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Education of hairdressers in Poland – status, needs and directions of development in the context of continuing education

Edukacja fryzjerów w Polsce – uwarunkowania, potrzeby i kierunki rozwoju w perspektywie kształcenia ustawicznego

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja fryzjerów, kształcenie zawodowe, edukacja ustawiczna, Polska, technologia fryzjerska, rozwój zawodowy.

Streszczenie: W artykule przeanalizowano obecny stan edukacji fryzjerów w Polsce, wskazując główne problemy i potrzeby rozwojowe, a także proponowane kierunki zmian, szczególnie w kontekście edukacji ustawicznej dorosłych. Omówiono kwestie rozdzielenia teorii i praktyki, niedostatecznego dofinansowania szkoleń oraz wyposażenia pracowni, a także rosnące koszty materiałów edukacyjnych i kosmetyków. Zwrócono uwagę na niedostosowanie metod nauczania do potrzeb współczesnej młodzieży, a także na brak szkół fryzjerskich w wielu regionach Polski. Przeanalizowano ponadto problem społecznego postrzegania zawodu oraz niedostateczną współpracę między szkołami a branżą. Wyniki wskazują na konieczność modernizacji programów nauczania, zwiększenia środków finansowych oraz rozwoju kompetencji cyfrowych uczniów i nauczycieli.

Key words: hairdresser education, vocational training, continuing education, Poland, hair-dressing technology, professional development.

Abstract: This article analyses the current state of hairdressing education in Poland, identifying key problems and development needs, as well as proposed directions for change, particularly in the context of continuing adult education. It discusses the separation of theory and practice, inadequate funding for training and studio equipment, and the rising costs of educational materials and cosmetics. It highlights the inadequacy of teaching methods to the needs of today's youth, as well as the lack of hairdressing schools in many regions of Poland. It also examines the social perception of the profession and the insufficient cooperation between schools and the industry. The findings indicate the need to modernise curricula, increase funding, and develop digital competencies among students and teachers.

Introduction

Vocational education plays a fundamental role in the education system and economic development, particularly in preparing young people for the demands of the labor market. In Poland, amidst dynamic socio-economic changes, the importance of craft and service professions, including those related to the hairdressing industry, is growing. The skills and competencies acquired through vocational education determine not only graduates' individual careers but also the quality and competitiveness of the entire service sector in the country. Despite this, hairdressing education in Poland currently faces numerous significant challenges that hinder the effective preparation of students for the profession and require a comprehensive approach in educational policy and teaching practice.

One of the most significant problems is the traditional division between theoretical and practical instruction, which in many schools is conducted separately, limiting the effectiveness of education. Years of experience have shown that the lack of integration between these two areas can result in insufficient professional preparation for students and hinder their smooth entry into the job market. This problem also stems from the inadequacy of curricula to the current needs of the hairdressing industry, which is constantly evolving under the influence of new technologies, trends, and customer demands.

Another significant challenge is the low level of funding for vocational education, which translates into limited opportunities to equip school workshops and laboratories with modern equipment and materials necessary for high-quality practical classes. As a result, students often lack access to the equipment and technologies standard in professional hairdressing salons, creating gaps in their practical skills and hindering their adaptation to real-world work. Rising prices for cosmetics and consumables complicate further the situation for educational institutions with limited budgets.

Furthermore, contemporary generations of students have different needs and expectations regarding the educational process than previous generations. Traditional forms of teaching, such as lectures or copying notes, often fail to engage young people and fail to address their learning style, which is strongly

associated with the use of digital technologies and interactive teaching methods. Consequently, the lack of innovative and engaging forms of education leads to a decline in student motivation and engagement, which can translate into lower quality knowledge and skills acquired.

The problem of insufficient cooperation between educational institutions, employers, and the hairdressing industry cannot be ignored. The lack of dialogue and joint initiatives hinders the updating of curricula and limits the possibility of implementing professional internships and apprenticeships in real-world work settings. Furthermore, the lack of standardisation of curricula between various vocational schools and the shortage of qualified teachers specialising in vocational education impact negatively the coherence and quality of education.

It is also worth noting that in Poland, a strong socio-cultural belief remains that higher education is the only path to professional success. This often leads young people to choose not to pursue hairdressing as a technician, despite the opportunity to pass the Matura exam and continue their studies after completing a technical school. Furthermore, there are no academic programs dedicated to hairdressing as a profession, which limits the development of the scientific dimension of this field.

In light of these challenges, this article aims to analyse comprehensively the current state of hairdressing education in Poland, identify key barriers, and propose development directions that can improve the quality of education and adapt it to the needs of the contemporary labor market. Particular attention will be paid to the integration of theory and practice, innovative teaching methods, and cooperation between schools and the hairdressing industry.

Methodology

The analysis is based on a review of scientific literature, government reports, and documents from the Ministry of Education and Science regarding vocational education in Poland. Furthermore, the authors' own observations and experiences, who actively participate in the teaching process at various levels of hairdressing education, are included.

Main problems and challenges in the education of hairdressers

Separation of theory and practice in the teaching process

One of the perennial problems of Polish hairdressing education is the separation of theory and practice. The traditional model of education often leads to students learning the basics of hairdressing technology separately from practical classes, making it difficult to effectively combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills. As a result, many graduates are not fully prepared for the market, which negatively impacts the quality of services provided.^{1,2}

¹ M. Kowalska M. (2019). Integration of theory and practice in the vocational education of hairdressers. *Scientific Papers of the Warsaw School of Economics*, 65(3), pp.121–134.

² Ministry of Education and Science (2023). Report on the state of vocational education in Poland.

In response to this problem, the authors of this publication undertook to co-create a handbook on hairdressing technology, combining theory and practice in one, modern edition.

Insufficient funding for training and equipment for laboratories

Funding for educational institutions, particularly vocational training, remains insufficient. Limited financial resources result in hairdressing salons being under-equipped with modern equipment and materials. Furthermore, the rising prices of cosmetics and training materials place an additional burden on schools and students.³

The lack of adequate funding limits the possibility of organising modern training for teachers and students, which affects the quality of teaching and professional preparation.⁴

Teaching methods not adapted to the needs of contemporary youth

There is a growing need to adapt teaching methods to the changing expectations and learning styles of young people. Traditional teaching methods, based on lengthy, theoretical lectures and copying notes, are often perceived as tedious and ineffective. Young people increasingly expect interactive forms of learning, the use of modern technologies, and practical workshops.⁵

The lack of such forms of education may lead to discouragement and resignation from continuing education in hairdressing.⁶

Lack of hairdressing schools in many regions of Poland

Analysis of hairdressing education availability reveals significant regional disparities. Many smaller towns and rural areas lack institutions offering this type of training, limiting young people's access to the profession and forcing educational migration to larger urban centers.⁷

This situation has a negative impact on the development of local labour markets and may lead to staff shortages in the hairdressing services sector.⁸

Social perception of the hairdressing profession and educational choices of young people

In Poland, there is a persistent belief that higher education is the preferred form of education, which leads to undervaluation of craft professions, including hairdressing.

³ J. Nowicki (2021). Financing vocational education in Poland – challenges and prospects. *Economics of Education*, 14(2), pp. 45–59.

⁴ Central Statistical Office (2022). Report on vocational education in Poland.

⁵ K. Wrona (2020). Modern teaching methods in vocational education. *Pedagogy. Practical*, 8(1), pp. 34–48.

⁶ OECD (2019). *Innovating Education and Educating for Innovation*.

⁷ A. Malinowska, R. Dąbrowski. (2018). Regional differentiation of access to vocational education. *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, 4(76), pp. 65–81.

⁸ Ministry of Education and Science (2021). Analysis of regional access to vocational education.

Young people often choose not to pursue hairdressing services at technical schools, despite the opportunity to continue their education at university after graduating from high school. The lack of higher education programs specifically related to hairdressing further discourages them from pursuing this field.⁹

Social stereotypes contribute to lower prestige of the profession, which translates into fewer candidates and difficulties in recruiting qualified students.¹⁰

Proposed solutions and recommendations

Given the identified challenges in hairdresser education in Poland, comprehensive action is needed to improve the quality and effectiveness of professional education. Key recommendations are presented below:

Strengthening cooperation between schools, employers and the hairdressing and beauty industry

Implementing systemic partnership mechanisms between educational institutions and the hairdressing and beauty industry will allow for better adaptation of education to market realities. The development of apprenticeship programs, internships, and workshops led by practitioners, as well as joint training initiatives and innovative educational projects, is recommended.¹¹

Unification and standardisation of curricula

Implementing mandatory curricular standards for hairdressing technicians will ensure consistent education across the country. Programs should be designed with both theory and practice in mind, reflecting the latest industry trends. Regular updates to standards are also essential.¹²

Increased expenditure on training and development of teaching staff

Increasing funding for training, courses, and the development of vocational teachers' competencies is crucial to improving the quality of teaching. It is also proposed to introduce an incentive system that would encourage teachers to continually improve their qualifications and utilise modern teaching methods.¹³

Modernisation of laboratory equipment and access to modern technologies

Schools should receive greater financial support for the purchase of modern hairdressing equipment and up-to-date cosmetic products so that students can

⁹ P. Nowak, A. Zielińska (2021). Social perception of vocational education in Poland. *Educational Studies*, 39(4), pp. 78–92.

¹⁰ T. Kowalczyk (2020). Educational choices of young people and the status of craft professions. *Polish Pedagogical Review*, 12(1), pp. 15–29.

¹¹ B. Kowalska, T. Malinowski (2021). Educational partnerships as a tool for modernizing vocational education. *Vocational Education*, 18(1), pp. 88–102.

¹² Ministry of National Education (2023). Recommendations for the standardization of vocational education.

¹³ OECD (2022). Professional development of vocational education teachers: challenges and solutions.

learn using equipment and materials that meet the requirements of the modern labour market.¹⁴

Introducing digital and media literacy education

Curricula should include modules on digital marketing, social media management, and the use of digital tools in hairdressing. These activities will increase graduates' competitiveness and facilitate their career development.¹⁵

Promotion of the hairdressing services technician course

Information campaigns should be conducted among young people to break down stereotypes about hairdressing professions and show opportunities for professional development, including continuing higher education after completing secondary school leaving examinations.¹⁶

Conclusions

The conducted analysis of the state and challenges of hairdressing education in Poland reveals multidimensional problems that require an interdisciplinary and strategic approach at the systemic level. It is essential to implement integrated educational solutions that harmonise the needs of the labour market with the expectations of young hairdressers, while also taking into account the dynamic technological changes and socio-cultural conditions of the contemporary beauty and hairdressing sector.

Above all, the lack of uniform and updated standardisation of curricula not only generates fragmentation of graduates' knowledge and competencies but also contributes to inequalities in the quality of education across the country. This disorganisation of curricula has far-reaching consequences for professional mobility and adaptation to rapidly evolving industry requirements, as confirmed by empirical research.¹⁷ This requires the establishment of a flexible yet mandatory educational framework that incorporates both theoretical and practical aspects, while also providing mechanisms for regular updating and evaluation of educational content based on scientific evidence and market trend analysis.

Furthermore, disparities in access to modern educational infrastructure, including cosmetic technologies and materials, seriously limit the possibility of implementing full-scale practical training. Underinvestment in educational institutions is not only a financial problem but also a strategic challenge for the development of

¹⁴ Central Statistical Office (2023). Report on investments in equipment for vocational education institutions.

¹⁵ J. Kamińska (2021). Development of digital competences in vocational education. *Media Education*, 13(2), pp. 66–80.

¹⁶ P. Nowak (2022). Stereotypes and the choice of vocational education fields. *Educational Psychology*, 29(1), pp. 45–58.

¹⁷ Błaszczyk, 2020; Ministry of National Education, 2023.

professional competencies, which must keep pace with technological advances and evolving industry standards¹⁸ Therefore, coordinated political and economic actions are necessary to increase funding for studio equipment and strengthen cooperation between the education sector and beauty and hairdressing businesses.

Another aspect is the shortage of qualified teaching staff, which is the result of both insufficient teacher training programs and limited motivation resulting from a lack of systemic incentives.¹⁹ Only comprehensive staff development programs that incorporate modern teaching methods, digital competences, and industry knowledge can significantly improve the quality of education. These changes are fundamental to raising the status of the profession and effectively preparing students for the challenges of the labour market.

Equally important is the poor integration of schools with the labour market, which leads to a lack of consistency between employer expectations and graduate qualifications. The lack of mechanisms for systemic cooperation and dialogue limits the ability to adapt curricula to the actual needs of the industry and effectively adapt students to practical requirements²⁰ Therefore, the development of public-private partnerships, internship programs, and apprenticeships based on cooperation between the education sector and businesses is crucial.

Another significant social determinant is the persistent stereotypical image of the hairdressing profession and the cultural pressure to choose educational paths leading to higher education, which significantly limits the attractiveness of hairdressing technicians. It is essential to systematically counteract these beliefs through information campaigns, promoting graduate successes, and emphasising the potential for professional development and entrepreneurship within vocational education.

In light of the above, a multifaceted approach is recommended, encompassing: curriculum reform with an emphasis on integrating theory and practice, increased funding for equipment and staff training, the development of digital competencies, strengthening partnerships between schools and industry, and promotional activities that change the public perception of the profession. Furthermore, further empirical research should focus on evaluating implemented changes, their impact on graduate competencies, and the effectiveness of intersectoral collaboration, which will enable the adaptation and improvement of the hairdressing education system in Poland based on reliable scientific data.

Implementing these demands has the potential not only to improve the quality of hairdressing education, but also to strengthen the industry's position on the domestic and international markets, which fits into the broader context of

¹⁸ GUS, 2022, 2023).

¹⁹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2022.

²⁰ Kowalska & Malinowski, 2021; Polish Chamber of Cosmetics Industry, 2021.

developing a knowledge-based economy and the sustainable development of the creative and service sectors.

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