORDS

public policy, public administration, education sector, education policy, European Education Area, Poland, Ukraine.



Публічна політика і публічне управління у сфері освіти: компаративний аналіз України та Польщі

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У статті розглянуто проблематику публічної політики та публічного управління у сфері освіти в компаративному вимірі України та Польщі з урахуванням євроінтеграційного курсу нашої держави та сучасних викликів безпекового, соціального й економічного характеру. Обґрунтовано методологічну доцільність вибору Польщі як референтної моделі для України, оскільки обидві країни мають спільну постсоціалістичну спадщину, але перебувають на різних етапах інституціоналізації європейських стандартів освітньої політики. На основі аналізу публікацій останніх років, присвячених управлінню загальною середньою та вищою освітою, міжнародним стандартам забезпечення якості, ролі органів місцевого самоврядування, а також оцінці спроможності освітніх систем реагувати на міграційні та гуманітарні кризи, виокремлено блок спільних чинників публічного управління освітою в Україні та Польщі й окреслено ключові відмінності між ними. Показано, що до спільних чинників належать європеїзація правових та управлінських рамок, масифікація освіти, поступова децентралізація, орієнтація на якість, інструменти зовнішнього оцінювання та зростання ролі місцевого рівня управління. Водночас доведено, що польська модель вирізняється вищою інституційною стійкістю, більш розвиненою культурою доказової політики та реальною автономією закладів освіти й органів місцевого самоврядування, тоді як українська система функціонує в умовах нормативної фрагментованості, ресурсних обмежень та воєнних викликів. На цій основі окреслено основні проблеми публічного управління освітою в Україні й сформульовано напрями адаптивного використання польського досвіду, пов'язані зі стабілізацією освітньої політики. Такими як: система зовнішнього оцінювання, механізми забезпечення якості, базові моделі фінансування; підтримка децентралізації через навчання й професіоналізацію місцевих управлінських команд, інституціоналізація системи забезпечення якості, посилення управлінської спроможності територіальних громад і осмислена інтеграція міграційних та мовних вимірів в освітню політику за рахунок розроблених в системі освіти механізмів щодо інтеграції мігрантів та біженців.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

проблематика публічної політики, публічне управління, сфера освіти, освітня політика, європейський освітній простір, Польща, Україна.

1. Introduction

In the modern world, the system of education and science is the main institutional factor in the formation and development of the human potential of the nation and the state, which lays the basis and nature of the future state-building of our country. For the future post-war Ukraine, this is of critical importance as a key factor in the capacity of national reconstruction and European integration. Therefore, the discussion on the modernization of public administration in the field of education in Ukraine becomes important, which is unfolding in conditions when educational policy is ceasing to be an internal, "home" affair and is increasingly being integrated into the wider European context, which means that it requires constant comparisons, comparisons and borrowings. In this sense, our choice of Poland as a key point of reference does not look random, but rather methodologically determined: it is a state with a similar historical legacy of the socialist centralized model, with a similar demographic and regional structure, but with at least two decades of experience of EU membership, including active participation in the formation of the European educational space.

For Ukraine, which is simultaneously undergoing a deep internal transformation, a full-scale war, and the acceleration of European integration, it is the Polish trajectory of reforming the educational system that allows us to see which factors of public education management work stably in the conditions of European standards, which require political will and institutional capacity, and which, on the contrary, are prone to political fluctuations and social conflicts. That is why, in the post-war perspective, it will be very relevant for us to apply the comparative method to determine both the further steps of the Europeanization of the domestic education system and the peculiarities of introducing successful cases of the development of the Polish educational system and taking into account the wrong steps of our closest neighbors.

2. Literature Review

In the existing public scientific discourse of the last five years, a certain core of publications can be clearly traced, in which either the Polish and Ukrainian models of public education management are directly compared, or the Polish experience acts as a normative and analytical "starting point" for understanding Ukrainian reforms, which allows the researcher to build a line of common and distinctive factors. Thus, if we talk about those works where Poland and Ukraine are put in a direct or indirect comparative focus as objects of public administration in the field of education, it is first of all worth highlighting the article by M. Lakhizha [3], in which the author analyzes Polish reforms of higher education and science through the prism of massification of education, the impact of the Bologna process, digitalization, quality orientation and student-centrism, and then shows how these same factors act (or are still weaker) in the Ukrainian context, focusing on funding, autonomy of institutions, the positions of universities in rankings and human resources as key parameters in which Poland was able to move further thanks to more consistent state policies and more stable institutional rules.

An article by Y. Shypitsyna [7] is built on close logic, where a comparative analysis of public administration reforms in general secondary education in Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine is carried out. The researcher compares the degree of decentralization, digitalization of management processes, the ability of education systems to adapt to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the use of international measurements such as PISA for policy correction; against this background, the Ukrainian model appears as such, which shares the basic European benchmarks with Poland and the Czech Republic, but is significantly inferior in terms of the stability of institutions, resource provision and the ability of the authorities to implement the decisions made in wartime.

Noteworthy is the analytical material of A. Rachynskiy [6], where, through the analysis of European (in particular Polish) standards of education management, a kind of "matrix" of factors is built that equally determine the trajectories of reforms in Poland and Ukraine, but manifest themselves with different intensity; monograph O. Postupna [5], where a classification of efficiency factors is proposed, which is quite easy to "superimpose" on Polish works on educational policy to see both coincidences (focus on quality, strategic planning, strengthening the autonomy of schools and universities) and divergences (sustainability of institutions, depth of decentralization, real level of community participation).

In the Polish scientific discourse, it is worth highlighting the publications of A. Wróbel [9]; M. Nesterok [4]; A. Hesse-Gawęda [2]. Of particular interest to us from the point of view of the direct intersection of Polish and Ukrainian educational spaces is the article by A. Skorupa-Wulczyńska [8], where, using the example of the language of instruction of Ukrainian refugee children in Polish schools, it is traced how the Polish public administration implements (or does not fully realize) the declared language rights, what coordination tools are used by central and local authorities at the same time, as well as where exactly there are inconsistencies between legal norms and practices; This work, in fact, allows us to see the clash of two systems of public administration of education in a real situation of mass flow of students.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of this article is to carry out, based on the analysis of modern scientific publications, a comparative analysis of public policy and public administration in the field of education in Poland and Ukraine, to identify common and distinctive factors of their formation and implementation, to identify the key problems of the Ukrainian model of public education management and to determine possible directions for the adaptive use of Polish experience in the context of the European integration course of Ukraine.

4. Methods and Materials

When working out this scientific search, the dialectical method of cognition provided an opportunity to identify features, investigate the functions and principles of public policy and public administration in the field of education, and determine the relationships between the two countries. In combination with general scientific methods (analysis of the data obtained, their synthesis and a systematic approach to the study of the educational policy of countries), the following principles of scientific comprehension are applied, on which this study is based and they are organically combined: the historical principle, which provides for the study of public policy and public administration in the field of education in Poland and Ukraine and helps to outline the historical aspects of the development of political phenomena in these countries, and the comparative-analytical principle was applied to identification of common factors of public management of education of both countries and outlines the key differences between them.

5. Results and Discussion

Ukraine's European integration course, enshrined in constitutional provisions and reinforced by the status of a candidate state, shifts the issue of public administration of education from the plane of purely internal reforms to the plane of adaptation to the complex of European policies in the field of education, science, youth and employment. As A. Rachynskyi [6] convincingly proves, "Ukraine's cooperation with the EU in the field of public management of educational institutions is, first of all, the transformation of the existing education program in the direction of compliance with European standards of secondary education, as well as the borrowing of European principles of education" [6, p. 1295].

Today, it is the international standards for ensuring public management of educational institutions in the EU countries, first of all, the legal requirements for transparency, accountability, quality assurance mechanisms and the participation of external stakeholders that set the framework within which Ukrainian educational policy should move if it claims to be compatible with the European system, and not only to formally approach it. Poland has successfully passed this path and today this framework has already become part of the internal political and managerial discourse: as A. Wróbel [9] shows, modern Polish educational policy is increasingly conceptualized not as a "sectoral" or "educational-pedagogical" activity, but as a full-fledged public policy, with its own categories of goals, tools, actors, political conflicts and evaluation mechanisms [9, p. 251–252]. Such a shift is also important for Ukraine – it forces us to see in a new way the relationship between public authorities, educational institutions, professional communities and the parent and student community as participants not just in the educational process, but in broader public policy.

If we try to single out the common factors that today determine the logic of public administration of education in Poland and Ukraine, then first of all, it is worth mentioning the process of Europeanization of legal and managerial frameworks. Both Poland and Ukraine, albeit with different depths of involvement, are building their education systems taking into account EU documents, OECD recommendations, the requirements of the Bologna process, and international quality indicators and international standards, which in Poland are successfully transformed into specific management practices – from external evaluation systems to accreditation algorithms and stakeholder participation mechanisms. Ukraine is also trying to follow these approaches, although often still at the level of normative proclamation, but already consolidating the relevant terminology and institutional architecture. In this sense, both countries live in the same discursive field: they talk about the quality of education, the competence approach, student-centrism, inclusivity, digitalization, the autonomy of institutions and accountability to society.

The second unifying block of factors is the massification of education and the associated requirement to combine expanding access with maintaining quality standards. At the level of regional educational systems, O. Postupna [5] shows that Ukrainian education, as well as Polish education, is experiencing tension between demographic changes, urbanization processes, expansion of the range of educational services and limited resources, with regional and local levels of government becoming a space, where this tension materializes in the form of decisions to reorganize the network, close rural schools, create pivotal institutions or change the status of universities. Similar processes took place in Poland, when, as a result of decentralization, communes became key responsible for the maintenance of schools and decision-making regarding their network; thus, in both Poland and Ukraine, it is the local level that is transformed in the arena, where public education management collides with the expectations of parents, professional groups and local elites, and political decisions acquire very specific spatial dimensions.

The third common factor is related to the gradual decentralization of education management and the strengthening of the role of territorial communities. The study by L. Danylenko and N. Larina [1] demonstrates how a complex of administrative, organizational, coordination and control functions in the field of management of educational institutions is formed in Ukrainian territorial communities. Y. Shypitsyna [7] notes similar accents in Polish regions, where communes not only finance and maintain schools, but also form a local educational policy that combines the requirements of state standards with the peculiarities of the local labor market, demography and social structure. As a result, “the focus on decentralization, innovations in the training of teachers and ensuring the financial independence of educational institutions contributed to the modernization of the education system in Poland and made it one of the most progressive in the region” [7, p. 102].

At the same time, even these common trends are manifested in Poland and Ukraine in fundamentally different institutional contexts, and it is here that a block of differences begins to emerge clearly. Polish educational policy, as described by A. Wróbel [9], functions within a stable framework of EU membership, where even in the presence of acute internal conflicts around the reform of the school structure, changes in programs or the role of the religious component. The Polish system preserves the basic parameters of institutional stability: the stability of the examination system, the predictability of funding, and a developed infrastructure for external evaluation and supervision. The Ukrainian system is forced to simultaneously perform three difficult tasks: to overcome the legacy of excessive centralization and regulatory overregulation, to adapt to European standards, and to respond to military challenges that undermine both the resource base and the human resources of education.

Another key difference is the different levels of *de facto* autonomy of educational institutions and the traditions of academic and school self-government. Polish schools and universities, despite the rather strict state regulation of standards, have significant space for the formation of their own educational programs, internal organization and cooperation with stakeholders [4]. This is clearly visible, for example, in the practices of implementing the language rights of students and their parents: a study by A. Skorupa-Wulczyńska [8] demonstrates how Polish schools, together with the authorities, are trying to ensure the language rights of Ukrainian children under temporary protection, combining the requirement of integration with the possibility of supporting their native language, but they face a lack of clear procedures, insufficient coordination between levels of government and limited resources. The Ukrainian system, in turn, declaring the right to education in the native language and to integration into the European space, it is not always possible to ensure even the basic continuity of the educational process in the context of military migration and distance learning. In addition, the declared autonomy

of Ukrainian universities remains critically low, which is why “in Ukraine it is not possible to effectively apply the Polish experience of reforming higher education, which primarily concerns the financing of education and science and ensuring the autonomy of universities” [3].

Another line of discrepancies is related to the maturity of the culture of assessment and the evidence of educational policy. In Poland, the tools of external examinations, inspections, and regular quality monitoring have become an integral part of public policy in education and, despite criticism, perform the function of producing data for political decisions and public discussion. In Ukraine, according to experts' observations, quantitative and qualitative data often exist in a scattered form, are not integrated into unified information systems and are not always the starting point for managerial decisions; Many reforms are launched as political projects, and their effectiveness is evaluated after the fact, with large gaps in the empirical base.

Against this background, the problems of Ukrainian public administration in education can be outlined as a multi-level complex in which structural, regulatory, resource and cultural factors mutually reinforce each other. At the regulatory level, we are talking about the fragmentation of legislation and bylaws, frequent changes in the rules of the game, the imposition of various reform waves – from the competence school to new standards of higher education, which creates a situation of chronic reform for governing bodies and institutions without completed evaluation cycles. At the institutional level, as studies of regional educational systems demonstrate, there is often a lack of clearly distributed powers and responsibilities between central bodies, regional structures, communities and administrations of institutions, as a result of which key decisions (network optimization, distribution of funding, placement of inclusive resource centers) are made in the context of conflict between levels of government and without sufficient involvement of stakeholders. At the resource level, the war and chronic underfunding exacerbate old deficits: not only is there a lack of funds for infrastructure modernization, but there is also a threat of staff loss, professional burnout of teachers, and a sharp deepening of regional and social inequalities in access to quality education.

6. Conclusions

The Polish experience, perceived not as a “ready-made model” but as a laboratory of solutions from which individual practices can be selectively borrowed, allows us to outline several areas of potential lessons for Ukraine. Firstly, it is the development of a stable, long-term framework of educational policy, in which the key structural elements – the external evaluation system, quality assurance mechanisms, basic funding models – are protected from short-term political fluctuations and are not revised every time a new government team arrives. This is the resilience demonstrated by the Polish system of examinations, inspections and accreditation, which relies on clear procedures and institutions, rather than one-time campaigns.

Secondly, it is systemic support for decentralization through the training and professionalization of local management teams in the field of education: Polish communes, having received powers in the field of schools, simultaneously went through institutional building and competence development, while Ukrainian communities are often left alone with new functions without sufficient methodological, financial and analytical support; experience described by L. Danylenko and N. Larina [1], can be correlated with Polish practices to see which elements (from the network planning system to public participation procedures) need to be strengthened in the first place.

Thirdly, it is worth paying attention to the Polish mechanisms for integrating migrants and refugees into the education system, even taking into account their contradictions and imperfections, described by A. Skorupa-Wulczyńska [8]. These mechanisms, which include additional language classes, adaptation classes, and special procedures for receiving and accompanying children, demonstrate that linguistic and cultural rights can be the subject of meaningful educational policies, and not just declarative promises.

For Ukraine, which is experiencing large-scale internal and external migration, including the relocation of its own citizens to EU countries, the experience of institutionalizing such policies can become material for building its own programs of integration, reintegration and support for educational continuity. Finally, an important Polish lesson is the understanding of educational policy as a public policy in the full sense of the word: with open discussion, conflicts, public debates, a system of expert support for decisions, and this is the dimension that Ukrainian educational policy is just beginning to

master, going beyond purely bureaucratic regulation and moving to a more transparent, inclusive format.

Summing up, we can say that the comparison of public education management in Poland and Ukraine is important for us not as another comparative “ritual”, but as a way to see how societies similar in terms of starting conditions ended up at different stages of implementation of European standards in the field of education. Such common factors as Europeanization, massification, decentralization, quality orientation and stakeholder participation create the basis for mutual understanding and policy dialogue, while the differences – the level of institutional stability, the maturity of the assessment culture, the real degree of autonomy of institutions and the capacity of local self-government – show where exactly Ukrainian educational policy needs the greatest concentration of efforts. Turning to the Polish experience through the prism of recent publications provides not so much ready-made recipes as an idea of how to gradually build a sustainable, open and evidence-based system of public education management, capable of simultaneously fulfilling European obligations and responding to unprecedented internal challenges related to the war, demographic shifts and transformation of the labor market. This is the main meaning of such a comparison for Ukraine, which seeks not only to catch up with Europe, but to become one of the full-fledged co-creators of its educational space.

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