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Exploring the Teacher's Role in Interwar Poland: Findings from Zygmunt Kukulski's Unpublished Research

ABSTRACT

Following Poland's independence, the educational landscape faced many challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, disparate educational systems and curricula inherited from the partitioning powers, and financial constraints. Among the most serious problems was a shortage of well-trained teaching staff. Educational authorities sought to remedy this shortfall by establishing a network of teachers' seminaries to cultivate a proficient workforce for the education sector.

The interwar period witnessed heightened scholarly interest in teachers as a distinct social group. Efforts were made to learn not only about their socio-economic backgrounds, educational qualifications, and professional training, but also their psychological predispositions and attitudes towards their profession and students. Zygmunt Kukulski, a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin who was instrumental in this research movement, collaborated with fellow scholars to develop an extensive questionnaire aimed at teachers. Despite remaining unexplored, these questionnaires serve as a valuable resource for understanding the teaching profession during the interwar period.

The purpose of this article is to shed light on the depiction of teachers in interwar Poland through the lens of Kukulski's unpublished research. Drawing on a collection of 289 questionnaires housed at the University Library of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, this study employs these primary sources as its principal research material.

KEYWORDS
teachers, interwar period, schooling, education, Zygmunt Kukulski

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Introduction

The interwar period in Poland was marked by intensive socio-political changes that affected all areas of life, including education. After regaining independence in 1918, Poland faced the monumental task of rebuilding its educational system, which had been largely neglected during more than a century of partitions. In the early years of independence, Polish schools faced many problems, such as a lack of school facilities, shortages of experienced teaching staff, financial constraints, and curricular disparities resulting from the country's prior political situation. Thus, Polish teachers bore the responsibility of adapting to a new educational system rooted in national and patriotic values. The introduction of the Polish language as the medium of instruction and the adaptation of the curricula to the realities of the newly independent state were given priority in this process. The role of teachers during this era was pivotal, as they were tasked with shaping the young generation in the spirit of an independent Poland.

Issues related to education during the Second Polish Republic have long been, and continue to be, a topic of considerable interest among researchers. Since the interwar period until the present day, a number of publications have been written on such issues as educational ideas and concepts, the organization and functioning of educational institutions at all stages of education, professional work and social activity of teachers, content and teaching methods, as well as monographs on schools and biographies of individual educators. At this point, we must ask: Who were the teachers of this period? What were their social backgrounds, education, professional preparation, and experience? What motivated them to choose this profession? What were their attitudes toward children and young people, as well as their mission to shape the young generation of Poles? These and other questions have led to a growing interest in teachers as a distinct social group (Magda-Adamowicz 2018).

A scientific look at the teaching profession and the personality of the teacher began in the early 20th century, initiated by Jan Władysław Dawid (Dawid 1912). This not only stimulated theoretical discussions but also spurred empirical research among teachers themselves (Nawroczyński 1929; Mirski 1933; Kuchta 1936). The foundational premise of pedeutological research was the belief that

teaching effectiveness is largely influenced by the personality traits of the teacher. In the 1920s, Wanda Dzierzbicka conducted a survey consisting of 20 questions among teachers, wishing to investigate primarily the psychological aspects of teachers' personalities. Unfortunately, she obtained very modest material, yielding limited results, with only 35 completed questionnaires (Dzierzbicka 1926). Far more extensive material was gathered by Zygmunt Kukulski, a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin.

Zygmunt Kukulski was born on May 2, 1890, in Jasło. After earning his secondary school certificate in 1909, he began studying at the Faculty of Law at the Jagiellonian University. However, after completing his first year, he transferred to the Faculty of Philosophy, where he took up Polish Studies. During his studies, he also attended lectures on pedagogy and the history of education. In the academic year 1912/13, he founded the student Pedagogical Circle at the Jagiellonian University and became its first president while simultaneously serving as president of the Polish Studies Circle (Draus 1989: 6). After graduating in 1914, Kukulski developed his interests in pedagogy, particularly in the history of education. In 1917, he defended his doctoral dissertation in philosophy at the Jagiellonian University based on his thesis *Działalność pedagogiczna Tadeusza Czackiego* [*Tadeusz Czacki's Pedagogical Activity*] (Starnawski 1971: 121). In 1925, he earned his postdoctoral degree (habilitation) in pedagogy at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv based on the thesis *Główne momenty myśli i badań pedagogicznych* [*Key Milestones in Pedagogical Thought and Research*], and in 1928 he was awarded the title of full professor (Starnawski 1971: 121).

In 1920, Kukulski joined the Catholic University of Lublin, where he was entrusted with leading the newly established Department of Pedagogy. In the same year, the Pedagogical Institute was founded, and he became its first director (Draus 1989: 7). He delivered lectures on the history of education, pedagogy, and didactics to students in the Faculties of Humanities, Theology, and Canon Law. From 1927 to 1930, he served as the dean of the Faculty of Humanities (Rynio, Skrzyniarz 2011: 50). Kukulski was also a founding member of the Scientific Society of the Catholic University of Lublin and a member of various scholarly societies and organizations, including the Commission for the History of Education and Schooling in Poland,

established in 1929 by Stanisław Kot under the auspices of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Kraków, and the Historical Commission of the Scientific Pedagogical Society (Draus 1989: 12).

Between 1920 and 1939, Kukulski was also involved with secondary schools in Lublin, including the Stanisław Staszic State Secondary School and the Lublin School, later renamed the Stefan Batory Private Male Secondary School. He taught Polish literature and history and served as principal (Draus 1989: 15). Additionally, he lectured at several institutions: beginning in 1925 at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv; from 1926 to 1930, he taught psychology and pedagogy at the State Higher Teachers' Course in Lublin; and during 1928–1929, he taught logic, psychology, and the history of education at the State Pedagogical College (Rynio, Skrzyniarz 2011: 50).

The outbreak of the Second World War found Kukulski returning from the United States, where he had attended the World's Fair in Chicago. Initially, he stayed in London before relocating to Scotland, where he taught the history of education at the Pedagogical Study organized for Polish teachers at the University of Edinburgh. He died unexpectedly on December 4, 1944, in Peebles (Draus 1989: 17). Kukulski devoted his studies mainly to the history of education and pedagogical thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the reception of the ideas of Jan Henryk Pestalozzi and Jan Amos Komensky in Poland, and the educational activities of Stanisław Staszic (Rynio, Skrzyniarz 2011: 50).

Kukulski's pedagogical interests, combined with his interactions with teachers during his time at the State Teachers' College, led him in 1927 to collaborate with other scholars on the development of a questionnaire. This survey consisted of 49 detailed questions on "the psychology of the teacher-pedagogue." A 50th item invited respondents to provide comments that were not covered in their answers to the earlier questions. The survey targeted teachers from general and secondary schools, and it received responses from 289 teachers, including 112 women and 177 men (*Ankiety*... 1927–1928).

The vast majority of respondents identified as being of Polish nationality and Roman Catholic faith. One person of Polish nationality declared himself irreligious, while 27 respondents did not specify their nationality. Among these 27, five identified as Roman Catholics, three as Jews, one as Orthodox and one as Greek Catholic, with

the remaining 17 not indicating any religious affiliation. Additionally, three respondents declared themselves to be Polish by nationality and Jewish by religion, while two identified as Jewish by both nationality and religion. The sample also included four individuals of Ukrainian nationality (two Orthodox and two Greek Catholic), two of German nationality and Protestant faith, and one of Russian nationality and Orthodox religion. Although these questionnaires have not yet been analyzed in detail, they represent an excellent resource for understanding the teaching profession during the interwar period.

Respondents approached the questionnaire in different ways. Some tried to provide exhaustive and comprehensive answers, while others offered only brief and concise responses. In a few cases, certain questions were left unanswered. For the most part, the respondents were teachers from mainstream schools with varying structures, ranging from one to seven grades. Only two respondents were secondary school teachers. What, then, is the image of the teacher that emerges from these surveys? It can be said that the teaching community was as diverse as Polish society as a whole. One of the most serious ills of education, both on the eve and after the restoration of independence, was the shortage of teachers and their inadequate qualifications. This problem was particularly acute in the territory of the former Kingdom of Poland. Often, the absence of a teacher made it impossible to establish a school in a given area. In such cases, the local community had to petition the authorities for the "assignment" of a teacher (Brodowska 1982: 147).

Over time, efforts were made to resolve this problem by expanding the system of teacher training to increase the number of qualified school staff. However, for many years, it remained common practice to transfer teachers from areas with a surplus to regions with a high demand for staff. For instance, a certain number of teachers were relocated to the former Russian partition from regions such as former Galicia, where staffing levels in primary education were relatively favorable (Juśko 2005: 98–99). In the early 1920s, 17% of teachers in the former Kingdom of Poland originated from the territory of the former Austrian partition (Gąsiorowska 1921: 51).

The practice of assigning teachers to regions with staff shortages sometimes even led to the separation of married teachers. Four such cases were identified in the analyzed questionnaires. In one instance,

a female teacher's husband worked at a school 400 kilometers away. This teacher, a 25-year-old with five years seniority, came from Radymno and worked at a seven-grade school, although its location is unspecified. She lived alone, so she may have moved from Galicia to the former Kingdom of Poland. A similar situation involved a 29-year-old female teacher with nine years of experience who also lived apart from her husband due to his distant teaching assignment. Two male teachers faced similar circumstances, as their teacher wives worked far from them—one 300 kilometers away and the other at an unspecified distant location.

Age and length of service

The age distribution of the teachers surveyed is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age of teachers

Age	Number	%	Including	
			Women	Men
< 20	2	0,7%	2	–
21–25	79	27,3%	39	40
26–30	100	34,6%	37	63
31–40	78	27%	19	59
41–50	15	5,2%	7	8
> 50	1	0,35%	1	–
No data available	14	4,85%	7	7
Total	289	100%	112	177

Source: Based on questionnaires.

Another interesting aspect of the survey was the length of service in the teaching profession, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Length of service

Length of service	Number	%	Including	
			Women	Men
< 1	17	5,9%	8	9
2–5	95	32,9%	36	59
6–10	112	38,7%	40	72
11–15	39	13,5%	18	21
16–19	9	3,1%	2	7
> 20	11	3,8%	5	6
No data available	6	2,1%	3	3
Total	289	100%	112	177

Source: Based on questionnaires.

One teacher, aged 50, stated that he had been working at the Carmelite Friars' Male College in Wadowice for eight years. However, contextual evidence suggests that his overall length of service in the profession was much longer.

The data presented above shows that more than 77% of the surveyed teachers had worked in the profession for less than 10 years. Interestingly, length of service was not always proportional to age. The majority of respondents began their teaching careers at around 20 years of age, although there were instances of individuals starting as teenagers. For example, one teacher, aged 28, had already accumulated 11 years of experience, while another, aged 29, had 12 years of experience, which indicates that both began teaching in their late teens. One remarkable case involved a teacher who, at age 23, had already been in the profession for six years. On the other hand, there were teachers who entered the profession later in life for various reasons. Notable examples include a 55-year-old teacher with 20 years of seniority, a 45-year-old with 10 years of experience, and a 39-year-old with 4 years of experience. Understanding the motivations behind these early or late entries into teaching requires further analysis of statements regarding their reasons for entering the profession.

Social origin

In terms of social background, a large proportion of the teachers surveyed came from peasant families—98 (33.9%). Others came from intelligentsia families, actively involved in the cultural, social, and political life of the country. Among their parents were clerks—51 (17.6%); teachers—20 (6.9%); doctors—6 (2%); dentists—2 (0.7%); and lawyers—2 (0.7%). Many teachers also came from working-class families—35 (12.1%)—and craftsmen's families—29 (10%). Eleven teachers (3.8%) identified their father's profession as manor owner or estate manager; 13 (4.5%) as merchant; 7 (2.4%) as entrepreneur; and 3 (1%) as organist. Other occupations of the fathers mentioned in the questionnaires included surgeon's assistant, military officer, gendarme, policeman, forester, actor, and horse trainer. In two cases, the parents' professions were not listed, with only the information that they were townsmen, while three respondents provided no information at all.

Certainly, the immediate environment in which future educators grew up had a significant influence on their decision to pursue teaching. In some families, teaching was already a well-established tradition, with grandparents, parents (one or both), relatives (aunts, uncles), or older siblings working in the profession. Among the teachers surveyed, 24 had a father or mother in the teaching profession, and in two cases, both parents were teachers. In some instances, mothers left the teaching profession after marriage. A notably larger group—94 respondents—reported having siblings who were teachers. In some cases, it was a single sibling; in others, multiple siblings or even entire families worked in the field.

For example, a 36-year-old teacher had all four older sisters working as teachers, while the youngest brother, aged 33, did not follow in their footsteps and became a lawyer. Similarly, one teacher had five sisters in education, while her brothers chose other professions. Another example involved a 24-year-old teacher whose father was also a teacher. This respondent had eleven siblings, three of whom were already teachers, five of whom were studying at teachers' seminaries, and only three who had chosen different career paths. Interestingly, this teacher was also married to a teacher. Similarly, a female teacher whose father was in the profession reported that all five of her siblings also worked in education, and she too was married to a teacher.

Among teachers, marrying someone within the profession was a fairly common practice. Among the male teachers surveyed, 67 were single, 109 were married, and one did not specify his marital status. Of the married men, more than half (58) had wives who were also teachers, although four of these women were no longer working in the profession. Two were identified as former teachers; one had stopped teaching a year prior, and another left the profession after having children. One teacher mentioned that his wife planned to leave her job at the school to focus on childcare. Aside from female teachers, the wives of male teachers included a midwife, a seamstress, and a medical student. It can be assumed that the remaining wives were not working professionally, but were instead involved in household responsibilities and childcare.

The surveyed teachers expressed a wide range of views on married women working in the teaching profession or women's employment in general. Some believed that, for the sake of both the school and the home, a wife should not work because it negatively affects both environments. Many men tolerated their wives' work only for financial reasons, stating that if they were able to support the family on their own, they would not allow their wives to work. One respondent, himself the child of two teachers and married to a female teacher, even advocated for a law prohibiting married women from working in the teaching profession. Such a law was implemented in Silesia, leading to the resignation of married female teachers from their positions (Urbańska 2011). Conversely, some teachers expressed the view that professional work ennobles a woman, or that if a wife is finds satisfaction and passion in teaching, her husband should support her decision and accept it. A 23-year-old bachelor even stated explicitly that a teacher's wife should also be a teacher.

As for the female teachers surveyed, 80 were single, 30 were married, one was a widow (whose late husband had also been a teacher), and one provided very little information about her personal life. All that is known about her is that she had seven years of teaching experience and three much older sisters, aged 37, 40, and 44. Among the married female teachers interviewed, only seven had husbands who were teachers.

Motivation for career choice

The question of motivation for choosing the teaching profession is particularly intriguing. The vast majority of respondents (165 individuals—57.1%), cited a love for working in education and an inner conviction of a calling to the teaching profession as their primary motivations. Among these, two teachers noted that they had pursued this career against their parents' wishes. In one case, a female teacher chose teaching despite her father being a goldsmith and her mother a teacher. In the other, a male teacher, whose father was a clerk, already had one sister working as a teacher and another studying at a teachers' seminar. One respondent admitted that although she had originally chosen the profession out of passion, she no longer felt that passion and was now working solely to earn a living.

In the surveys conducted by Dzierzbicka, the majority of teachers also cited vocation as their reason for entering the profession. However, Dzierzbicka questioned the validity of this motivation, suggesting that 14- or 15-year-old students entering teachers' seminaries were unlikely to have a fully developed understanding of their sense of vocation. She argued that the most common motives for attending the seminaries were either the influence of their own teachers or the desire to continue their education (Dzierzbicka 1926: 23–24).

For many respondents, a secondary school education was unattainable, primarily due to financial constraints. One teacher wrote that he attended a teachers' seminary because he could not afford to go to secondary school, which, as he put it, "shaped his life path, so to speak." For 33 respondents, the choice of teaching as a profession stemmed from the need to take up any kind of job in order to earn a living. Some had little influence over their career path, as their parents made the decision for them. Four female teachers cited a desire to become independent as their motivation for pursuing a career in education.

For a large group of respondents, the choice of profession was a matter of chance or the result of various circumstances. Several had previously initially pursued studies in other fields—medicine, law, theology, philosophy, technical disciplines, or the natural sciences—but were forced to abandon them due to war, financial difficulties, or health issues. For some, the teaching profession offered an escape from military service; others entered the field at the urging of teachers, friends,

or siblings. As schools continued to grapple with staffing shortages and the difficult labor market, many were drawn to teaching for the stability and steady income it provided (Sanojca 2014: 282).

For one female teacher, the main incentive to work in education was the appeal of summer and winter holidays. Given the profession's requirement for good health, one teacher (24-year-old) revealed that he suffered from bone tuberculosis, which prevented him from working in other fields. His parents sent him to a teachers' seminary, and he subsequently became a teacher. Another teacher wrote that he felt called to the profession after marrying a female teacher. However, he later expressed the opinion that his wife's work negatively affected both the home and the school.

Preparation for the profession

In interwar Poland, the preparation of teachers for the profession was governed by education acts and regulations issued by the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment (Polish abbreviation: MWRiOP). The basic form of teacher education was the teachers' seminaries, which admitted young people aged 14 or older who passed entrance examinations covering the curriculum of a seven-year primary school (Dekret... 1919; Regulamin... 1926). This system of teacher training remained in place until the 1930s, when, following the enactment of the Education System Act of 1932, seminaries began to be gradually phased out (Pyter 2016: 789). At their peak, during the 1926/27 school year, Poland had 204 teachers' seminaries attended by 37,420 students (*Rocznik*... 1928: 417, 419).

Despite the relatively extensive network of seminaries, they were unable to meet the high demand for teachers for many years. Initially, there was even a shortage of candidates who had completed a seven-grade general school. This led to the idea of creating separate schools to prepare students from lower-level primary schools in the shortest possible time to qualify for seminaries. This is how preparatory schools, also referred to as two-year preliminary courses, were established (Makarewicz 1963: 112–113). These schools admitted children aged 11–14 and were established mainly in the territories of the former Russian partition, where the shortage of teachers was most acute. Although preparatory schools existed for only a few

years, they supplied seminaries with many candidates. For example, in the 1920/21 school year, 599 candidates entered seminaries from preparatory schools, compared to 202 who entered after completing a seven-grade general school (Makarewicz 1963: 131). At their peak, in the 1922/23 school year, there were 49 preparatory schools serving a total of 3,090 pupils (*Rocznik*... 1928: 407).

Among the teachers surveyed, only one mentioned having completed one year at a preparatory school followed by five years at a teachers' seminary. It is possible, however, that more of the seminary graduates interviewed had also attended preparatory schools. The majority of respondents (150 interviewees—51.9%) were graduates of teachers' seminaries, while 107 had completed secondary school. Some teachers pursued studies at universities in cities such as Cracow, Lviv, Vilnius, Warsaw, and Lublin in subjects such as law, philosophy, Polish studies, technical studies, or natural sciences. In two cases, respondents had attended seminaries for priests but were forced to discontinue their studies due to the war. A few respondents mentioned undertaking university studies, but did not specify their field of study or whether they completed their programs. Most of the teachers who had begun higher education did not graduate, citing reasons such as war, financial hardship, or health problems. One respondent noted that she had to abandon her studies because her father was murdered, and she needed to work to support herself.

However, not all teachers had adequate preparation for the profession. When asked about their qualifications, seven respondents admitted that they had no or almost no formal preparation. Some had been educated in private schools and later supplemented their education with courses and qualifying examinations. One teacher had completed only five grades of primary school and a two-month course but claimed to have prepared for the profession through extensive reading and self-education. Another teacher, in a similar situation, completed primary school, continued studying privately, and passed a qualifying exam. One female teacher mentioned completing a course and passing a qualifying exam but provided no details about her prior educational background. For comparison, data from Tarnów County shows that among the 424 surveyed teachers (representing 60% of the county's total teaching staff), all had completed a teachers' seminary (Juśko 2005: 107). Nationally, statistics from the

1921/22 school year indicate that fewer than 60% of primary school teachers had full professional qualifications (Kraeutler 1921: 527).

Although private tuition or even graduation from a teachers' seminary prepared educators for working in mainstream schools, it became evident that this was insufficient training for teaching all subjects, particularly in the upper three grades of a seven-grade school. In response, in 1923, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment (Polish abbreviation: MWRiOP) established the State Higher Teacher Training Courses (Polish abbreviation: PWKN) (Boguszewska 2007: 9). The purpose of these courses was to enhance the scientific and professional education of teachers. Admission requirements included possession of a secondary school-leaving certificate qualifying the applicant to teach in mainstream schools and at least three years of uninterrupted teaching experience. Candidates could also hold a vocational school certificate, provided it was duly authorized by MWRiOP (Pyter 2016: 791).

The courses covered pedagogical subjects and the study of contemporary Poland. In addition, students chose one of several specialized subject groups (humanities, physics and mathematics, geography and nature, drawing and handicrafts, singing, or physical education) that they were expected to teach after completing the program (Dzierzbicka 1926: 121). It is worth mentioning that successful completion of such a course not only gave priority in applying for public education positions but also conferred the right to a salary supplement, an important benefit given the financial hardships many teachers faced at the time (Pyter 2016: 793). These courses also provided exposure to new pedagogical trends and experimental teaching methods, which participants often implemented in their schools.

In addition to PWKN, many teachers improved their competences and pursued further education through various supplementary courses, which lasted from a few weeks to two years and were typically held during vacations or holidays. By the late 1920s, the situation regarding teachers' professional qualifications was most concerning in the central and eastern voivodeships (see Table 3). However, by the early 1930s, practically 100% of teachers had obtained the required qualifications (Trzebiatowski 1970: 351).

Table 3. Professional qualifications of public school teachers in the 1927/28 school year

Voivodeships	Number of Teachers	Qualified	Partially Qualified	Non-qualified
Central	27 245	26 265	443	537
Eastern	7713	6287	739	687
Poznań and Pomerania	8676	8417	31	228
Silesia	3917	3802	9	106
South	17 713	17 709	–	4
Total	65 264	62 480	1222	1562

Source: *Rocznik statystyki Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (1928), vol. 6, p. 406

Certainly, another way for teachers to improve their qualifications was by reading contemporary pedagogical literature. Most of the teachers surveyed did not own private book collections, and only a small number subscribed to pedagogical magazines. Those who wished to deepen their knowledge often relied on books and journals while attending various in-service courses. Only a limited number of schools subscribed to journals, which were then made available to the teachers working there. Teachers eagerly read these publications and used them as a basis for discussions about new ideas for school functioning or reforms being implemented in the education system. The most frequently mentioned magazines in the analyzed questionnaires included *Ruch Pedagogiczny* [*Pedagogical Movement*], *Szkolna Praca* [*School Work*], *Życie Szkolne* [*School Life*], *Przyjaciel Szkoły* [*School Friend*], and *Głos Nauczycielski* [*Teachers' Voice*].

Education and characteristics of a good teacher

The surveys devoted a great deal of attention to issues of education, teaching methods, and attitudes toward students. These topics are broad and merit a separate study, so only the most important findings are highlighted here. When asked about the meaning of education, the most frequent responses included: "good preparation for life," "formation of character," "strengthening good qualities and weakening bad ones," and "shaping a good citizen." In general,

teachers approached the educational process with the perspective that, as the German pedagogue Georg Kerschensteiner suggested, the child represents the future embodiment of their values (Mirski 1936: 141).

Regarding teaching methods, the vast majority of teachers who had attended PWKN courses reported applying the methods they had learned in their practice. Among the interviewees, some employed approaches such as the work school, blended learning, Decroly's system, the project method, or group teaching. While some teachers relied on their previous experience and applied proven methods, newer teachers were often still experimenting and searching for approaches that best suited their needs and those of their students. When asked about the qualities of a good teacher, the most frequently mentioned attributes were a love for the profession, the ability to empathize with a child's soul, and a genuine love for children. This love for children was described as a deep desire for their well-being. Kerschensteiner referred to this as "pedagogical love," Józef Mirski called it an "upbringing attitude" (Mirski 1936: 141–142), and others described it as an "educational relationship" (Jeziorański 2022: 99–100). While the vast majority of respondents declared an ability to empathize with a child's soul, six admitted to feeling uncomfortable working with children. It can therefore be assumed that establishing an educational relationship was not easy for them.

A common response to the question about the qualities of a good teacher was that they should possess a well-formed religious and moral character. Many teachers emphasized the importance of the religious upbringing of children and young people, including those who themselves held indifferent or even hostile attitudes toward religion and the clergy. In addition, frequently mentioned qualities included a strong education, consistency, gentleness, and justice. Fairness, in particular, was noted as crucial—not only in assessing students' progress but also in ensuring their equal treatment. Among the responses, 126 teachers declared having equal feelings toward all students, while 161 admitted to harboring latent sympathies or antipathies. Greater sympathy was most often shown to gifted and polite children, while antipathy was directed toward less gifted, misbehaving students or those belonging to religious or national minorities. Some

teachers openly expressed antipathy toward children who, for example, appeared dirty or were of Jewish origin.

Other important traits of a good teacher included good health and posture, eloquence, composure, and an absence of unnecessary gesticulation. Interestingly, five respondents admitted that they lacked the ability to speak in public, while 60 described their verbal skills (the "gift of words") as being poorly developed (two of these were not native Polish speakers). The remainder assessed their verbal abilities as either average or good. A significant portion of the teachers surveyed also reported various health problems. According to a study conducted in the 1920s by Walenty Miklaszewski, almost 23% of male and 10% of female primary school teachers described themselves as physically weak or sickly. Miklaszewski believed that the actual percentage might have been considerably higher (Miklaszewski 1924: 67–68).

The findings indicate that while the surveyed teachers had a clear concept of the ideal teacher, listing many qualities they believed essential, they themselves faced a number of problems over which they either had no control, such as health, or personal shortcomings that they were unable to remedy, like laziness, impatience, or lack of the gift of eloquence.

The pursuit of defining the ideal teacher has long been a subject of scholarly interest. Many researchers have sought to answer the question, "What psycho-physical traits best suit a person for the teaching profession?" (Kuchta 1936: 3). Over time, six types of teachers were identified: religious, theoretical, practical, social, aesthetic, and authoritarian. Analyzing these categories, Jan Kuchta concluded that "pure" types do not exist; rather, teachers embody mixed traits. He also identified a seventh type—the perfect type. According to Kuchta, the ideal teacher's mental structure should combine elements of the social and aesthetic types because, without these, the teacher "will not empathize with the child" and will not be able to guide them effectively. This ideal structure should also incorporate a religious dimension to enable a deeper understanding of life and its ultimate purpose (Kuchta 1936: 16).

Conclusion

Education faced numerous challenges during the interwar period. Beyond expanding the network of schools and standardizing and reforming curricula, the goal was to ensure a well-qualified teaching staff. Accordingly, teachers' seminars were organized on a large scale, and various professional development courses were established, including the State Higher Teacher Training Courses, whose task was to train and improve teachers' qualifications. Despite these efforts, some of the surveyed teachers felt inadequately prepared for their profession and deficient in both their subject knowledge and teaching methodologies. Notably, over 60% of the respondents were under the age of 30, and the majority (77% had less than 10 years' seniority), so they often lacked not only sufficient knowledge but also the practical experience necessary for working effectively with children.

Regarding the social background of the surveyed teachers, the largest group (33.9%) came from peasant families, followed by a significant proportion from intelligentsia families (27.9%), and a fairly substantial representation from workers and craftsmen (22.1%). Many teachers came from families with educational traditions, where parents, siblings, or other relatives had worked in schools. More than half of the respondents (57.1%) reported that their motivation for choosing the teaching profession stemmed from a sense of vocation and a passion for working in education. For others, however, the choice was either coincidental or driven by necessity, as they sought any available employment to support themselves.

It is also worth mentioning that most of the surveyed teachers were former students of the State Higher Teacher Training Course in Lublin, i.e., those who were keen to improve their qualifications and teaching skills. From the analyzed questionnaires, it is evident that many teachers who received the survey chose not to complete it. This suggests that the image emerging from the analyzed responses is not a comprehensive portrayal but rather reflects a subset of the teaching community—those who were particularly conscientious about their duties and committed to the welfare of their students and schools. It is clear that the teaching profession of that time was incredibly diverse. They were people with very different personalities, experiences, beliefs, aspirations, and worldviews.

This diversity does not diminish the great responsibility that teachers had in shaping society during the interwar period. They had an enormous influence not only on the intellectual development, but also on the cultivation of civic and patriotic attitudes in the younger generation. The impact of their work left an indelible mark on Polish education, laying a foundation for future generations. For many years after World War II, the term "pre-war teacher" remained synonymous with professionalism and high moral standards.

This article attempts to outline the image of teachers in the interwar period as revealed through the questionnaires conducted by Zygmunt Kukulski, contributing to the rich body of literature on pedeutology and the history of education. These questionnaires certainly warrant further, more detailed analysis, particularly regarding the psychological predispositions and personal talents of those who dedicated themselves to teaching.

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