

AN OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON OF SELECTED MBA PROGRAMS IN POLAND

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Purpose: Despite the growing number of MBA programs in Poland, comparative research examining the simultaneous integration of innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and research competencies within MBA curricula remains limited. This article aims to assess the extent to which selected MBA programs in Poland incorporate these future-oriented areas and to evaluate their alignment with broader trends in the modernization of management education.

Design/methodology/approach: The study employs qualitative content analysis (QCA) based on publicly accessible information from official websites of MBA programs. Program descriptions were manually coded using a predefined set of keywords related to innovation, AI, sustainability, and research skills. The analysis compares public and private institutions in Poland and considers structural program characteristics such as duration, teaching load, and AMBA accreditation.

Findings: The research revealed significant differences in addressing innovation, sustainability, AI, and research skills. Innovation is included in 19 out of 26 programs, while sustainability and artificial intelligence appear in 12 and 11 programs, respectively. Research skills are notably underrepresented, being present in only two programs. Only seven programs simultaneously incorporated innovation, AI, and sustainability. Private universities more frequently included innovation, sustainability, and AI-related content than public institutions. The findings suggest that Polish MBA education is only partially aligned with global trends associated with digital transformation and sustainable leadership development.

Research limitations/implications: The study relies on publicly available data, which may not fully represent actual curricula. The keyword-based coding approach may also omit relevant content described using alternative terminology. Future research could include detailed syllabus analysis, interviews with program directors, and student perspectives.

Practical implications: The findings highlight the need for MBA program designers to strengthen the integration of emerging topics such as AI, sustainability, and research competencies.

Originality/value: The paper offers a comparative analysis of MBA programs in Poland that simultaneously considers innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and research skills. It contributes to the discussion on the modernization of management education in Central and Eastern Europe and identifies important gaps in future-oriented managerial training.

Keywords: MBA programs, artificial intelligence, sustainability, innovation, management education.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Education distinguishes individuals because it determines career paths and develops the knowledge and skills needed to enter the labour market in our chosen fields (Bočková et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be considered a crucial element in today's world. Lifelong learning (LLL) is one of the key concepts in contemporary educational theory and policy. This concept is based on the premise that the learning process should not be confined to formal educational institutions or the early stages of life but should continue throughout an individual's lifetime (Laal et al., 2014).

Recognizing lifelong learning as a continuous process allows us to better understand how professionals, especially those in managerial positions, must keep developing their competencies throughout their careers. Managers learn and develop through structured programs outside the workplace and through informal on-the-job training (Jarošová et al., 2017). Studying for an MBA or participating in short-term lifelong learning programs are examples of formal programs.

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) is one of the most globally recognized postgraduate qualifications. It is a professional program designed to equip individuals with the skills needed for high-level roles in business, typically in management. Although the MBA has been around since the early 1900s, its popularity and relevance continue to grow (Aithal, 2015). In Poland, a particularly significant role in assessing the quality of MBA programs is played by the MBA Ranking published by the "Perspektywy" Educational Foundation. This ranking takes into account a variety of criteria, such as the program's reputation in academic and business circles, the competencies of the teaching staff, internationalization, the quality of participants, as well as feedback from alumni and employers. The business environment is changing very fast with technological advancements, growing emphasis on sustainability, and the increasing role of data-driven decision-making. To keep up, MBA programs need to cover essential modern topics. Innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development, and research skills are key areas that help managers succeed in today's environment.

This article aims to assess whether MBA programs in Poland incorporate courses on innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development, and research skills. It examines programs based on the total number of class hours and the duration in semesters. Additionally, it evaluates whether a university holds AMBA accreditation. In order to examine these issues, the study focuses on three interrelated questions concerning: (1) the extent to which MBA programs incorporate innovation, AI, sustainability, and research skills, (2) differences between public and private institutions, and (3) variation in program structure and teaching intensity.

2. Literature review

Research on MBA programs shows a diverse set of thematic areas reflecting the evolving objectives, challenges, and societal expectations surrounding business education. One research stream examines leadership curricula. Western management schools often focus on leadership principles rooted in Western traditions and ways of thinking. However, the research argues that these schools should broaden their approach and incorporate leadership perspectives from non-Western cultures as well (Mellahi, 2000).

The academic literature is increasingly emphasizing the importance of internationalization and global competencies. Research shows that institutions can improve teaching by using innovative and interactive methods, such as group research projects, role-playing games, international guest lectures, and cross-border virtual classes, instead of traditional lecture-based teaching. However, curriculum reform requires a thoughtful balance between global standards and local needs, including the use of original, market-relevant materials with an emphasis on intercultural communication. Strengthening the international faculty is also essential, which involves sending lecturers for training abroad and inviting experienced foreign instructors to participate in on-site or online teaching. These efforts are essential for developing professionals ready to lead in a globally connected world (Zhang, 2015).

Other studies investigate student motivations, revealing how personal interests, perceived career opportunities, and peer influence guide MBA paths (Din et al., 2014). Entrepreneurial intentions fostered by business education (Hmedat et al., 2017) and need for innovation (Aithal, Aithal, 2023) are also evident. (Hmedat et al., 2017) show that most MBA students in Oman are inclined to start their own businesses as a way to establish their careers. The study (Aithal, Aithal, 2023) examines and assesses a novel experiential learning approach known as "incubationship", designed to foster entrepreneurship at the higher education level. It utilizes advanced research skills such as design, analysis, comparison, evaluation, interpretation, and the generation of innovative ideas. It is worth mentioning that there are also studies on the development of MBA students' research skills, which show that engaging in qualitative research not only improves their research skills but also provides additional benefits that enhance managerial effectiveness (Cassell, 2018). Finally, studies also highlight institutional challenges, such as program scalability, supervision quality, and alignment with industry needs, especially in developing contexts (Pandiyan, 2011).

Sustainability is increasingly recognized as a key aspect of modern business. It is unsurprising that MBA programs are incorporating green business management into their curricula. Programs that focus on environmental responsibility can provide a competitive advantage. By introducing future managers to the principles of green management, these programs equip graduates with the necessary skills to function in a corporate environment that values sustainable practices (Page, Collins, 2010). There is also the concept of the Super

Innovative MBA, whose authors advocate for a far-reaching transformation of management education programs, including, among other things, a deep focus on research, the implementation of specialized analytical tools, and a strong grounding in the realities of the digital economy and sustainable development (Aithal, Karanth, 2024).

Given the above, academic attention is focused on topics such as innovation, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and research competencies. These are increasingly seen as key to shaping MBA programs for the future. Not only as indicators of modernizing educational content, but also as elements of developing leadership competencies in a dynamically changing global economy. In the face of technological innovations and the complex challenges of sustainable development, MBA programs are expected to become multidisciplinary, providing students with cross-cutting skills beyond the traditional managerial knowledge.

Three leading accrediting organizations for business schools - AACSB, AMBA, and EQUIS - are collectively known as the "triple crown accreditation". AMBA, AACSB International, and EQUIS require school activities to be based on policies and processes that will lead to continuous improvement (Avolio, Benzaquen, 2020). AMBA accreditation applies directly to MBA programs and has been awarded by the British Association of MBAs since 1967 (Jacqmin et al., 2021). It focuses on areas such as program impact, graduate employability, and learning outcomes. Rigorous criteria are applied regarding teaching quality, career development, and collaboration with the business sector. The accreditation is international and regularly updated to reflect changing standards and market needs. AMBA also promotes innovation, encouraging business schools to adapt their programs to new trends and maintain a high level of excellence (AMBA, 2025).

Existing studies on MBA education focus primarily on leadership development, internationalization, entrepreneurship, or sustainability as separate dimensions of management education. Previous research has also examined innovation-oriented MBA models and the growing importance of AI-related competencies. However, the existing literature rarely investigates the simultaneous integration of innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and research competencies within MBA curricula.

Moreover, comparative studies focusing on MBA programs in Poland remain very limited, despite the rapid expansion of postgraduate management education in the country. To the best of the author's knowledge, no previous study has systematically compared Polish MBA programs with regard to the combined presence of these future-oriented curricular components.

Therefore, this study addresses an important research gap by providing a comparative analysis of selected MBA programs in Poland in the context of innovation, AI, sustainability, and research competencies.

3. Methods

As part of the adopted research procedure, qualitative content analysis (QCA) was conducted. It is one of the most commonly used analytical tools (Zhang, Wildemuth, 2017). QCA has a strong foundation in various fields of social sciences, including management (Komor, Grzyb, 2023). The focus was on publicly available information presented on the official websites of selected MBA programs offered by Polish universities. Each program was manually coded based on the presence or absence of the identified thematic areas. Course descriptions were analyzed using keyword matching and contextual interpretation to ensure accurate classification. The website analysis was conducted in October 2025. Although this approach is limited to declarative data published by the universities themselves, it nevertheless allows for a comparative assessment. The analysis included both public and private universities from different regions of the country.

This article aims to compare MBA programs according to several key criteria. First, it analyzes the presence of content related to innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development, and research skills, as well as the number of hours devoted to these topics. Then, it compares the programs in terms of total course hours and the number of semesters. Finally, it analyzes whether a given university is AMBA accredited.

A list of keywords was created to assign courses to specific thematic areas. This list includes, among others, innovation, sustainability, ESG, artificial intelligence, and research skills. Various combinations of these keywords with other terms were also considered in the search. For the purposes of this analysis, a dataset based on the latest "Perspektywy MBA 2025" ranking was used. This ranking is one of the most comprehensive sources of quality assessment for Master of Business Administration programs in Poland, taking into account both academic criteria and factors related to the qualifications of teaching staff and graduate career support. The study covers institutions and programs listed in the ranking, including the Warsaw School of Economics, Kozminski University, Warsaw University of Technology, Poznań University of Economics and Business, and Wrocław University of Economics and Business, as well as several regional and private institutions, such as the WSB University, Lazarski University, and Merito WSB University, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
List of schools offering analyzed MBA programs

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Cracow University of Technology
Gdańsk University of Technology
Kozminski University
Krakow University of Economics
Medical University of Warsaw
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
Poznań University of Economics and Business

Cont. table 1.

SGH Warsaw School of Economics
Silesian University of Technology
University of Gdańsk
University of Lodz
University of Warsaw
Warsaw University of Life Sciences
Warsaw University of Technology
West Pomeranian Business School
Wroclaw Business University of Applied Sciences
Wroclaw University of Economics and Business
Wroclaw University of Science and Technology
WSB Merito University in Gdańsk
WSB Merito University in Poznań
WSB University
WSHIU University

Source: own work.

Some schools appear in the ranking more than once because they offer multiple MBA programs. The University of Lodz website did not provide curriculum information, so it was excluded from the analysis. Warsaw University of Life Sciences was also excluded, as no information about an MBA program was available on its website. Additionally, one of the two Kozminski University programs was also removed. In total, 26 programs from 21 schools were examined.

4. Results

An analysis of MBA program content in Poland, based on data from universities included in the "Perspektywy MBA 2025" ranking, revealed significant variation in the integration of selected thematic areas: innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and research skills. Among the 26 MBA programs examined, components related to innovation were present in 19 cases, AI-related topics appeared in 11 programs, and sustainability issues were included in 12 programs. Research skills were present in just 2 programs.

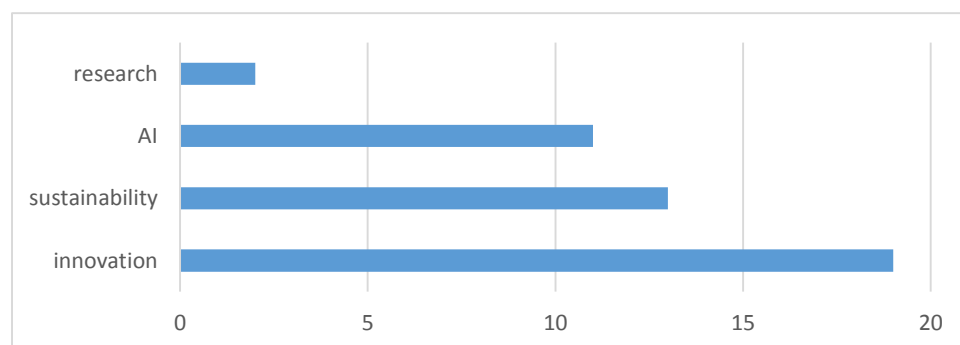


Figure 1. Number of MBA programs including selected thematic areas.

Source: own work.

The particularly low representation of AI may suggest a delay in the adoption of technological trends in Polish MBA-level management education. It is also worth noting that none of the four analyzed components are present in all programs, confirming the lack of a standardized teaching framework in this regard. The identified gaps serve as an important signal for MBA curriculum designers, highlighting the need for deeper integration of these subjects into the educational structure to better address the challenges of the contemporary business environment. Some topics are combined within a single course, for example UMK innovation and AI. This case is noteworthy because sustainability is addressed in three separate courses. The program includes courses such as: Sustainability and ESG, ESG Strategies, and ESG Regulations.

A comparative analysis demonstrated significant variation in the presence of key program components depending on the nature of the institution and the level of technological advancement in the educational offerings. MBA programs run by private universities more frequently include topics related to innovation than public universities (72% vs. 66%), sustainability (54% vs. 40%), and AI (54% vs. 33%). The results suggest that private universities can respond more quickly to changing market needs and employer expectations, which is reflected in the structure of their MBA programs. Public universities also incorporate modern content, but to a lesser extent, which may be due to more complex program procedures and greater structural stability. Overall, the observed differences indicate distinct program strategies between the two types of institutions. Another pattern can be observed in the relationship between the inclusion of AI-related modules and innovation components - among the 19 programs incorporating innovation, 11 also featured AI-related elements. This suggests a tendency to cluster technological themes within select, modernly designed programs. Additionally, only seven MBA programs in the entire set integrate three strategic components: innovation, AI, and sustainability. These programs can be regarded as leaders in incorporating content that addresses contemporary digital and environmental transformation challenges, offering a more holistic model of management education. Table 2 presents a graphical representation. A green field shows that the thematic course is included in the program, while a red field signifies its absence. An asterisk denotes that the institution is not a public university, and "N/A" means no data is available.

Table 2.*Presence of key thematic courses in selected MBA programs*

List of schools	Innovation	AI	Sustainability/ ESG	Research skills	Hours	Semesters
SGH Warsaw School of Economics					672	N/A
Kozminski University*					578	4
Warsaw University of Technology					550	4
Poznań University of Economics and Business					660	4
University of Warsaw					N/A	4
SGH Warsaw School of Economics					640	N/A
Krakow University of Economics					530	4
Wroclaw University of Economics and Business					680	4
Medical University of Warsaw and SGH Warsaw School of Economics					658	4
Gdańsk University of Technology					N/A	N/A
WSB Academy*					521	3
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń					540	4
WSB Merito University in Gdańsk*					450	4
Wroclaw University of Science and Technology					N/A	2
WSB Academy*					N/A	3
Silesian University of Technology					670	4
Cracow University of Technology					350	N/A
WSB Merito University in Gdańsk*					501	4
Wroclaw Business University of Applied Sciences*					437	3
University of Gdansk					570	4
WSB Merito University in Poznań*					437	4
Wroclaw Business University of Applied Sciences*					437	3
West Pomeranian Business School*					446	3
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and Poznań University of Economics and Business					540	4
Lazarski University*					460	N/A
WSHIU University*					N/A	2

Source: own work.

The highest annual teaching workload is observed at the Wroclaw University of Economics and Business, where there are 680 hours of teaching within four semesters, averaging 170 hours per semester. Comparable intensity comes from institutions such as the Silesian University of Technology (670 hours over 4 semesters, 167.5 hours/semester), Kozminski University (578 hours over 4 semesters, 144.5 hours/semester), and WSB Academy (521 hours over 3 semesters, approximately 173 hours/semester). Very heavy teaching loads are also reported at the following institutions: Krakow University of Economics: 530 hours over 4 semesters (132.5 hours/semester), Poznań University of Economics and Business: 660 hours over 4 semesters (165 hours/semester), SGH Warsaw School of Economics: 640 hours (no number of semesters specified; but, if small, intensity would be large). Alternatively, lower semester average workloads are indicated by some institutions such as Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (540 hours in 4 semesters, 135 hours/semester) and Kozminski University (578 hours in 4 semesters, 144.5 hours/semester).

A few institutions did not provide complete course information regarding the number of semesters or total instructional hours, which limited the potential for a comprehensive analysis. Yet, the reported statistics reflect characteristic trends. The differences in the length of programs and the total number of hours suggest the existence of different didactic models. These range from time-concentrated and intensive programs to those stretched over time but less burdensome per semester. This suggests the need for further research on the relationship between the organizational form of studies, their educational effectiveness, and the perception of students and graduates in terms of the quality of education.

The analysis of hours dedicated to specific subjects shows a significant variety in the number of hours dedicated to individual courses within the MBA programs offered by Polish universities. Only a few institutions provide specific modules with a clearly defined number of hours. For example, Nicolaus Copernicus University offers 20 hours for innovation and 30 and 20 hours in two different blocks for sustainability. The joint program of the Medical University of Warsaw and the Warsaw School of Economics offers the most hours – 42 hours devoted to innovation. A few universities, such as the West Pomeranian Business School or the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, allocate only 5-10 hours to a given course. However, the vast majority of the analyzed institutions do not provide specific hourly values on their websites, which prevents a broader analysis.

Seven universities in Poland hold AMBA accreditation. All are listed in Table 3 and were included in the study, with accreditation details confirmed on their official websites. It is significant that out of all AMBA-accredited institutions, four schools have programs covering AI, innovation, and sustainable development: Poznań University of Economics, Gdańsk University of Technology, Kozminski University, and Nicolaus Copernicus University.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings provide clear answers to the research questions. First, MBA programs in Poland show uneven integration of key contemporary topics, with innovation being the most frequently represented and research skills the least. Second, observable differences between public and private institutions confirm the role of institutional context. Third, structural variation across programs reflects diverse educational models rather than a standardized approach.

The diversity of MBA program content indicates a lack of a unified approach to management education in the area of strategic challenges of the present day, such as innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development, and research skills. Despite the growing importance of these areas in international MBA education standards, their relatively low presence in Polish programs suggests a certain delay in relation to global trends. The low level

of integration of AI-related content is particularly worrying, which may indicate that programs are not adapted to the challenges of digital transformation. The identified gaps serve as an important signal for MBA curriculum designers, highlighting the need for deeper integration of these subjects into the educational structure to better address the challenges of the contemporary business environment.

The observed tendency to "cluster" technological topics (e.g., simultaneous occurrence of innovation and AI in selected programs) may suggest selective implementation of modern didactic components within more advanced, flexible and probably better-funded programs. This phenomenon may be related to institutional differences - as indicated in the results, private universities more often integrate elements of innovation, AI and sustainable development. Their organizational structure and decision-making processes may allow them to respond more rapidly to evolving market needs and employer expectations. The analysis of didactic intensity (number of hours vs. number of semesters) reveals differences in the organizational models of MBAs, from intensive two-semester executive courses to more time-stretched but less demanding four-semester models. This differentiation may be a response to different needs of target groups: professionals may prefer shorter, focused courses, while people entering the labor market may choose more extensive programs. These results suggest that future actions of institutions offering MBA programs should aim to better harmonize the structure of programs with the challenges of the global economy - both in terms of content (e.g., AI, ESG) and the organization of the educational process.

There are also dedicated ESG-focused MBA programs available. For example, Lazarski University offers one such program, consisting of 450 hours and structured into eight modules: Organizational Transformation and Responsible Business Management, Policies and Regulations for Operating Responsible Enterprises, Environmental Responsibility in Management, Social Responsibility in Management, Corporate Governance and Leadership, Business Strategies, Reporting, Compliance, and ESG Auditing, Sustainable Leadership - Developing Competencies for Responsible Leaders, and Diploma Seminar. However, this program was not included in the ranking that was the basis for this article.

A similar trend can be observed in the case of MBA programs dedicated to artificial intelligence. Several Polish universities have introduced specialized management education tracks that focus on the application of AI and digital tools in organizational leadership. One notable example is the MBA Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation offered by the Warsaw University of Technology, which integrates knowledge of modern technologies, process automation, and digital transformation with traditional managerial competencies.

Diversity in content and teaching intensity reflects not only a range of didactic models but also an evolving interpretation of what constitutes innovative management education. As such, Polish MBA programs demonstrate potential for transformative impact. However, these programs still require deeper alignment with global educational trends to fully realize the vision of future-oriented leadership development.

There are some methodological limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the results. Not all MBA programs were examined, and those that were indicated in the ranking "Perspektywy MBA 2025". The analysis was based on publicly available information published on the official websites of higher education institutions offering MBA programs. Institutions may present only selected elements of their curricula or use generalized descriptions, potentially leading to inconsistencies in course categorization. The identification of relevant subject areas - such as innovation, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and research skills - was conducted through keyword analysis. While this approach allows for a structured and replicable examination, it is inherently limited by the vocabulary used on institutional websites. Important content may have been overlooked if different terminology was employed. Third, the study focuses on the presence and declared number of instructional hours, without evaluating learning outcomes. While instructional time can serve as a basic indicator of curricular intensity, it does not provide insight into the depth of knowledge acquired, the development of key competencies, or the alignment of teaching practices with intended learning objectives.

Future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative interviews with program directors, detailed syllabus analysis, and student surveys to provide a more holistic understanding of how MBA programs address contemporary managerial challenges. Qualitative interviews with program directors would offer valuable insights into institutional intentions behind curriculum choices. Detailed syllabus analysis could help uncover the extent to which key themes such as innovation, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and global competencies are operationalized within course structures. Additionally, student surveys would provide critical feedback on the perceived relevance, effectiveness, and applicability of course content in preparing graduates for modern managerial roles. It is also worth conducting further research on the effectiveness of individual teaching models from the point of view of their impact on the development of managerial competences and compliance with the needs of employers.

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