

# Primary School Teachers' Attitude to the New Ukrainian School Reform

Inna Khyzhniak \* [0000-0002-4227-8268], Iryna Viktorenko [0000-0003-3887-4662]

*SHEI "Donbas State Pedagogical University", Sloviansk, Ukraine*

*\*innakhieshn@gmail.com*

## ABSTRACT

The paper reveals the results of implementing the New Ukrainian School reform by analysing teachers' attitude to transformation processes in the national education system, as well as motives that influence their professional activities. Having analysed a great number of scientific works and monitoring researches of the results of implementing the New Ukrainian School reform, the authors disclose the lack of diagnosing the results of functioning the new school according to these criteria. The narrative method is considered to be the effective one for studying the phenomenon. The scientific research on the approaches to its organising, made by foreign scientists, allows defining the most feasible ones for achieving the paper purpose – a narrative framework "I and New Ukrainian School". It is developed as a Microsoft Word template and contains four content-structural blocks: general information about a respondent, the attitude to the teaching profession and the New Ukrainian School, personal experience, and prediction for the New Ukrainian School development. The qualitative and quantitative indicators of analysing the research results prove the positive dynamics in teachers' motivation and the general effectiveness of the New Ukrainian School reform for the national education system.

**Keywords:** *New Ukrainian School reform, teachers' attitude to the New Ukrainian School reform, motives, narrative method, narrative framework.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The New Ukrainian School reform started in Ukraine in 2016 after adopting the Concept of the New Ukrainian School. The need for the reform is justified by the shortcomings of the traditional system at the procedural and final levels: the use of outdated methods, teachers' demoralisation, a lack of real motivation to personal and professional growth, school-leavers' inability to implement the acquired knowledge in real life (the effect of 'stuffed fish which is a fish but cannot swim') [1].

The gradual implementation of the developed Concept in the learning process of primary schools started in 2018. It is in an active implementation state now and it is currently being intensively studied at the level of the state, civil society organizations, scientists, and practitioners. Monitoring the results of the New Ukrainian School reform at the state level and public initiatives shows optimistic indicators for the reform, however, it doesn't take into account the important focus of the New Ukrainian School – motivated teachers, their personal beliefs in the need to transform the national education system. The scientists (H. Bevz [2],

T. Vodolazska [3], L. Hrytsenok and V. Yurchenko [4], O. Kononenko [4], et al.) take this aspect into account in the results of their research but there are some differences in the interpretation of primary school teachers' attitude to the effectiveness of changes and the levels of their motivation. The quantitative research methods, used in nationwide monitoring, cannot provide an objective and realistic picture of teachers' value orientations, and scientific researches, based on qualitative methods, are currently isolated.

Based on this, the purpose of this paper is to identify the features of primary school teachers' attitude to the New Ukrainian School reform and the motives which control their professional activities by carrying out a narrative study.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The narrative research method, which implies that respondents make up narrative texts with the different levels of structuring or given "pillars", is relatively new in psychological, pedagogical, and sociological practice and more common for foreign practice. The origins of the

method date back to the 80s of the 20th century. The scientists use similar approaches to organising the narrative research, however, every author emphasises its certain varieties or characteristics. For example, Y. Pulvermacher and A. Lefstein give special importance to the analysis of mini-stories, use audio and video recordings of small discourses [6]. Instead, K. Dahl analyses “life-long stories” – large texts that illustrate the dynamics of teachers’ attitude to the profession [7]. Most scientists use questionnaires with a certain number of questions (M. Mäkinen [8], K. Ching [9], D. Henriksen, M. Henderson, E. Creely et al. [10]). But there are also different approaches to compiling the narrative material: E. Cavicchiolo, F. Aliverninia, and S. Manganellia analyse teachers’ diaries, extrapolating the key concepts, used in them [11]. V. Bahramia, M. Hosseinia, and M. Reza Atai use semi-structured narrative research, giving respondents a narrative framework, which should be completed, creating a holistic story [12].

The scientists substantiate the value of narratives both for diagnosing phenomena and instructing teachers (J. Phillion and F. Connelly [13], Y. Pulvermacher and A. Lefstein [6], V. Bahramia, M. Hosseinia, and M. Reza Atai [12], D. Henriksen, M. Henderson, E. Creely, et al. [10]). So, C. Craig emphasises the role of analysing metaphors in respondents’ stories and claim that the whole narrative combines the content and speakers’ attitude, contains resonance and worldview, “keeps unsaid things” [14].

The various approaches to compiling and analysing a narrative allow choosing the most optimal and ergonomic format for our study. A semi-structured narrative study of primary school teachers’ attitude to the New Ukrainian School reform was applied. For this purpose, the narrative framework was developed and 60 stories were compiled between September 2020 and January 2021, using this framework [15]. Respondents were mainly primary school teachers of secondary education institutions (71,7%), some sample parts involved directors of secondary education institutions (20%), and teachers of specialised schools for children with special needs (8,3%). The participants were between 25 and 52 years old and their teaching experience was between 1 and 32 years long. The narrative framework was developed as a Microsoft Word template and sent to different categories of respondents for completing.

### **3. RESEARCH RESULTS**

In the conditions of reforming the education system, foreign scientists investigate the value phenomena of educators, choosing different study objects and purpose: determining the value of technological literacy in the digital era for teachers (K. Ching) [9], defining the attitude to the inclusive education (M. Mäkinen) [8], to the teaching profession and its change, depending on the age and experience (K. Dahl) [7], to using different

methods during the blended learning of primary school teachers (E. Cavicchiolo, F. Aliverninia, S. Manganellia) [11], to teaching practice (Y. Pulvermacher, A. Lefstein) [6], to integrating mobile games into primary school children’s learning (P. Bandara) [16], to implementing online courses during the Covid-19 pandemic (M. Malik, T. Mirza, W. Mirza) [17], to implementing “electronic” primary schools (W. Khan, M. Rahaman) [18], to their own critical risks, successes and failures (D. Henriksen, M. Henderson, E. Creely) [10], etc.

Currently, the educational practice in Ukraine is successfully integrated into the European one, the monitoring research on the effectiveness of the practical implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform, which has started at the level of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine since 2018, are conducted every year. However, analysing the questionnaire content, we can see that most of them are more aimed at defining the amount of primary school teachers’ practical ideas, knowledge, and skills to work at the New Ukrainian School, pupils’ competences, material problems to implement the New Ukrainian School than at diagnosing teachers’ value attitude to reforming. So, 624 teachers participated in the survey during the monitoring in 2018. According to the analytical reports of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the overwhelming number of teachers are aware of key components of the New Ukrainian School: 37,3% of respondents are completely ready to teach at new Ukrainian school and develop their educational programs; 78,1% are aware of changing the role of a teacher at the New Ukrainian School; 90,9% prefer the democratic style of pedagogical communication [19]. The survey in 2018, also focusing on the issue of the correlation of teachers’ readiness to the reform and their age, pointed out that this readiness comprised 60–75% regardless of the age [20], [21].

The same monitoring of the effectiveness of the New Ukrainian School, carried out by the civil society organization “Center of Supporting the Educational Reform”, has more complicated structure and includes three types of instruments, which contribute to compile information and data: forms of observing, questionnaires and surveys, and competency-based assignments. The monitoring results have indicated that directors of secondary education institutions are highly informed about the New Ukrainian School reform and mainly have a positive attitude to it. The average mark of their level of being informed about the New Ukrainian School reform is 8,5 points, attitude to the New Ukrainian School reform is 8,2 points on a ten-point scale [22]. The similar vectors of monitoring are displayed in the next analytical references and report materials of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine about the New Ukrainian School; however, the processes of measuring are different [21].

Listed high indicators of teachers' practical abilities, skills, and ideas are not considered by the researchers to be probable, as "numerous assumptions and unconfirmed facts comprise a negative image of a school and slow down the implementation of the Concept "The New Ukrainian School" [3]. O. Kononenko calls "innovation of the New Ukrainian School" one of the factors of Ukrainian teachers' professional burnout and distinguishes positive thinking, an ability to separate the main things from the secondary one, and self-development among the preventive methods [4].

T. Vodolazska surveys 186 teachers of Poltava region on understanding the sense of reforms and comprehending the necessity to make changes. She defines that before the start of reforming the education system 64% of educators haven't been aware of the necessity to make changes. While implementing the new Ukrainian School, some of educators lack the reliable system of informing about the sense of the reforms, they also feel the lack of detailed explanation about the main innovations and prospects of developing the education. The scientist asserts all this results in emergence of such myths: gamification and giving a child the right to choose will lead to reducing an intellectual level of the nation; in the future schools won't have discipline at all; the changes of education system will greatly enlarge the amount of teachers' work and add responsibilities to them; it's impossible to make as many learning centers in class as it is indicated in the documents [3].

Other Ukrainian scientists, who study primary school teachers' value attitude to the reform, express similar point of view. V. Yurchenko and L. Hrytsenok have given the following results of the monitoring research (2015–2018) on the features of reflecting the transformation of educational system in Ukraine in public opinion: the level of trust to the system of education in Ukraine fluctuated between 48,0% (2015) and 47,2% (2018) and didn't depend on the age and respondents' residence region. The scientists describe one of the possible social and psychological technologies of developing positive public opinion about the educational innovations – All-Ukrainian Contest-Quest "Reform is a Way to the School of My Dream" [4].

H. Bezv substantiates the need of the activity-based approach to improving the attitude of public and teachers to the New Ukrainian School, claiming that in the condition of social and political changes the high-quality methods, which make it possible "to keep the general context and to increase the focus on the individual preferences" should prevail over traditional social survey [2]. The scientist illustrates the effectiveness of the method of "investigating by participating" for studying educators' viewpoints about the prospects of developing new Ukrainian school. Analysing teachers' narratives, H. Bezv distinguishes keywords of the positive connotation (interesting (55%), funny (45%),

success (23%), clubs (53%), etc.) and negative content (failure (13%), shame (21%), difficulties in communication, knowledge assessment (18%), unpleasant stories (3%), etc.). In H. Bezv's research among the prospects of secondary education institutions in the implementation of the New Ukrainian School, the following ones are determined: building the communicative environment at school, its inspiring role in teachers' and students' lives, the orientation to developing and supporting the national identity of the learning process participants, strengthening teachers' self-sufficiency, trust and sincerity in communication, increasing teachers' motivation [2].

The issue of teacher-practitioners' resistance to transformation processes in education is characteristic not only for Ukraine. Describing the attitude of teachers all over the world to transformations, C. Craig uses an accurate comparison: reforms are like a water supply which helps educational reforms to be fast delivered to teachers, however, they rarely go up. So, C. Craig studies teachers' attitude to six reforms, connected with the learning process standardisation, being implemented in American secondary schools for two decades. The author describes their difficulties while reforming the learning process, presented in stories and symbolising the outstanding idea of reforming the education system in such a way: data (information) is [G]od [14]. M. Mäkinen carries out the interpretative phenomenological research on teacher' attitude to reforming inclusive education in Finland and says that the indicators of teachers' professional burnout during the reforming have a high level, however, teaching profession is respectful in this country. At the same time, the resistance to changes and teachers' criticism is mainly based on the insufficiency of their motivation to reforming [8].

Thus, on the way to the New Ukrainian School Reform in Ukraine, there are problems that are typical for the transformation of the education system and require more attention to studying the value aspect of educational innovations in educators' awareness.

Our empirical research is based on implementing the narrative framework – a form which has been chosen, firstly, for directing teachers' story content to the components that are essential for us, defining different aspects of teachers' attitude to the New Ukrainian School; secondly, for structuring their stories; thirdly, for developing initially the conversational style of a narrative and for avoiding the scientific, theorizing, and reporting nature, which is so customary for Ukrainian teachers that they avoid "live" communication on professional topics. For this purpose, the title of the narrative is also formulated using the conversational style – "I and the New Ukrainian School".

The narrative framework contains four content-structural blocks:

1. The general information about a respondent: sex, age, speciality and degree of education, the total number of teaching experience years, number of teaching experience years at the New Ukrainian School.

2. The common attitude to the profession and the New Ukrainian School: the assessment of the level of their teaching skills, the attitude to reforms, and if there are changes in the perception of the New Ukrainian School.

3. The subjective evaluation of the effectiveness of the New Ukrainian School: attitude to main theoretical foundations of the New Ukrainian School, advantages and disadvantages of the reforms. In this block, we try to use additional opportunities of the narrative framework as an instrument of measuring (“a hidden question”) and encouraging respondents to indirectly determine their attitude to the New Ukrainian School: “I \_\_\_\_\_ understand the theoretical foundations of pedagogical innovations and can \_\_\_\_\_ all \_\_\_\_\_ of foundations, which comprise the New Ukrainian School formula: \_\_\_\_\_”.

According to our plan, a teacher should concentrate on recalling key New Ukrainian School foundations and indirectly express the real attitude to acquiring the theoretical foundations of the reform.

4. The personal practice and the prediction of the new Ukrainian school development: cases (negative and/or positive) which have happened in teachers’ professional practice, choosing suitable expression or metaphor illustrates a personal attitude to the New Ukrainian School (in this part, we turn to the experience of C. Craig [23] and H. Bevez [2] in analysing metaphors in narratives), their own ideas about the New Ukrainian School development, its influence on the traditional education system and Ukraine’s future.

The analysis of the results proves that respondents had higher education and specialist’s and master’s degrees. All the teachers surveyed and principals of higher education institutions had the education in speciality “Primary education”, the teachers of

Evaluating their level of professional competence and mastership, respondents were distributed as follows: 30% of teachers defined their level as a high one, 23% – sufficient, 47% – medium and basic. It is an interesting fact that 3 persons defined their level as a high one, having less than 3 years of teaching experience, and so 12 persons did whose teaching experience was over 10 years. The attitude to the profession distributed as follows: positive (62%), good (24%), and highly professional (14%).

The quantitative analysis of respondents’ answers about their attitude to the New Ukrainian School at the beginning of the reform is generalised in table 1.

The dynamics and directions of changes of teachers’ attitude to the New Ukrainian School at the beginning of the reform and in the 2020–2021 academic year is generalised in Figure 1.

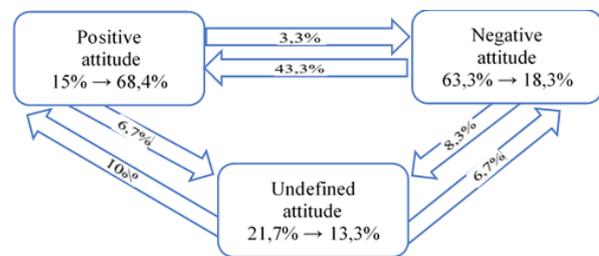


Figure 1. The dynamics of changes of teachers’ attitude to the New Ukrainian School between 2018 and 2021

The respondents called the following reasons that influenced the changes of attitude to new Ukrainian school: in-depth acquaintance with the methodology and equipping of the New Ukrainian School classrooms with multimedia complexes, the implementation of changes in practice, high-quality teacher training, interactive, etc. Teachers defined overloading with the work, the necessity to learn additional theoretical information, the complexity of organising the necessary number of cells as the reasons of decreasing the level of their attitude to the New Ukrainian School.

Completing a sentence by teachers about the key

Table 1. Primary school teachers’ attitude to the New Ukrainian school reform

Attitude	Positive	Negative	Undefined
At the beginning of the reform (2018)	15%	63,3%	21,7%
Tree years later (2021)	68,4%	18,3%	13,3%

specialized schools – in special education. The years of teaching experience at the New Ukrainian School didn’t correlate with the total number of teaching experience years: there were cases when the total number of teaching years comprised 28, whereas the years of teaching experience at new Ukrainian school – 1, and vice versa – total number of teaching experience years – 2,5, whereas years at new Ukrainian school – 1,5.

components of the New Ukrainian School proved the fallacy of our previous ideas, as most of respondents (85%) gave complete answers which were practically indistinguishable from each other. That means teachers were looking for additional answers to this question and copied it from the Internet resources. On the other hand, this reaction of teachers illustrated not high level of their theoretical knowledge about the New Ukrainian School,

in-depth sense of this reform, and unwillingness to delve into theoretical areas.

Describing the cases from their own practice, teachers gave reactions that proved positive tendency (42%); negative tendency (50%); neutral events (8%). The metaphors, which teachers used for describing the New Ukrainian School reform, were also interestingly distributed: with positive connotation 62% (creativity; something new but still complicated; giving the high-quality education; comfortable conditions; the New Ukrainian School is a school for living in the 21st century; a new modern model, etc.); with negative connotation 38% (all that glitters is not gold; a child but not monitoring is in the centre of educational process).

Predicting the development of the national education system in Ukraine, teachers assert that the New Ukrainian School will improve it (63%), will destroy all the good that existed previously (37%). The effects of the New Ukrainian School impacts are defined as follows: “developed and socialised personality, a citizen of Ukraine”, “children, interested in learning, and our educated future”, “optimisation of the learning process”, “hard realia”, “children’s unreadiness to solve difficult life problems”, “decline of education in our country”, “disappearing of good teachers”, etc.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results obtained in our practical research differ from the date given in the analytical reports of national questionnaires of teachers [19], [21], on average by 15–20% downward and confirm the reliability of indicators specified in the researchs [3], [4].

The narrative research qualitative analysis established the presence of myths about New Ukrainian School confirmed by T. Vodolazska [3] in the minds of primary school teachers. The results of the answer to the “hidden” question in the narrative framework regarding the key positions of the New Ukrainian School confirm the conclusions [14], [8], [3], [4] about the important role of participants awareness in deep essence of the reform. The metaphors within attitude to New Ukrainian School, primary school teachers gave in our study, did not coincide with the examples of positive and negative connotations H. Bevz [2], which can be explained by the use of different research methods and methods of analysis of results.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

While making the theoretical research on the issue, we have found out that survey of teachers, which have been conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine every year since 2018, and civil society organisations are more focused on distinguishing teachers’ practical skills than on diagnosing their attitude to the New Ukrainian School reform, whereas a

motivated teacher is one of the components of the Concept of the New Ukrainian School. The empirical research has proved that primary school teachers’ attitude to the New Ukrainian School innovations has been changing for three years and has changed from the negative one (63,3%) to mostly positive (68,4%). The reasons of changing teachers’ attitude to the New Ukrainian School include the improvement of the level of being informed about the reform, the indirect perception of the first results. The changes of the attitude to the negative direction are caused by material and technical factors [24] and school teachers’ traditional resistance to something new.

The results of qualitative research of primary school teachers’ value orientations to the New Ukrainian School illustrate their unwillingness to study theoretical foundations, underlying the Concept of the New Ukrainian School, however, they show teachers practical readiness to implement these foundations in the practice of modern school. The most common metaphors, used by teachers to express their positive attitude to the New Ukrainian School, are “creativity”, “efficiency”, and “comfort”. Such results indicate the overall effectiveness of the New Ukrainian School reform for the national education system and the need to organize additional activities at the national level to further increase teachers’ motivation, which have been showing a positive tendency for 3 years.

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