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Teachers' and principals' experiences with assessing Ukrainian students in Polish schools

Abstract

Research objectives (aims) and problem(s): The purpose of this article is to describe the experiences and strategies adopted by teachers and principals in response to the challenge of evaluating Ukrainian students. The research questions are as follows: What difficulties and obstacles do school teachers face in the process of assessing Ukrainian students? What strategies have teachers developed for evaluating these students?

Research methods: Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals from schools enrolling students from Ukraine. A total of 10 interviews were conducted.

Process of argumentation: The article discusses the legal aspects relevant to the research topic, dominant approaches to grading in Polish didactics (objectivist and constructivist), and a review of current research in this area. It also outlines the methodological assumptions and presents the findings according to the research questions.

Research findings and their impact on the development of educational sciences: The main challenges in grading Ukrainian students included a lack of systemic support, language barriers, the absence of preparatory departments, the limited effectiveness of mixed-class instruction, and the short duration of Ukrainian students' education

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in Polish schools. Strategies adopted by teachers included modifying or adjusting grading criteria and applying a "profit or loss" calculus – choosing to promote or not promote a student – often justified as being "in the best interest of the child."

Conclusions and/or recommendations: The strategies employed by teachers expose the inefficiency of the current grading system. The sole function of assessment has become the decision to promote students to the next grade. Ukrainian students, by virtue of their extraordinary circumstances, have in some ways contributed to exposing the overemphasis on grades in the Polish educational system. We underscore the need to move away from traditional grading toward more inclusive, student-centered approaches that take cultural context into account.

Introduction

Before the outbreak of war in Ukraine, Polish schools were relatively culturally homogeneous, and teachers had little experience working with immigrant students who did not speak Polish. Schools generally lacked comprehensive tools or strategies in this area. Poland's migration policy offered no established model for integrating immigrant students in schools, particularly one involving systemic solutions that would enable long-term educational and psychological support for this group (Kamińska, 2019). This situation persisted despite the upward trend in migration and the increasing mobility that had been observed even before the war.

After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the number of Ukrainian children enrolled in Polish schools and kindergartens steadily increased, reaching 190,000 by the end of the 2022/2023 school year.[1] In a very short time, the educational community faced an urgent need for systemic solutions in the framework of migration policy, particularly in the field of education. One burning issue requiring top-down resolution was the assessment of Ukrainian students. The legal solution introduced in this regard stipulates that Ukrainian students in mainstream classes are subject to the same rules of classification, promotion, and grading as Polish students (Legal Journals 2023.900, Article 165, item 2, Education Law).

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[1] Data from the Ministry of Education and Science, October 2022.

Only students placed in preparatory divisions are exempt from this evaluation system. These divisions are intended for students whose knowledge of Polish is insufficient for participation in mainstream classes. In practice, however, the vast majority of Ukrainian students – despite their limited Polish language skills – are enrolled in mainstream classes together with Polish students. Since instruction is delivered in Polish, this situation creates conditions ripe for discrimination. Amnesty International has warned that "grading male and female students who do not understand Polish well enough does not reflect their actual knowledge and is therefore unfair to them" (Amnesty International, 2023). Such practices contribute to the phenomenon of early dropout – either through premature withdrawal from formal education or through academic results that fail to reflect students' true potential (Seynhaeve et al., 2024). Teachers and principals who work with Ukrainian students widely recognize this concern and identify assessment as the most difficult area in their work with this group (Pyżalski et al., 2022; Tędziagolska et al., 2022). The purpose of this article is to describe the experiences of teachers and principals involved in assessing Ukrainian students during the first wave of refugee arrivals, between March and June 2022.

Quantitative and qualitative nature of assessment

The discussion surrounding school evaluation – its function, form, and benchmarks – is ongoing, arouses a lot of controversy, and largely depends on the educational paradigm adopted. Instructional didactics, which stems from the objectivist paradigm, assumes that learning outcomes can be observed and measured through assessment, which reflects a student's mastery of the material. This approach is oriented around the curriculum and strategies for the effective acquisition of knowledge. Assessment is also an important element in the behaviorist model of instrumental conditioning associated with instructional didactics, wherein positive assessments are intended to reinforce desirable behavior, while negative assessments suppress undesirable behavior (Skinner, 1958).

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In contrast, the constructivist paradigm holds that knowledge is not easily measurable, and reducing assessment to the monitoring or measurement of school performance is seen as harmful. Proponents of this approach emphasize the student and the process of mental knowledge construction. Students are expected to ask questions, solve problems independently or collaboratively, and adopt an investigative and reflective mindset. Assessment in this model is individualized and qualitative. It takes the form of student self-assessment or self-evaluation (Klus-Stańska, 2018; Groenwald, 2021). Calls to include students in the evaluation process have led to movements toward the democratization of assessment (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2001, pp. 38–48). The goal is to make assessment fairer, more transparent, and more sustainable. Following this principle, teachers engage students in self- and peer-assessment, allowing them to help establish evaluation criteria. The ability to define the purpose of peer-assessment, formulate appropriate feedback, and communicate it constructively to peers – while fostering a supportive atmosphere – is crucial for developing communication skills and promoting collaborative learning. Supporting students in developing this skill enables them to provide feedback that positively impacts their learning process (Little et al., 2025, pp. 1–2).

This approach balances the relationship between the assessed and the assessor, who no longer acts as the sole authority. Through democratic assessment practices, teachers adopt individualized approaches that consider students' needs, pace, and learning styles. Students, in turn, develop democratic values and come to understand the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning (Ćwikła, 2021, p. 27). As a result, assessment becomes more responsive to the diverse needs of learners.

Contemporary research on school assessment – particularly within the "growth mindset" framework – focuses on the developmental role of assessment, its effectiveness, methodological diversity, and its impact on student motivation and educational equity (Dweck, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Hattie, 2015; Brookhart, 2024). Assessment should function as a tool for student growth, rather than a final judgment of achievement. According to formative assessment theory, learning agency is located

with the student (Earl, 2013; Adie et al., 2018). These shifts exemplify a constructivist approach to education, which emphasizes student autonomy and self-regulation in the learning process.

This approach to assessment is grounded in socio-cultural learning theories, which explain how teachers and peers assist students in understanding their current position in the learning process and identifying where they should direct their learning next (Dann, 2014; Hattie, 2015). Learning is a contextualized process that expands the role of students as active participants in assessment (Andrade et al., 2021, p. 2).

However, both in everyday discourse among teachers and parents, as well as among educational policymakers and academics, the dominant belief is in the authoritative and reliable nature of numerical assessment – as a quantitative indicator used to represent a student and their mastery of knowledge relative to their classmates (Szyling, 2014). This approach continues to have a profound impact on assessment theory and practice, not only at the level of internal school assessment systems but also more generally – for example, in the use of educational value added as a measure of a school's teaching effectiveness (Dolata et al., 2015).

Studies of teachers' grading practices show that these are based on personal educational philosophies, a teacher's conscience, and sense of fairness, as well as existing regulations and procedures (Szyling, 2011; 2014). Teachers, when determining how to grade students, often admit to manipulating scores and criteria. In doing so, they develop personal survival strategies in response to the conflicting expectations placed on them by different stakeholders in the grading process (ibid.).

This phenomenon became particularly pronounced when teachers were required to assess Ukrainian students (Tędziagolska et al., 2022). On the one hand, they were legally obligated to apply the same rules of classification, promotion, and evaluation to Ukrainian students as to their Polish peers (Legal Journals 2023.900, Article 165, item 2, Education Law). On the other hand, most children with experiences of forced migration can be classified as students with special educational needs (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2022). This status necessitates differentiation in the educational process, including curricular content, learning requirements, and

grading systems. As Nachbauer and Kyriakides (2020, p. 6) note, "Students' learning outcomes should depend only on their own efforts and capacity, and not on considerations over which they have no influence," such as language of instruction or ethnic background.

Thus, teachers faced the challenge of adapting the educational process to accommodate the special educational needs of Ukrainian students, while simultaneously being required to assess them under the same conditions as their Polish peers. They often resorted to overt manipulation of scores and grading criteria, giving preferential treatment to Ukrainian students or adjusting assessment standards to match individual abilities (Tędziagolska et al., 2023). From this perspective, the experiences and strategies developed in response to the need to assess Ukrainian students are of particular research interest.

Research methodology

The research is part of a project devoted to the functioning of schools receiving students from Ukraine. The project was a grassroots initiative undertaken by the staff of the Educational Research Institute, in cooperation with researchers from other academic institutions. Its purpose was to gather knowledge about the challenges, effective solutions, and working conditions of schools operating under the extraordinary circumstances created by the war in Ukraine and the resulting arrival of refugee students.

The research is qualitative and grounded in an interpretive paradigm. The chosen method is biographical (Schütze, 2006), and the key technique employed was individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals from elementary schools that had received students from Ukraine. The research team developed a proprietary tool in the form of an interview guide, which included questions concerning the emotional experiences of both students and teachers, the didactic experiences (challenges encountered and support needed by teachers), and social experiences.

The research was carried out between June and September 2022, that is, after an incomplete semester of education for Ukrainian students in Polish schools. Public elementary schools were selected based on their high percentage of refugee students and limited prior experience working with Ukrainian learners. All participating schools were located in the Mazovia province. Due to the high workloads of these schools, establishing contact proved difficult. In the end, 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours, yielding a total of about 100 pages of transcript.

The goal of the study was to describe the experiences of teachers and school principals in assessing Ukrainian students. The research focused on the experiences and strategies adopted by teachers and principals in response to the necessity of evaluating these students. The central research questions were as follows: What difficulties and obstacles do teachers encounter in the process of assessing Ukrainian students? What strategies have teachers developed for evaluating Ukrainian students

To answer these questions, all data related to school grading were extracted from the interview material and organized according to broader analytical categories. This analysis identified key barriers to the assessment of Ukrainian students, as well as the strategies adopted by teachers and principals to deal with this complex situation.

Obstacles in the evaluation process of Ukrainian students

A chief obstacle in the assessment process – and in the education of Ukrainian students – was the language barrier. Non-Polish-speaking students were granted one year of preparation for general education classes in dedicated preparatory divisions, during which they were not subject to evaluation (Journal of Laws 2022, item 795). In practice, however, many schools were unable to establish such divisions due to various limitations, including lack of space, staffing shortages, or financial constraints, despite having reported a need for them (Tędziagolska et al., 2022).

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For comparison, in the 2021/2022 school year, there were fewer than 2,500 such divisions across the country, serving 38,000 children – only 27% of all refugee students. In the following school year, the number of preparatory divisions dropped by nearly two-thirds. As a result, only 15,000 Ukrainian students – about 10% of the refugee student population – were enrolled in preparatory programs (Tędziagolska et al., 2022).

Consequently, many Ukrainian students who did not speak Polish or had insufficient command of the language were placed in mainstream classes. In the end, the vast majority of Ukrainian students were assigned to mixed classrooms (Pyżalski, 2022), which meant that they were to be evaluated according to the same standards as their Polish peers.

In the interviews, both teachers and principals, when discussing the challenges that schools faced in connection with the admission of Ukrainian students, drew attention to this issue as particularly problematic. Above all, they openly criticized the legal requirement that Ukrainian students in mainstream classes be assessed according to the same rules as Polish students.

Examples of statements:

It was a regulation we never fully agreed with. (D4Wd)

*You can only excuse children from grading if they're in preparatory classes. But if the principal decided the child was fit for a regular class, that is, they were placed there and had to be graded – well, we had a bit of a **conflict**. (D6Md)*

*The grading was not very good. Because we were told to grade the children in Polish classes the same way we grade Polish children. I'm sorry to say it, but that **was not a good solution**. Those children could not be evaluated according to the same criteria as Polish children. They **did not have the same chance** to learn – some of them **were starting from scratch**. (D5Wd)*

To be honest, if I had to accept students based on their knowledge of Polish, I would have accepted two out of the hundred Ukrainian children. And to the rest, I would have had to say, "I'm really sorry, but I don't have a place for you in this school because you don't speak Polish. We only teach in Polish." (D7Md)

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The fact that we admitted these children into mainstream classes – well, the situation was sort of black and white, you know? If you accepted them into Polish groups, then please treat them like Polish students. You took that risk. You didn't have to admit them, right? (D7Md)

These statements convey a clear sense of disagreement with the existing regulations. For many teachers, it was difficult – if not inconceivable – to understand how non-Polish-speaking immigrant students were expected to succeed in mixed-language classrooms, especially in the context of assessment. Teachers openly admitted that they could not assess Ukrainian students fairly or objectively – at least not according to the regulations and standardized expectations.

In this context, the grading system rooted in instructional didactics, in which teachers are expected to verify the extent to which each student has mastered the curriculum, proved essentially unworkable in real educational practice. Yet it was still imposed on teachers as a top-down requirement. Educators found themselves in a position of compliance without room for discussion or independent decision-making. Their grading decisions were dictated by subjective judgments, often built from the ground up with their own justifications. Notably, participants' statements lacked reflection on alternative grading methods, assessment strategies, or the evaluation of Ukrainian students more specifically. They also frequently mentioned a lack of institutional support, which contributed to a significant emotional burden in their work.

Examples of Statements:

There was a problem with grading. How do you evaluate them? What do you grade them on? Do you give them grades? Are they supposed to take regular tests? Or not take tests at all? Do you even grade them when they came in halfway through the second semester? (D6Md)
*It [grading] was really hard because it was – honestly – it was a huge source of **nerve-wracking stress** for the teachers, too. It was panic. It felt like **a panic attack,** and **I was just as scared as they were.** And at the same time, managing the situation was not easy because we really didn't know*

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*how to assess the skills of these children – and I don't think any school in Poland knew either because it really was, it was… **it was really very hard**. It completely caught us off guard. (D1Ms)*

*[The teachers] were a little disgusted at first that they had to give grades at all, and they tried to find a **balance** between our kids and those kids. But overall, it was really difficult. (D5Wd)*

*Some teachers didn't know what to do… but **mostly**, it was an **"anything goes" kind of attitude**. There was **nothing structured, nothing centralized.** (D5Wd)*

*Team meetings were not easy either. One teacher says, "No, I won't let him pass." Then someone else says, "Look, but what about this? What about that?" **Decision-making was just left up to the teachers**. (D7Md)*

Teachers clearly expressed that they lacked systemic support in this area. They described the grading process for Ukrainian students as "the Wild West," a situation where anything could happen, and no clear rules applied. When assigning grades, they were left to make decisions on their own, often questioning whether what they were doing was truly in the best interest of the children. They found themselves in situations where human needs took precedence, and they had to develop their own ways of handling the evaluation of children. Their accounts show a pervasive sense of chaos, anxiety, tension, and uncertainty typical of crisis situations. What had once been a predictable and ritualized institutional practice now required active reflection and reevaluation (Giddens, 2003).

Teaching linguistically mixed classes proved to be a major challenge. In their statements, teachers noted that Ukrainian students – due to a lack of support and the language barrier – often spent time in class ineffectively. Teachers did not have adequate tools to support these children, who were in a highly stressful situation as a result of their unfamiliarity with the Polish language and educational system. This led to communication difficulties. The teachers, following their own individual approaches, dealt with a variety of school-related problems and situations involving Ukrainian children.

Teachers responded by drawing on their personal educational beliefs – what Balakhovich (2009) calls their "own points of reference," or "cognitive

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attitudes. Implicit in these beliefs is a set of pedagogical values, ethical orientations, and assumptions about the student's individual and social responsibilities. As Balakhovich writes, "Teachers' beliefs are made visible in the teacher's working style, individual educational actions, interpretations of real situations, judgments, and behavioral norms" (2009).

Examples of statements:

*I really think putting those kids in regular classes was a mistake. They should've had preparatory classes and learned only Polish. **There was simply no way they could get any real support**. (N1Wd)*

*In those regular classes – you know, the mixed ones – **these poor kids just kind of sat there. They looked so lost. And sometimes, the time wasn't as productive as it should've been**. (N1Wd)*

*I got tired of the regular lessons, such as Polish language class, when I saw those Ukrainian kids just sitting there doing nothing… and I **didn't have much of an idea how to adapt the material, so to speak**, so that they could learn the same stuff as the Polish children, even though they didn't know the language. It just felt… well, it felt it wasn't right on my part. I'd leave class thinking, "No, not again… he was playing under the desk again **because I couldn't come up with anything interesting or appropriate for him.**" I just don't really know how to do it. (N1Wd)*

According to the teachers, making learning more effective was nearly impossible due to their lack of pedagogical preparation and limited knowledge of how to educate migrant students. They lacked ideas, materials, and practical tools for working with this group. As a result, they experienced feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and failure.

In expressing their opposition to evaluating Ukrainian students, teachers pointed not only to the language barrier, the lack of systemic support, and insufficient training or resources, but also to the short amount of time available to make decisions about final year evaluations. It is important to note that the study was conducted between June and September 2022, which means that Ukrainian students had been enrolled in Polish schools for only a few months.

Examples of Statements:

*After all, we couldn't **suddenly expect grades from these children** on February 24. … The last few weeks were really a very difficult time for us because **all of a sudden, we were expected to start grading these children**, just like everyone else. (D7Md)*

*Well, yes, but to give a meaningful, descriptive grade, **you have to assess the child** – **you need the time and opportunity** to do that. (D5Wd)*

*The closer we got to the end of the year, the more we wanted to be specific about the final grades because you **can't just issue a certificate or a final evaluation in one day. You have to prepare for it, observe, and collect data. It's a whole process**, assessing a child – and we were waiting the whole time for some clear guidance: how to assess? What to base it on? What should the final evaluation look like? (D6Wd).*

According to the teachers, assigning grades is a process that requires long-term observation and data collection, which they had no opportunity to do under these circumstances. In the constructivist model, the teacher steps away from the role of evaluator and instead focuses on supporting the student, following their progress, and motivating them to continue learning. Although this may seem achievable in theory, teachers explained that they lacked the tools to fulfill this role, citing numerous obstacles that stood in their way.

Table 1 Obstacle to assessing Ukrainian students

Obstacles to assessing Ukrainian students
Lack of systemic support
Language barriers
Absence of preparatory divisions
Ineffective learning in mixed classrooms
Short duration of Ukrainian students' stay in Polish school

Source: Author's own study

Teachers' assessment strategies

In our discussion, we emphasize the significant role of teachers in devising the strategies used to assess the school performance of Ukrainian students. In educational practice, it is up to the teacher to decide how to assess, what will be evaluated, and which criteria matter most (Szyling, 2011, p. 85). **"Those who had heart were guided by their heart; those who had more reason were guided by their reason." (D5Wd)**

Teachers and principals, placed in a situation where they were required to evaluate, described the strategies that they adopted to handle this challenge. Many spoke of relying on their conscience or intuition. One strategy that emerged from the interviews **was the modification – or even manipulation – of grading criteria.**

Examples of statements:

At our school, we graded these children very generously. When it came to Polish classes, I didn't grade the kids based on the core curriculum because obviously that doesn't make any sense. They don't know how to do it. ***I mostly evaluated their engagement in class, and most of the teachers did the same: they checked if the kids were engaged and interested.*** *It was really hard, really incredibly hard. One of the hardest things I've had to do. (N1Wd)*

We translated tests, pulled grades from Ukraine, and tried to find subjects that matched what our teachers taught. … Just based it on basic classwork. *We told them, "Let them do anything. It doesn't have to be grade 8 content, even if they're in grade 8." (D6Md)*

Obviously, I can't expect them to… (D6Md) I mean, yes, they wrote a classification exam at the end, in June. ***But if I saw that the student was engaged – especially if they were really trying to learn Polish – then I felt like it was worth it.*** *(D7Md)*

Teachers' methods of grading Ukrainian students stemmed from an effort to strike a balance between official regulations and their own professional values, between near-term compliance and longer-term ethical

responsibility (Groenwald, 2014). They described grading as an undefined, open-ended task, one they carried out according to personal beliefs, conscience, or intuition. Altering grading criteria often meant lowering academic demands, paying more attention to effort and engagement, or incorporating students' previous academic achievements from their home schools. One strategy that ultimately proved unsuccessful was verifying the students' prior performance through records from their schools in Ukraine.

Example of statement:

*There was this idea: okay, well then **let them provide us with some documents from Ukraine, show us what grades they had there**. But it turned out they had completely different subjects, a completely different grading scale – I think it's from 1 to 10 – and everything was at completely different levels. (D6Md)*

The educational systems in Poland and Ukraine turned out to be radically different. These attempts by the school community to find solutions independently constitute additional evidence of the lack of top-down government support, such as the absence of a synthesized guide to the Ukrainian curriculum (including stages of education, age of school entry, grading scales, required subjects, etc.).

Another strategy that emerged could be described as a "**profit and loss" calculus,** underpinned by the principle of **acting "in the best interest of the child." Teachers were often focused on ensuring that students were promoted to the next grade level in order to avoid disrupting the classroom peer group.** "For children, **being anchored in the class unit was really important for their sense of security**." (D7Md). In some cases, children were intentionally held back a grade to give them more time to acquire the language: "In early childhood education, we have four Ukrainian children who – if everything goes according to our agreements – will repeat the first grade. **This was based on an agreement and the parents' consent.**" (D7Md)

These statements show that teachers were concerned with the safety, emotional well-being, and developmental needs of Ukrainian students.

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Their decisions exemplify their professional judgment and commitment to doing what they believed was best for each child. It is worth noting that the area of decision-making is tied to teachers' individual theories, which, as Polak notes, "constitute an instrument for adapting to the conditions in which [the teacher] works and, at the same time, a factor that allows them to transform the external network of teaching and educational situations into a framework that is understandable to them." (2000, p. 163). The pedagogical worldview embedded in these complex individual theories – particularly regarding assessment strategies – is expressed in practical action. This helps explain not only the phenomenon of "variability of assessments" (Szyling, 2011, p. 85), but also the discretionary nature of grading criteria and the absence of a clear, unified assessment strategy.

Szyling refers to this phenomenon – of adapting assessment methods to classroom realities – as *classometry*. Its goal is to reduce the tension between formal measurement practices and the practicalities of grading by teachers, which creates a "terrain of compromises," often involving the occasional lowering of academic demands (Szyling, 2011). One of the principals interviewed also described the strategies employed by Ukrainian parents in response to the possibility of their child not being promoted:

> *It was basically a kind of **reassurance from the parents**. They wanted to be sure that even if we recommended holding the child back, they'd just come back in August with a certificate from a Ukrainian school saying that the child had completed that level – and we'd have to enroll them in the next grade. (D7Md)*

Although it is difficult to estimate the number of Ukrainian students who participate in remote education through the Ukrainian school system, it is worth noting that many students pursue education in both systems simultaneously. These students, even if not promoted in the Polish school system, may still present a certificate confirming completion of a given grade from their Ukrainian school. This is a kind of legal workaround that can be applied in practice.

The standardized grading system proved useful in the context of "Polish as a foreign language," even though teachers of this subject were not formally required to assign grades. One teacher pointed out the need to assess Ukrainian students in these classes:

> *As for Polish as a foreign language, which I taught, **there didn't even have to be a grade. But I still gave one**. It was much easier for me because I had structured topics, I got feedback from the children, they did exercises, I could hear how they spoke and see the progress they were making. So it was easier to grade them and give them feedback on what they didn't know, what they needed to work on. Well, a grade is such feedback. (N1Wd).*

In preparatory departments, where Ukrainian students were enrolled, the practice of assessment regained its traditional function and was successfully used. In this context, grading once again functioned as a standardized tool. Although students were only expected to receive a certificate of participation in these classes, the teacher found it difficult to forgo summative assessment, even though it could have been easily replaced with descriptive assessment, which is inseparable from formative assessment. More specifically, formative assessment relies on feedback intended to support the student's learning process. The purpose of formative assessment is to foster students' sense of agency and support the development of self-esteem and autonomy. It is a future-oriented process – a dialogue between teacher and student, and also among students themselves (Ćwikła, 2021, p. 31). Such feedback could be translated into Ukrainian using Google Translate, the simplest free tool available to anyone, which makes communication more accessible for students.

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Table 2. Teacher assessment strategies

Teachers' assessment strategies
Changing or manipulating grading criteria based on the teacher's intuition
Taking into account students' previous grades
"Profit and loss" calculus: actions taken "in the best interest of the child" (both promotion and non-promotion to the next grade)
Use of traditional and standardized assessments during Polish language classes for foreigners, though not mandatory).

Source: Author's own study

Study Limitation

This research project has certain limitations that should be taken into account when generalizing its findings. First, the number of participants was limited. Second, the study was conducted during the first wave of war refugees and focused on teachers' initial experiences as they developed their own strategies for the educational process. Now, after three years of war and a continued increase in migration to Poland, the presence of Ukrainian students has become a routine part of school life, which is why it would be worthwhile to repeat this study. Additionally, the research covered exclusively primary schools. Future studies should expand to include high school teaching staff as well.

Conclusion

Teachers' grading practices take on many forms – from resistance and disagreement with the idea of grading newly arrived students to ethical considerations surrounding the act of assessment. The obstacles to grading Ukrainian students identified by teachers and principals include a lack of systemic support, language barriers, the absence of preparatory divisions, ineffective learning in mixed classrooms, and the short duration of students' educational experience in Polish schools. To cope with

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the obligation to assign grades, teachers and principals reported strategies such as altering grading criteria, adjusting or inflating scores, or recognizing previous grades from students' schools of origin. These approaches are rooted in individual pedagogical theories.

The legitimacy of grading itself is not questioned. However, teachers appear not to engage in deeper reflection on the function of grading – as a potential tool for learning design and for identifying alternative paths to support students in overcoming individual learning difficulties (Faber & Billmann-Mahecha, 2010, p. 30). In the accounts provided by educators and principals, there is a notable absence of references to descriptive or formative assessment, differentiated approaches, multiple forms of feedback, or the influence of cultural context on assessment practices. The educational potential of assessment is, in this context, largely overlooked. As a result, the support system for students is situated outside the grading framework.

The current migration crisis calls into question the continued validity of existing assessment systems. Longstanding norms and rules may, under new circumstances, prove ineffective, outdated, or even counterproductive. Teachers indicate that the traditional school grading system does not function effectively in these new circumstances. Their strategies expose the inefficiencies of the system. Ukrainian students, due to the exceptional nature of their situation, have inadvertently exposed the overreliance on grades in the Polish education system, in which grades, despite often being inadequate or even absurd, remain the default requirement.

Given forecasts that a significant number of refugee students will stay in Poland after the war (Herbst & Sitek, 2023), systemic support for teachers and students in the education of Ukrainian students is especially important. Although some reports and recommendations in this area are beginning to emerge (Tędziagolska et al., 2023; Tomasik, 2024), there is still insufficient attention given to a relatively unrecognized concept in Poland: *culturally responsive assessment* (Gay, 2010; Nayır et al., 2019; Nortvedt et al., 2020). This student-centered approach to assessment emphasizes differentiation and respects students' cultural ways of knowing and participating. Incorporating students' cultural contexts can help

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create a more inclusive, relevant, and engaging learning environment (Neugebauer et al., 2022). Assessment of Ukrainian students' academic performance should be a fair and flexible process – one that takes into account their unique circumstances, including cultural background, language proficiency, emotional well-being, and the challenges of adapting to a new environment.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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