

Initiative and communication in educational transformation: a comparative analysis of the Ukrainian and Polish experience

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Abstract. *This study compares initiative and communication in higher education reform in Poland and Ukraine, based on survey data from 540 students, educators, and administrators. Ukrainian students show higher self-perceived initiative in driving change, with greater emphasis on the collaborative roles of educators. Institutional and socio-political contexts, including military conflict in Ukraine, influence communication barriers and reform dynamics. Polish respondents highlight internal institutional conflicts and a desire for autonomy. The findings underscore the need for tailored strategies addressing logistical, communicative, and structural challenges to foster educational transformation.*

Keywords: *initiative, communication, educational reform, institutional barriers, student engagement.*

Initiative and communication represent two foundational components of successful educational reform and student engagement, particularly within contexts marked by political, institutional, and socio-cultural complexity. This study addresses the dynamics of initiative and communication in higher education, based on empirical data from 540 respondents across Ukraine and Poland. Through a comparative lens, it explores how students, educators, and administrators perceive and enact their roles as initiators of change and participants in communication processes that drive educational transformation.

A comprehensive survey-based study was conducted, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample of 540 participants includes students, teachers, and university authorities across a diversity of roles, age groups, genders, and institutional affiliations. Respondents were from Koszalin University of Technology and other Polish academic centres, such as Ignatianum University in Cracow, as well as from major Ukrainian academic institutions including Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kherson National Technical University, Kherson State University, and

V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. The study incorporated thematic qualitative coding [1] and statistical tools appropriate for exploratory survey data [3].

The survey illuminates the triadic structure of educational change agents: university administration, teachers, and students. Notably, students are perceived to have the most significant impact on the initiation of change. While 45.9% of Ukrainian students consider themselves initiators of educational changes, only 30.6% of their Polish counterparts do so. Additionally, 39.3% of Ukrainian respondents believe educators are key initiators, compared to 26.7% in Poland. This highlights a more prominent recognition of collaborative agency in Ukraine.

Institutional breakdowns by city reveal significant differences in initiative. Students from Lviv are the most active in initiating projects, while those from Kherson show notable hesitation, potentially reflecting the limitations of the online educational environment. In Koszalin, Polish students demonstrate high self-assurance in their role as change initiators, suggesting the need for tailored institutional support for student-led initiatives.

In terms of obstacles to idea sharing, students were the most optimistic group, with 52.8% reporting “no challenges” in expressing their ideas. Polish students followed closely, with 51.7% offering similar responses. Conversely, university authorities in Ukraine expressed notable concern regarding the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, indicating deeply embedded institutional constraints. Polish educators identified internal faculty disagreements and the lack of consistent decision-making processes as key barriers, suggesting a desire for greater institutional autonomy from ministerial control.

Students from both countries commonly pointed to logistical challenges, such as scheduling conflicts and organizational inconsistencies, as the main barriers to idea implementation. Ukrainian teachers also drew attention to the effects of military conflict on institutional development and communication, reflecting the broader socio-political context’s influence on educational reform.

Regarding stakeholder dynamics, the study reveals the importance of enhancing the accessibility of key decision-makers and overcoming resistance to change rather than focusing solely on communication barriers. Educators and authorities underline that institutional reform requires not only dialogue but structural conditions conducive to participation and transformation.

The internationalization component of the study reveals limited direct experience with studying abroad among respondents. Nonetheless, many expressed interest in foreign academic contexts and identified the need for targeted programs to support international

academic engagement. Challenges associated with international study experiences included communication adaptation, cultural adjustment, and logistical issues.

Communication difficulties were varied across groups and national contexts. These include interpreting non-verbal cues, expressing ideas effectively, initiating conversations, and adjusting communication styles to different interlocutors. Differences between countries and between roles (students, teachers, administrators) demonstrate how communication is shaped by both institutional culture and broader cultural patterns [2].

The findings underscore a multi-layered and contextualized view of initiative and communication within educational environments. Student-driven initiatives emerge as a powerful force in both national contexts, although significantly more so in Ukraine. This suggests differing expectations, power dynamics, and institutional cultures.

The results further indicate that students are not only willing but also able to serve as catalysts for institutional change when conditions are favorable. Simultaneously, Ukrainian institutional actors attribute a stronger initiatory role to teachers and educators, suggesting a broader culture of shared responsibility, possibly shaped by the country's crisis context and decentralization efforts in education.

Authorities in both countries express frustration with vertical institutional systems. In Poland, the desire for faculty-level autonomy points to tensions between academic self-governance and national education policy. In Ukraine, frequent references to the Ministry of Education and Science reveal bureaucratic constraints and unclear reform pathways, contributing to uncertainty and inertia at the institutional level.

The role of socio-political factors is particularly salient in Ukraine. Military operations and broader political instability are explicitly named as barriers to effective communication and change implementation. These realities differentiate the Ukrainian experience from that of Polish respondents, who rarely cite external political factors.

Cultural and institutional norms also shape the communication challenges reported. While Polish respondents tend to frame issues around process inefficiencies or organizational dynamics, Ukrainian participants are more likely to highlight external or structural barriers. This variation suggests that institutional reforms in each context may require differentiated communication strategies and change management approaches.

The data also highlight a pragmatic orientation among students. Despite contextual differences, the main reported barriers to participation and communication are organizational and logistical, rather than motivational or ideological. This implies that institutional responsiveness and practical support systems may significantly enhance student participation and initiative.

Finally, the study affirms the value of using mixed methods to explore initiative and communication. The integration of thematic qualitative analysis and quantitative breakdowns allows for a nuanced understanding of complex institutional behaviours (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Blattman et al., 2016; Vogt et al., 2014). It also provides insight into how cultural, national, and institutional contexts intersect to influence communication styles and initiative patterns.

Thus, this comparative study provides a comprehensive overview of initiative and communication dynamics in the higher education contexts of Poland and Ukraine. The findings suggest that educational change is most effectively driven by engaged and empowered students, supported by cooperative faculty and responsive institutional structures.

Noteworthy national differences emerge: Ukrainian students report higher levels of initiative and attribute more importance to educator participation, whereas Polish respondents emphasize internal institutional conflicts and desire greater autonomy. Communication challenges are widespread but vary by role and context, ranging from logistical coordination to deeper cultural and political constraints.

The study concludes that overcoming institutional inertia requires not only improving communication channels but also addressing deeper issues of accessibility, authority, and coordination. While logistical issues remain the most cited barrier by students, administrators highlight systemic limitations tied to policy environments. Effective educational transformation thus depends on holistic approaches that include logistical, communicative, and political strategies for enabling initiative.

The research offers actionable insights for academic institutions, especially those operating in volatile or transitioning systems. It also provides a foundation for further inquiry into how educational actors negotiate authority, initiative, and collaboration across national contexts.

References

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