
CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE

TRENDS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION OF TEACHERS IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Continuing education of teachers is one of the most important challenges in the educational policy of the European Union. Primary education and professional development of teachers are considered as strategic factors in the achievement of educational indicators in the 2020 perspective. The article presents the main concepts that characterize continuous education on the background of the concept of continuous education. The provisions on education and professional development of teachers in European educational systems have been analyzed on the basis of research reports, strategies and communications from the Council and the European Commission. There is a growing awareness and sense that improving the quality of general and vocational education cannot take place without taking into account changes in teacher education and training. The level of professional qualifications of teachers is quite high, but initiatives are needed to improve teachers' professional competences, especially in the area of pedagogical and practical education. The challenge remains to work towards the professional integration of young teachers and – as a result – to limit the outflow of teachers from the profession. This is closely related to the promotion of solutions that will help teachers develop their competence potential and gain new experiences through various forms of professional development. This also applies to non-formal learning and recognition of its effects.

Key words: continuing education; education system; teacher; vocational training .

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technologies and techniques in the twentieth century meant that currently we are dealing with civilization of excess data, information and knowledge that the average person can perceive as information chaos, cognitive, ethical and aesthetic relativism, anarchy, loss of existing support in cognition and valuation. These indicators of a specific «confusion» of modern man – according to many opinion-forming circles – are to confirm the need to build a *knowledge-based society* or, in the opinion of others, post-industrial, global, network, information society etc. (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 2008, p. 29). In a knowledge-based society, social development is determined by *knowledge and information*, and key activities are the production, storage, processing, transmission, downloading and use of information. The functionality of a knowledge-based society is measured by the degree of dissemination of scientific knowledge and the awareness of the importance of qualifications development. This affects the continuing education of contemporary teachers.

In the light of current international trends in the development of education, it is justified, according to Czesław Kupisiewicz (2005), to prepare not only more but also *other* teachers. Modern teachers need to be better prepared to work in constantly changing economic, social and political conditions, sensitive to the fact that today's students differ in many respects from their peers from a dozen or so years ago, because childhood is now more related to “television”, “computers” and “loneliness” (Kupisiewicz Cz. 2005, p. 157). Writing about the need for changes in the teaching education system, Czesław Kupisiewicz also draws attention to the need for building an efficient and flexible system of continuing education, teacher development and training, taking into account the rapidly changing educational demands of the society and adapted to work in equally rapidly changing conditions (Kupisiewicz, 2005, p. 160).

Today's teachers face very different tasks than those did in industrial society. They require a number of skills that diverge from the image of a typical teacher. Jolanta Szempruch formulates the following *teaching tasks* resulting from changes taking place in social and educational reality (Szempruch, 2012, p. 185): “preparing students for living in the conditions of a changing civilization and in democracy; shaping social capital in a school aimed at the development of agency, cooperation and reflection; development of civic activity of pupils and adults; building social bonds and trust; (self)formation of the personality of learners; developing the identity of students, their individual self-awareness, awareness of continuing and remaining themselves in the changing conditions of life, awareness of participation in social groups, self-concept, as well as the ability to interpersonal and group comparisons; shaping the cultural community and participation in culture; learning how to function in a multicultural environment and to cooperate with others; solving issues by negotiating with participants in school life; introducing students to the world of values; preparation for lifelong learning; preparation for using information resources; shaping problem solving skills; providing social and professional advice”.

We will not find here a standard “transfer of knowledge” and traditional “development of abilities and skills necessary to explore the world”. We enter a completely different level of educational relations between the teacher and the

student. The description of key competences and the state of various areas of education presented in subsequent educational reports generates a different view of the *functions and roles of the contemporary teacher and his professional competences*. Today's teacher moves in the world of modern technologies, methods of knowledge management, operates in a school as a learning organisation, supports the development of their students, shows opportunities, discovers potential, creates a space for communication with the school and non-school environments. He is a guide and adviser of students in building their own identity, but also helps to find a place in a family, school, peer, local, regional, European and global community. Teacher helps to become a citizen of the country, Europe and the world. It is a responsible task requiring enormous effort, intellectual and social potential, pedagogical professionalism (Kamińska, 2013, p. 788).

CONTINUING EDUCATION OF TEACHERS AND THE QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

An important role in the implementation of new teaching tasks is fulfilled by a well-organised and effective system of continuous vocational education and training. *Continuing education and training* in the countries of the European Union has been recognised several years ago as one of the educational priorities. The concept of “*Life Long Learning*”, initiated by the Bologna strategy in 2000, became the main slogan. Under this concept are “all activities aimed at improving the level of knowledge, skills and competences in a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective” (Development Strategy..., 2003, p. 7). The idea of *Life Long Learning* concerns both individual development and the development of social features in all forms and contexts, in the *formal, informal and non-formal* system. The emphasis is on encouraging learning throughout life, from early childhood” (Development Strategy..., 2003, p. 7). Continuing learning is part of this concept for adults and is understood as a complex of educational processes: formal, informal and incidental, which, regardless of the content, level and methods allow completing education in school and out-of-school forms, thanks to which adults develop their skills, enrich knowledge, improve professional qualifications or acquire a new profession, change their attitudes (Development Strategy..., 2003, p. 7).

In the European Commission Communication of March 2010 under the slogan *EUROPA 2020. The strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* indicated that “the implementation of the *lifelong learning* (LLL) principle requires action adapting vocational and continuing learning to the needs of the labour market and knowledge-based economy” (Commission Communication..., 2010). According to the definition adopted by the European Commission, continuing education and training is “education or training after completing initial education and training, or after entering the labour market, aimed at enabling individuals to: 1. develop or update knowledge and/or skills; 2. acquire new skills for career development or retraining; 3. continue personal or professional development” (European Commission, 2015, p. 151).

The *Strategy* stresses the need to modernise the *teacher's vocational training system*, it was proposed, among others, to “introduce periodic training for teachers in the field of modern vocational education methods and modern

techniques and technologies, including internships or apprenticeships in enterprises, and to strengthen activities for the official recognition of informal and non-formal learning” (Commission Communication ..., 2010). Informal and non-formal learning have a slightly different dimension than formal learning, but all three forms are recognised as necessary in the effective lifelong learning of every person. *Formal learning* “is implemented in an organised and structured environment, designed specifically for this purpose and usually leads to obtaining certain qualifications, usually in the form of a certificate and diploma” (European Commission, 2015, p. 154). Formal education refers to a specific age of learners - from 5–7 years to 20–25 years. It is provided by a system of schools, colleges, universities and other institutions of formal education. *Informal learning* “results from everyday activity at work, in the family or during leisure time. The effect of informal learning is skills acquired as a result of life or professional experience, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work or outside work, language skills and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, as well as skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work or activities performed at home, e.g. child care” (European Commission, 2015, p. 154). *Non-formal learning* is organised and lasting educational activities that take place both in educational institutions and outside them and are addressed to people of all ages (as opposed to formal education). They can be used to help with learning, transferring professional skills, life skills or in the field of general culture. They may include adult education programs as well as children and youth education programs (European Commission, 2015, p. 154–155).

All of these forms apply to teacher training and continuing education. Both formal education of candidates for the profession, as well as non-formal and informal education of teachers should constitute the complementary process of continuing education of this professional group. *Formal teacher education* is an indispensable and key foundation for future school work, but without constant and systematic *upgrading of qualifications* and *updating and modernising professional competences*, one cannot speak about improving the quality of education and adapting its effects to the requirements of a modern knowledge-based society. European committees indicate the need for cooperation between EU countries in favour of “strong support for teachers, trainers, educational leaders and other educational staff by increasing the attractiveness and rank of the teaching profession, supporting the recruitment of the most suitable candidates and supporting professional development for teachers and improving teaching” (Joint Council and Commission Report, 2015). The quality of teacher education – also referred to as *initial education* (European Commission, 2015, p. 31) – and the effective provision of support to teachers starting their work in the profession has been recognised in the European community as an integral part of education policy in this area. Initial education should take into account “a balanced and coherent attitude to the theoretical knowledge of the subject, its skilful teaching and practical experience” (Joint Council and Commission Report, 2015). *Professional integration* support for beginning teachers is mainly the organisation of *professional internships and mentoring* on the part of experienced teachers. This is to prevent the outflow from the profession of (not only young) teachers, and to contribute to the real increase in educational indicators to be achieved in the perspective of 2020. According to the Eurydice

report of 2015, “two-thirds of teachers in Europe are over 40 years old, and about 40 percent in this profession will retire in the next 15 years. Without taking actions to recruit new teachers, there will probably be no candidates in countries with a clearly aging teacher population” (Joint Council and Commission Report, 2015).

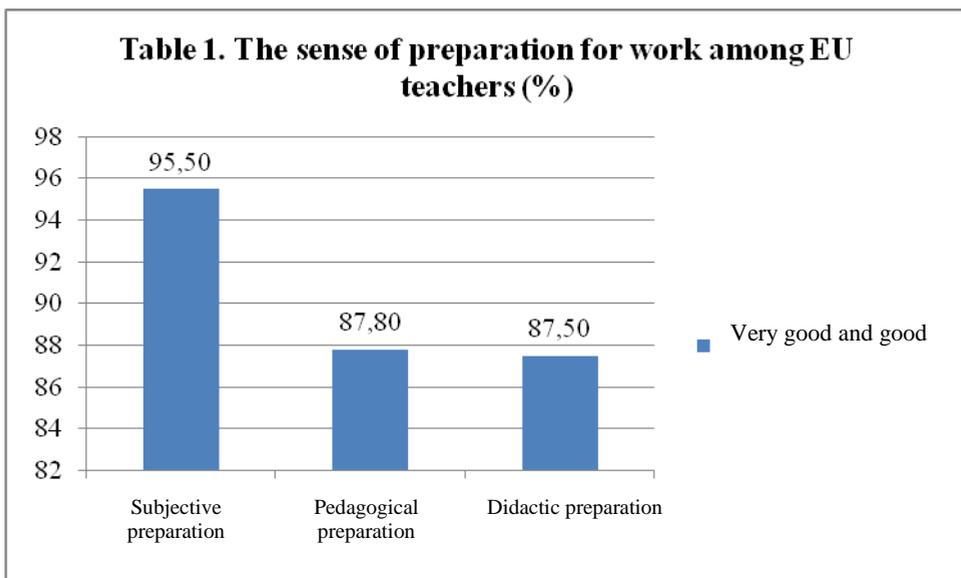
Therefore, the EU strategy for teachers assumes, first and foremost, intensive actions towards “renewing professional skills” through: renewing the recruitment and selection of candidates for the profession, adopting a teacher retention strategy, increasing the effectiveness of teacher education, while strengthening the role of internships and mentoring, and the introduction of more flexible and personalised forms of cooperation to vocational training, as well as linking professional development with the prospects of teachers' career development and school development plans. The priority is also to provide teachers with “opportunities to update subject knowledge as well as support and training in effective and innovative teaching methods, including methods based on new technologies” (Joint Council and Commission Report, 2015).

TRENDS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION OF TEACHERS IN EUROPE

EU member states undertake a number of activities aimed at improving the state of continuing education of teachers. It is emphasised that the education and professional development of teachers and trainers should be tailored to the goal and combine the *subject of teaching, pedagogy and practice*. The development in appropriate staff – at all levels and in all sectors of education and training – of high pedagogical skills and competences, based on sound scientific research and practice, remains a priority. The staff should be trained to respond to the individual needs of learners and the growing diversity - in the social, cultural, economic and geographical dimensions – of the environments from which these learners come; to prevent early school leaving and to optimally use innovative pedagogical methods and ICT tools, while benefiting from the initial training at the time of starting a career (Joint Council and Commission Report, 2015).

The Eurydice report data show that most teachers in the European Union feel that they are well or very well prepared for work – in all three components of initial (formal) education. In this respect, the best subject (substantive) education regarding the *content of teaching* falls out. A slightly smaller percentage of teachers feel well prepared *in terms of pedagogy and practice* (Table 1). In initial teacher education there are two models: the so-called *step model* and *parallel model*.

The first one consists in the fact that pedagogical preparation (theoretical and practical) takes place after graduation in a specific direction. In the second model, pedagogical preparation (theoretical and practical) takes place at the same time as general education. The duration of pedagogical preparation is on average a year of full-time education, which corresponds to 60 ECTS credits. Interestingly, in Ireland, France and Iceland it lasts twice as long (parallel model), and in such countries as: Bulgaria, Austria (parallel model), Poland, Portugal, Romania, Montenegro and Serbia it is shorter than the equivalent of 40 ECTS (European Commission, 2015, p. 32).

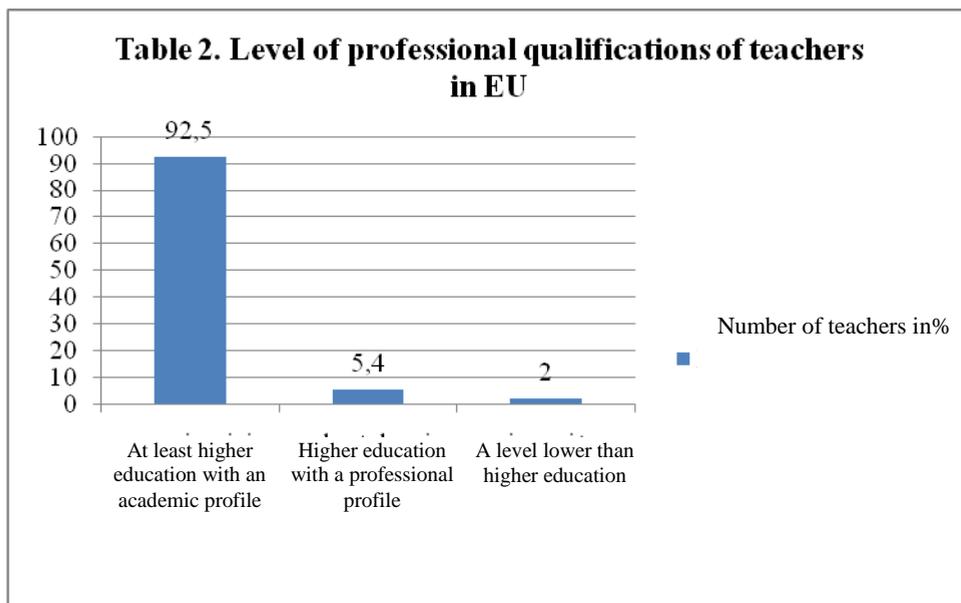


Source: (European Commission, 2015, p. 41).

School practices are understood as a practical part of pedagogical preparation, carried out in a real work environment, which usually last no longer than a few weeks. They are supervised by a designated teacher and are subject to periodic appraisal by teachers employed in a teaching institution (university) (European Commission, 2015, p. 123). Their duration corresponds on average to 25 ECTS. In Montenegro, no school practices are carried out at all, and in countries such as Bulgaria (parallel model), Estonia, Austria (parallel model), Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, Turkey, the number of ECTS points is 15 or less.

The diagnosis of the *qualification levels obtained by teachers in EU countries* shows that the vast majority have qualifications corresponding to at least the first stage of academic higher education studies with an academic profile (bachelor). Only a small percentage has qualifications at the level of higher vocational education or qualifications lower than higher education (Table 2). Over 91% of teachers completed initial education. The highest percentage was recorded in Poland – 99.4% teachers, and the lowest in Serbia – 71.4%. Countries such as: Czech Republic, Italy and Serbia still have a fairly high percentage of teachers without initial education, i.e. unqualified teachers or those with only a qualification from the subject field of study without pedagogical preparation.

An important stage in the continuing education of teachers is the stage of *professional integration*, which is the transition period between the completion of initial teacher education and the beginning of work in the profession. In line with the European trend, “the teaching profession should be seen as a gradual process encompassing education, professional integration and further training. The moment when teachers who have just completed their education pass from this stage to the profession is seen as crucial for later involvement and professional development and for reducing the number of teachers who leave the profession” (European Commission, 2015, p. 42).



Source: (European Commission, 2015, p. 41).

Professional integration takes place primarily in the form of *teacher internships*, which are an organised stage of support provided to beginning teachers after completing the formal education program. During the internship, novice teachers carry out all tasks or part of tasks that are the responsibility of experienced teachers and receive remuneration for their work. The internship usually includes training and assessment, and a *mentor* is appointed to provide the novice teacher with personal, social and professional support within an organised system. The internship stage lasts at least several months and may take place during the trial period of employment (European Commission, 2015, p. 124).

Among the 32 European countries involved in Eurydice Network actions under the Life Long Learning program, *novice teachers* have access to an organised introductory program in 17 countries, usually directly after obtaining a university degree. In many countries (e.g. Netherlands, Iceland, Poland, Czech Republic) there are no so-called national introductory programs (data from the 2011/2012 school year), but schools often organise periods of support for their new employees (European Commission, 2013, p. 39). *Introductory programs* are organised in many different ways. In most countries, the introductory program is a compulsory phase that includes the final exam. Beginning teachers have to get a positive final grade to get the formal qualifications necessary to pursue the teaching profession. However, in Estonia and Slovenia, the introductory program is optional. In most countries, it applies to teachers at all levels of education in general education; however, in Malta and Austria, the introductory program is not provided for all teachers at all levels of education. In France, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and the United Kingdom, the introductory stage is also considered a trial period and, in these cases, affects the possibility of permanent employment (European Commission, 2013, p. 40). If the introductory phase ends with an exam, it is carried out by the headmaster or the examination board at the school management level. In Ireland and

Scotland (UK), the teaching council is actively involved in the final grade. In the majority of cases, there is cooperation with teacher training institutions in conducting exams, although the scope of this cooperation may vary (European Commission, 2013, p. 39–40).

Vocational training is another important component of teachers' continuing education. It is understood as "participation in formal or non-formal education, which may take place in the form of subject courses (in the field of subjects taught) or pedagogical courses. In some cases, these activities may lead to further qualifications" (European Commission, 2015, p.122). The European strategy for improving the quality of education is one of the most important priorities. In the face of the rapid pace of changes in information and communication technologies, the progress of science in the field of learning and the changing global socio-cultural conditions, the possession and maintenance of appropriate competences by teachers determines the effectiveness of educational interactions in the modern school. One of the communications of the European Council (Council Conclusions on Effective..., 2014) highlights the need to adapt vocational development to changes in teaching and learning and to foster interdisciplinary and cooperative attitudes as well as digital competences and the use of open educational resources. A more flexible approach to vocational training is recommended, in which adult learning methods based on practice, online learning and mutual learning are used. At the same time, attention is drawn to the need to train teachers in effective and innovative teaching methods.

In European countries, vocational training may be treated as a *professional obligation* of a teacher as a *criterion for career advancement* or as an optional activity (e.g. in Finland it is optional for teachers working at ISCED 0 level in nurseries/kindergartens). In 28 education systems it is considered mandatory. According to the 2013 Eurydice report, 6 countries precisely specify the minimum number of hours teachers should spend in continuing professional training courses - from 8 to 64 hours per year (Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Finland). In the 2015 report, it already lists 10 countries (European Commission, 2015, p. 69). In some countries, participation in the minimum level of vocational training is essential for retaining one's profession. In others (Netherlands, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (Scotland)) the minimum number of hours of continuing professional development is treated as a privilege to which the teacher has the right. In several countries, where vocational training is considered an obligation, teachers are encouraged to participate by making them professionally dependent. In Bulgaria, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia, vocational training is a must and a prerequisite for career development and salary increases. In Denmark, Ireland, Greece, France, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, the involvement of teachers in vocational training is not included in the scope of professional duties. However, in France and Poland, vocational training is clearly linked to career development. In all other education systems, even if professional development is not clearly required for promotion, it remains an important asset. In many countries, participation in vocational training is considered an additional asset during teacher evaluation (European Commission, 2013, p. 57–58).

In seven European education systems, certain types of vocational training or a specific number of hours of education are treated as a prerequisite for *maintaining the degree of promotion*. In Hungary, for example, all teachers are required to complete 120 hours of continuous training every seven years to stay in their profession. In Romania, it is required that each teacher accumulates at least 90 professional points every 5 years. Sometimes, after the introduction of new regulations, it is necessary for certain groups of teachers to complete certain professional development courses. For example, in Sweden, after approving new qualification requirements under the Education Act (2010), teachers who did not meet the new requirements had to complete certain professional development courses in order to remain in the teaching profession (European Commission 2013, p. 60).

All educational systems offer a certain type of *financial support for the professional development* of teachers. This depends on specific criteria and guidelines but is usually only required for professional development to be agreed with and confirmed by the school's management. There are three main ways of supporting vocational training. These include covering the costs of training entities as part of vocational training, granting financial resources to schools or direct reimbursement of costs to individual teachers (European Commission, 2013, p. 62). For example, in Belgium (French Community), Italy, Cyprus and Portugal, compulsory vocational training is free. In 24 European education systems, schools receive funding from public authorities to pay for their teachers' professional development. In some countries there is a specific amount for career development; in other schools, they can freely decide what part of the budget they spend for this purpose. In 10 education systems, financial support measures are granted directly to individual teachers. In countries such as: Belgium, Estonia, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Slovenia, Lithuania, teachers can apply for public funding to cover fees for vocational training classes not offered by schools, education authorities or other public institutions. In Netherlands, teachers can only expect travel costs related to improvement and can apply for a grant for professional development, including doctoral studies (European Commission, 2013, p. 63).

Financial support is one of the most important factors conducive to teachers' professional development. In addition, there are various *incentives* to influence teachers' participation in improvement. These include financial incentives, such as an increase in pay and additional benefits for teachers without changing their grade or rank, professional promotion, maintenance of a given degree of professional promotion, or professional mobility or transfer to another school (European Commission, 2015, p. 75). The main *barriers* to the participation of teachers in professional development on a European scale include: trainings colliding with a professional course plan, non-adaptation of the offer, family responsibilities, costs, lack of employer support, no prerogatives, no incentives (European Commission, 2015, p. 81). In Poland, continuous professional development is considered an indispensable condition for career advancement and increase, however, the professional development system for teachers is relatively limited. Despite the widespread use of various forms of lifelong learning, teachers claim that they cannot fully use new skills at the workplace, because the available training is not adapted to their needs or schools do not

provide sufficient support, including financial support (*Monitor of education and training 2016 – Poland*).

Most teachers in European education systems signal *moderate level of needs* in the different thematic areas of vocational training. Although these needs do not reach a high level in any country, teachers from Italy, Bulgaria, Estonia, Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Iceland stand out above the EU average. The low level of needs is characterised by teachers from the United Kingdom, Belgium (Flemish Community) and Poland (European Commission, 2015, p. 56). The key *thematic areas* of professional development indicated by teachers are: 1) teaching students with special educational needs, 2) skills related to ICT in teaching, 3) new technologies in the workplace, 4) methods of individualised education 5) teaching cross-curricular skills. Relatively the smallest demand concerns such areas as: knowledge and understanding of subject areas taught, management and administration at school, knowledge of the curriculum (European Commission, 2015, p. 58). In Poland, teachers most often point to a high level of needs in the following areas: work with class, multi-curricular teaching, teaching skills and the use of new technologies (*Education and Training Monitor 2016 – Poland*). The most popular *form of professional development* among European teachers are *courses* or *workshops*. Subsequently, the following are mentioned: individual or team research in the area of professional interests; educational conferences or seminars; participation in teacher networks created specifically for vocational training purposes; mentoring, peer observation and coaching as part of formal school activities; programs leading to qualifications; observational visits in other schools; vocational training courses or visits for observation in enterprises, public institutions and non-governmental organisations. Indicators of *teachers' participation in professional development* in individual countries are at different levels, e.g. in Iceland and Latvia over 50% of teachers declared participation in observational visits in other schools, in Croatia over 62% – participation in teacher networks, and in Slovakia the highest percentage concerned mentoring, peer observation and coaching. The teachers from Romania and Spain as well as Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Portugal develop the *most intensively* (in terms of the number of days per year and the number of thematic areas). *The poorest indicator* is obtained in teachers from Belgium (Flemish Community) (European Commission, 2015, p. 67).

CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis of the data on continuing education of teachers in Europe prompts a few reflections. We see the aspiration of most countries to implement the idea of lifelong learning, to monitor systemic actions to improve and develop continuing education of teachers. There is a growing awareness and sense that improving the quality of general and vocational education cannot take place without taking into account changes in teacher education and training. The level of professional qualifications of teachers is quite high, but initiatives are needed to improve teachers' professional competences, especially in the area of pedagogical and practical education. The challenge remains to work towards the professional integration of young teachers and – as a result – to limit the outflow of teachers from the profession. This is closely related to the promotion

of solutions that will help teachers develop their competence potential and gain new experiences through various forms of professional development. This also applies to non-formal learning and recognition of its effects. It also seems necessary to take measures to strengthen the sharing of good practices in continuing education of teachers not only at the national but also international level. The implementation of the priority concerning mobility and international exchange of teachers from different countries may serve this purpose. It is also important to increase the digital competence of teachers, that – as is clear from many educational studies – significantly translates into expanding education and lifelong learning opportunities, as well as improving the quality of education.

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ТЕНДЕНЦІ НЕПЕРЕРВНОЇ ОСВІТИ ВЧИТЕЛІВ У ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ ОСВІТНІХ СИСТЕМАХ

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Неперервна освіта вчителів є одним із найбільш важливих викликів в освітній політиці Європейського Союзу. Початкова освіта та вдосконалення професійної кваліфікації вчителів розглядаються як стратегічні чинники у досягненні освітніх показників у перспективі 2020 року. У статті представлені основні поняття, що характеризують безперервне навчання на тлі концепції неперервної освіти. Положення про освіту та професійний розвиток вчителів у європейських освітніх системах було проаналізовано на основі звітів досліджень, стратегій та повідомлень Ради та Європейської Комісії. Зростає поінформованість і відчуття, що покращення якості загальної та професійної освіти не може відбуватися без врахування змін у навчанні та підготовці вчителів. Рівень професійної кваліфікації викладачів досить високий, але необхідні ініціативи для підвищення професійної компетентності вчителів, особливо у сфері педагогічної та практичної освіти. Досліджено сучасний стан професійної інтеграції молодих вчителів, що призводить до обмеження відтоку вчителів з цієї професії. Зазначено про необхідність приймати негайні рішення на державному рівні, які допоможуть вчителям розвивати свій компетентний потенціал і отримувати новий досвід. Серед таких заходів автор виділяє різні форми професійного розвитку (найбільш популярною формою професійного розвитку серед європейських викладачів є курси або семінари), а також урахування неформального навчання та визнання його наслідків. Необхідно також вживати заходів для посилення обміну досвідом у продовженні освіти вчителів на національному та міжнародному рівні через поширення мобільності та міжнародного обміну викладачами з різних країн. Важливо також підвищити цифрові компетенції вчителів, що значною мірою призводить до розширення можливостей навчання протягом життя, а також покращення якості освіти.

Ключові слова: вчитель; неперервна освіта; професійне навчання; освітня система.

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