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Monitoring the Professional Training of Military Chaplains in Ukraine

*Nadzor strokovnega usposabljanja
vojaških kaplanov v Ukrajini*

Abstract: This study examines educational monitoring within the professional development system for military chaplains at the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The research combined literature review, curriculum analysis, surveys, and diagnostic assessment of 208 chaplains representing 11 denominations. The findings revealed a predominance of theoretical training, while 92.7% of respondents supported updating the professional component of the curriculum and 89.6% favored modern teaching methods and international experience. Monitoring results indicated stronger growth in cognitive than operational competencies. The study recommends balancing theoretical and practical training, distinguishing professional and denominational competencies, and introducing follow-up assessment after returning to service.

Keywords: education quality monitoring, professional development programs, military chaplains, professional competencies, postgraduate education

Povzetek: Ta študija proučuje nadzor izobraževanja v okviru sistema strokovnega izpopolnjevanja vojaških kaplanov na Vojaškem inštitutu Narodne univerze Tarasa Ševčenka v Kijevu. Raziskava je vključevala pregled literature, analizo učnega načrta, ankete in diagnostično ocenjevanje 208 kaplanov, ki zastopajo 11 veroizpovedi. Ugotovitve so pokazale prevlado teoretičnega usposabljanja, medtem ko je 92,7 % anketirancev podprlo posodobitev strokovnega dela učnega načrta, 89,6 % pa se jih je zavzelo za sodobne metode poučevanja in mednarodne izkušnje. Rezultati spremljanja so pokazali močnejšo rast kognitivnih kot operativnih kompetenc. Študija priporoča uravnoteženje teoretičnega in praktičnega usposabljanja, razlikovanje med strokovnimi in verskimi kompetencami ter uvedbo naknadnega ocenjevanja po vrnitvi v službo.

Ključne besede: nadzor kakovosti izobraževanja, programi strokovnega razvoja, vojaški kaplani, strokovne kompetence, podiplomsko izobraževanje

Introduction

The current phase of the development of the military chaplaincy in Ukraine is characterized by a transition from voluntary initiatives to a clear institutional framework within the security and defense sector (Sagan and Harat 2023). This necessitates a rethinking of military chaplain training as a strategically important area, in which the quality of the educational process directly influences the moral and psychological resilience of military personnel in combat zones (Pleizier and Schuhmann 2022; Schuhmann et al. 2023). In this context, monitoring of professional training is no longer just a formal activity, but plays an important role in quality management in postgraduate education.

In the Ukrainian context, military chaplaincy has been attracting increasing attention from academics since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Existing research focuses primarily on the legal status of military chaplains, the institutional development of the chaplaincy service, psychological support for military personnel, and the historical development of military chaplaincy in Ukraine (Kryvenko et al. 2020; Holiachenko 2023; Makovskyi 2023; Rusnak 2024). At the same time, the professional training of military chaplains remains a relatively under-researched area, particularly regarding mechanisms for assessing the quality of education and monitoring learning outcomes. Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014, and particularly after the full-scale invasion in 2022, chaplaincy ministry has evolved from a predominantly voluntary initiative into a formally institutionalized component of the national security and defense sector.

According to the Law of Ukraine No. 1915-IX of 30 November 2021 *On the military chaplaincy service* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021), he/she is an officer who is tasked with responding to the religious/spiritual/moral needs of staff. The military chaplain's role has changed significantly from the time of the full-scale war. They have emerged as a central element in the network of moral and psychological assistance, as a first spiritual aid, as a mediator in conflicts and as a field of resilience of the soldiers. Chaplain care is an integral part of a unit's combat effectiveness, as it works with the warrior's value foundation (Kazman et al. 2022). When traditional psychology becomes impotent, the chaplain brings meaning, alleviates



psychological trauma and maintains the morale of the personnel during the worst moments.

One of the distinctive features of military chaplaincy in Ukraine is its denominational diversity. The chaplaincy system includes representatives of various religious organizations and denominations officially recognized by the state. These include Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and other Christian communities. This diversity reflects the religious composition of Ukrainian society and places specific demands on the training of chaplains. Military chaplains must be able to provide spiritual support in a multi-denominational environment, whilst respecting freedom of conscience and religious pluralism.

The urgency of this profession today stems from the extraordinary level of combat stress and existential challenges faced by Ukraine's defenders. Despite significant progress, researchers note a systemic gap in the study of this topic (Grimell 2025). In particular, Ukrainian studies on military education lack developed monitoring mechanisms that would take into account the interdisciplinary nature of a military chaplain's work (Holiachenko 2023). Similar conclusions are drawn in recent European studies, which emphasize that modern military chaplains require a combination of theological expertise, psychological resilience, intercultural communication skills, ethical leadership, and the ability to operate effectively in technologically and organizationally complex military environments (Klenar 2025; Pirc 2025; Ristevska and Juvan 2025). The challenge of striking a balance between hands-on teaching methods that foster leadership qualities in learners and the tough demands of military training remains a pressing issue (Layson et al. 2022). Chaplains are expected to possess theological knowledge and demonstrate competence in psychology, conflict mediation, leadership, communication, crisis response and the laws of war. Consequently, professional development programs combine military, humanitarian, psychological and theological components.

The establishment of a permanent institutional framework for military chaplaincy within Ukraine's security and defense sector enabled the professional development of military chaplains, identifying it as a strategically important area of development in the current military context (Centre for Moral and Psychological Support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine 2020).



In the context of the Europeanisation of priorities, the improvement of military chaplains' professionalism lies in the continuous process of shaping professional competence and seeking innovative forms and methods of training and assessment: hands-on teaching methods help trainees regain control over their lives, as they engage them in the educational experience (Pampukha et al. 2024). Therefore, the aim of this article is to identify the structural and functional characteristics of educational monitoring within the professional development system for military chaplains at the Military Institute. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set:

- to analyze theoretical approaches to educational monitoring as a tool for managing the education quality in military and postgraduate settings;
- to examine the structure and content of professional development curriculum for military chaplains and determine the balance between the theoretical and practical components of the training;
- to identify the educational needs and professional requirements of military chaplains based on empirical survey data;
- to identify key discrepancies between training objectives, curriculum content, and learning outcomes.

The research aim and objectives stipulate the following research questions:

- What structural imbalances exist in the military chaplaincy training system in terms of the ratio of theoretical and practical training?
- To what extent do existing monitoring tools reflect military chaplains' genuine readiness to operate in combat conditions?
- What educational needs and professional weaknesses do the students point out?

The theoretical novelty of this study lies in its exploration of the theoretical and methodological foundations of educational monitoring within the postgraduate military education system in the warfare context. The paper proposes a rethinking of the functional purpose of monitoring as a tool aimed at recording educational outcomes and assessing the military chaplains' ability to perform their professional duties effectively in the extreme

conditions of a combat environment. Further development is achieved in understanding the specifics of assessing professional competence in the context of the religious diversity of the military personnel, making it possible to justify the separation of the professional and religious components of training as independent objects of monitoring. This creates the conditions for ensuring the objectivity of assessment without violating the principle of freedom of religion.

1 Literature review

The international academic discourse on military chaplaincy has also expanded in recent years, reflecting a growing interest in the role of spiritual care within modern armed forces. Contemporary research views military chaplaincy not merely as a religious institution but as a multidimensional system of psychological, ethical and social support for military personnel. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of chaplaincy functions in response to technological changes, cultural pluralism, and shifts in the security environment.

Recent European studies provide valuable insights into these developments. Klenar (2025) analyzes the provision of spiritual care within the armed forces through the concept of authenticity, emphasizing the importance of meaningful spiritual support in modern military service. Pirc (2025) explores the challenges facing military chaplaincy in the context of rapid digitalization, technological progress and societal transformation, highlighting the need for adaptive forms of spiritual support. Comparative studies conducted by Dörfler-Dierken and Nowak (2025) and Ristevska and Juvan (2025) assess military chaplaincy systems in Slovenia and other NATO member states, identifying institutional models and best practices that can contribute to the further development of military chaplaincy services.

The historical and functional evolution of military chaplaincy has also attracted the attention of scholars. Kocjančič (2021) demonstrates that military chaplains have traditionally fulfilled a wide range of roles that extend beyond religious ministry, including moral guidance, counseling and the promotion of military cohesion. Šimac (2025) explores the



emotional experiences of military chaplains operating in conflict environments, revealing the complex psychological dimensions of chaplaincy. Furthermore, Primc (2025) provides a comprehensive review of the literature on religious and spiritual care in the Slovenian Armed Forces, whilst Brožič et al. (2025) discuss the prospects for establishing military chaplaincy structures in the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia.

An analysis of the academic literature indicates that the educational quality monitoring in Ukraine has been gradually evolving from a control mechanism into a flexible management system. In particular, Annenkova (2012) regards it as a cyclical process geared towards timely decision-making. This is a fundamental approach for the present study, as military chaplains' training requires constant adjustment of curricula based on real-world combat experience. Moreover, Bilyakovska (2021) identifies key functions of university education monitoring, namely: informational (the systematic collection of objective data), diagnostic (the identification of current status and trends), prognostic (the modeling of possible scenarios), and corrective (the formulation of management decisions to address deviations). Applying these functions to the training of military chaplains permits to establish guidelines for monitoring the training of military personnel and improving the curriculum of refresher courses. This, in turn, helps go beyond a simple assessment of knowledge and evaluate the actual professional readiness of the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (hereinafter – Military Institute) students to work in extreme conditions.

The conceptual foundations of quality management developed by Synchak et al. (2022) form the basis for constructing a comprehensive monitoring model within postgraduate education. The European integration and the international assessment standards implementation, in particular the European Teacher Education Evaluation (ETEE) system adopted by NATO, are analyzed in detail by Kryvenko et al. (2020). However, despite a significant body of theoretical work, the specific nature of chaplaincy ministry remains under-researched. Hence, Zelnytskyi (2023) notes that theological and military-educational indicators cannot be combined in one system since it is difficult to formulate an efficient mechanism to monitor them.



Moreover, monitoring the quality of military chaplain training can sometimes be only a formality (Makovskiy, 2023). There is no universal system, but rather isolated tests and questionnaires. Therefore, if there is no clear direction and understanding of what the outcomes mean, and what changes need to be made to the curriculum, monitoring will not be an effective way to make impact. It points to issues but not solutions to issues, restricting the professional training system development. This underscores the importance of understanding the current system of educational monitoring at the Military Institute to uncover imbalances and areas for novel development.

Despite the growing body of literature, there is still a lack of empirical research dedicated to monitoring the effectiveness of military chaplain training programs and assessing the relationship between the structure of the curriculum, educational needs, and the development of professional competence. Existing research primarily concerns the legal, theological, historical or organizational aspects of military chaplaincy, whilst considerably less attention is paid to the monitoring of education. This gap is particularly significant in wartime, when the effectiveness of chaplaincy support directly influences the moral and psychological resilience of military personnel. Thus, this study aims to supplement the existing literature by analyzing the structure and effectiveness of educational monitoring within the professional development system for military chaplains in Ukraine.

2 Methodological framework

The study's methodological framework is based on mixed descriptive-analytical design which is a combination of structural analysis of educational content, sociometric survey of students, and diagnostics assessment of the level of professional competences. The theoretical part is based on methods for a systematic and critical analysis of the scientific literature on the problem in the field of pedagogical measurement, educational monitoring and management of professional development in postgraduate education system. The empirical phase was carried out at the Military Institute in 2023-2024. The sample included 208 military chaplains, representing eleven officially recognized religious denominations operating within the



Military Chaplaincy Service of Ukraine, with the largest groups being chaplains affiliated with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (Table 1).

Religious denominations	n	%
Orthodox Church of Ukraine	92	44.2
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church	42	20.2
Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine	8	3.8
All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists	22	10.6
Ukrainian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostal Church)	18	8.7
Ukrainian Evangelical Church	7	3.4
Religious Centre »Council of Christian Churches and Religious Organizations 'Skynia'«	5	2.4
Centre of Christian Evangelical Churches of Ukraine »Victory«	4	1.9
Union of Jewish Communities of Messianic Judaism	4	1.9
Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine »Umma«	4	1.9
Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea	2	1.0
Total	208	100.0

Note. The distribution is presented to characterize the denominational diversity of the sample and was not used as an analytical variable in the statistical analysis.

Table 1: Religious denominations participating in the survey

Due to requirements for anonymity and ethical considerations, a detailed breakdown by denomination was not recorded during the survey. However, the sample reflected the multi-denominational structure of military chaplaincy in Ukraine. All students in the refresher course participated voluntarily, and their responses were kept completely anonymous. Representativeness of the data set is defined by the proportion of the respondents to the total number of the personnel of the Military Chaplaincy Service in Ukraine, which is estimated according to the relevant legislation as 700-800 people. Individuals who did not complete training or who were missing data were not included in the sample.



The research method was based on a new questionnaire *Assessment of the professional needs of a military chaplain*. It allowed for the distinction of subjective perceptions of the curriculum content, prioritization of professional development pathways and self-reflection on professional competence. Closed and multiple-choice questions were used to enable precise measurement of data acquired. Diagnostic assessment was carried out at the beginning and after the completion of the training. It was designed to measure two aspects of the professional competence: cognitive (knowledge of the regulatory, legal, theological, and psychological aspects of the profession) and operational (knowledge and skill acquisition and their use in simulated practical situations). Case studies and practical assignments were used as a part of the final evaluation.

The competence development level was measured on a scale from 0 to 100. The structure and the criteria of the initial and final assessment tools were similar, allowing the results to be compared later. The data collected were analyzed descriptively with the percentage and average method. It is important to note that the survey results are based on the respondents' opinion of the content and quality of training and are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the effectiveness of the curriculum.

3 Results

The professional development course comprised 422 academic hours (8 academic weeks of 56 hours each). Out of these, 320 hours were allocated to classroom-based sessions, 76 hours reserved for self-study and 26 hours assigned to additional activities. The curriculum was divided into two main modules: a general military module (252 hours; 59.7% of the program) and a specialized module on chaplaincy (170 hours; 40.3%). The training content was organized into two major modules (general military and specialized modules). The general military module comprised military pedagogy (48 hours), leadership and military management (42 hours), first aid and care for combat casualties (36 hours), international humanitarian law (32 hours), troop support (48 hours) and the provision of supplies to the Armed Forces personnel (46 hours). The specialized module covered the legal foundations of military chaplaincy (42 hours), professional ethics and interfaith communication (38 hours),



the organization of chaplaincy (46 hours), psychological support and crisis intervention (24 hours), and conflict mediation in military contexts (20 hours). Teaching time was allocated as follows: lectures accounted for 53% (169.6 hours), seminars for 31% (99.2 hours) and practical sessions for 16% (51.2 hours). This structure demonstrates the predominance of theoretical learning over the development of practical skills, particularly within the specialized module, where classroom-based learning predominated over scenario-based and simulation exercises.

The results of the survey of the refresher course participants reflected their educational needs and their assessment of the course content (Figure 1).

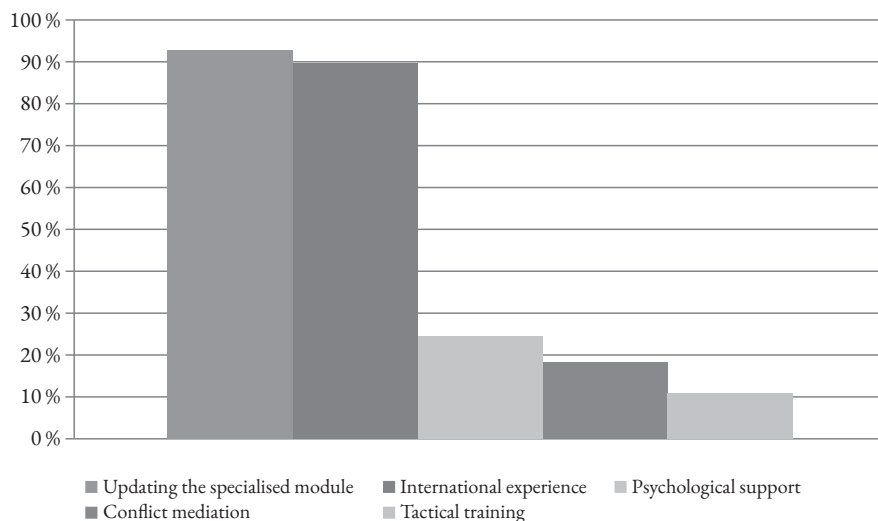


Figure 1: Priority areas for improving professional training, as assessed by military chaplains

As Figure 1 shows, 92.7% of respondents highlighted the need to update the specialized module to the contemporary wartime challenges. Nearly the same number of respondents (89.6%) emphasized the importance of drawing on international experience and using interactive teaching methods. This indicated a demand for practice-oriented educational approaches that allowed for the simulation of real-life situations in chaplaincy ministry. Many chaplains emphasized the need to develop protocols for crisis counselling and the provision of initial psychological support

following combat casualties (24.5%). Some respondents highlighted the need for more practical sessions. In their view, theoretical knowledge was a necessary foundation for professional practice, but practical training boosted readiness to work in real combat conditions.

Additional characteristics of the respondents provided a more comprehensive understanding of the educational needs identified during the study. The sample included military chaplains representing various Christian denominations who are officially affiliated with the Military Chaplaincy Service of Ukraine. Although no statistically significant differences were observed in the overall assessment of the professional development program, several trends emerged. Representatives of Protestant communities placed greater emphasis on practical communication skills, mediation and leadership training, whilst Orthodox and Greek Catholic chaplains more frequently highlighted the importance of psychological support and crisis intervention skills. Across all denominational groups, respondents demonstrated a shared interest in increasing the practical focus of the training program and expanding opportunities for scenario-based learning.

The analysis also demonstrated that educational needs varied depending on professional experience. Chaplains with less service experience were more likely to report difficulties relating to tactical adaptation, military regulations, and interaction with commanders. In contrast, respondents with more service experience emphasized the need for further training in psychological support, conflict mediation, and the prevention of professional burnout. These findings suggested that professional development programs should be tailored to the level of practical experience of military chaplains. Education also influenced respondents' perceptions of training priorities. Chaplains with a theological background demonstrated greater confidence in the religious and ethical aspects of ministry but expressed a greater need for military, psychological, and crisis management skills. Respondents with prior military or civilian professional experience reported greater confidence in performing organizational and communication tasks, whilst emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary integration within the training program.

The qualitative comments obtained through the open-ended questions in the questionnaire further reinforced the quantitative findings. Many



respondents emphasized the importance of practical training for service in combat conditions. One participant noted that »theoretical knowledge is important, but true ministry begins when the chaplain encounters soldiers experiencing acute stress and loss«. Another respondent claimed that »more practice-based simulations and real-life case studies will help prepare chaplains for the challenges they face during deployment«. Several chaplains also highlighted the growing need for structured training in conflict mediation, particularly in units comprising service personnel from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Qualitative responses confirmed that respondents viewed psychological support, crisis intervention, and practical communication skills as critical areas for further professional development. These observations underpinned the findings of the diagnostic assessment, which demonstrated a stronger growth in cognitive competencies than in operational ones, thereby confirming the need for a more practice-oriented training model.

The results of the initial diagnostic assessment demonstrated the baseline level of the trainees' professional competencies and serve as a basis for comparison with the educational needs identified during the questionnaire survey. The most significant areas of training were identified as follows: psychological support, conflict mediation, and tactical training. Apart from that, a comparison of the results of the initial and final assessments proved changes in the level of the students' professional competencies. The assessment was carried out across cognitive and operational components. The cognitive component covered knowledge of the legal, theological, and psychological foundations of military chaplaincy work, whilst the operational component involved the ability to apply this knowledge in simulated practical situations. The results indicated a more pronounced growth in the cognitive component compared to the operational component. In particular, the average score for the cognitive component rose from 62.4 to 84.8 points, whilst the operational component grew from 48.2 to 61.5 points (Table 2).



Components of professional competencies	Initial assessment	Final assessment	Growth
Cognitive (knowledge of law, theology, and psychology)	62.4	84.8	+22.4
Operational (practical skills)	48.2	61.5	+13.3
Group average	55.3	73.1	+17.8

Note: The data sample is based on the group’s average scores (n=208) obtained during tests.

Table 2: Trends in the assessment of military chaplains’ professional training (100-point scale)

The results of the final assessment displayed a positive trend in the development of all components of military chaplains’ professional competence. The greatest improvement was recorded in the cognitive component (+22.4 points), indicating the high effectiveness of the program’s theoretical component. At the same time, the operational component showed a smaller increase (+13.3 points). The results may indicate an insufficient amount of practical training and limited use of simulation and scenario-based teaching methods. The difference between the dynamics of the cognitive and operational components confirmed the need to review the structure of the curriculum with a view to increasing the proportion of practice-based classes. Furthermore, the results showed the alignment between the structural characteristics of the curriculum, the students’ educational needs, and the development of professional competencies (Table 3).



Stage	Aim	Tools	Indicators	Results	Solutions
Initial	Assessing the initial level of development of professional competencies, identifying the educational requirements and current needs of students, considering the specifics of their future professional duties	Questionnaires, initial assessment, initial testing	The development of the initial conceptual framework on chaplaincy; the main trends in professional development; the complexity of professional challenges	A critical need was identified for psychological decompression tools (24.5%), mediation of intra-unit conflicts (18.2%) and specific tactical training (10.9%); a functional mismatch was identified between the content of training and the current challenges of the combat environment	A conceptual review of the specialized module; intensification of the psychological and tactical components of training; alignment of educational priorities with identified gaps in students' competencies
Ongoing	Verification of the educational process structure; monitoring of respondents' cognitive engagement and the effectiveness of training methodology management	Targeted didactic observation; structural-functional analysis of classroom sessions; multi-level expert evaluation of teaching performance	The intensity of students' intellectual engagement; the balance between theory and practice; the nature of interpersonal interaction; the proportion of immersive and interactive technologies	A structural imbalance was identified: 53% of the curriculum consisted of lectures, compared with 16% of practical training; there was a limited use of interactive teaching methods	A reassignment of teaching time in favour of practical training; the introduction of training formats, scenario-based exercises, and interactive teaching methods



Stage	Aim	Tools	Indicators	Results	Solutions
Final	Assessing the extent to which planned learning outcomes were achieved and key professional competencies were developed	Final assessments, focus group discussions, analysis of learning outcomes	Level of mastery of specialized theoretical knowledge; level of operational competence; development of perceptual skills (mediation skills, psychological resilience); ability to model situational decisions in a professional environment	A lack of practical tools for solving case studies was identified; 89.6% of participants expressed a desire for the implementation of modern immersive teaching techniques and internationally recognized training protocols	Active integration of case studies and simulation scenarios; interdisciplinary convergence of course content; adaptation of leading international training practices to the specific requirements of the national security sector
Follow up	Assessing the effectiveness of applying acquired competencies in real-life work situations and determining their impact on professional performance	Graduate surveys, feedback from unit commanders, analysis of service performance	Level of adaptation to combat conditions; effectiveness of psychological support; ability to mediate conflicts; impact of the chaplain's activities on the unit's morale and psychological state	This is not implemented systematically; there is no established mechanism for collecting data on graduates' actual professional activities	Introduction of follow up monitoring; establishment of a post-course support system; fostering cooperation between educational institutions and military units

Table 3: The structure of educational monitoring of military chaplains' training

The structure of the curriculum was characterized by a predominance of lectures, whilst the survey results displayed a demand for practice-oriented and interactive learning formats. Based on a comparison of the results of the structural analysis of curricula, student surveys, and diagnostic



assessments, the logic of educational monitoring of military chaplain training was summarized. Overall, the monitoring results revealed a gap between the structure of the educational program and the professional needs of military chaplains. Despite positive progress in the development of cognitive competencies, the pace of practical skills development remained slower. The high demand among respondents for psychological training, crisis counselling, mediation and interactive learning technologies indicated the need for further improvement of professional development programs in line with the current conditions of military service.

A comparison of the curriculum structure, questionnaire responses and the results of the diagnostic assessment revealed several structural imbalances in the existing system of professional development for military chaplains. The most obvious discrepancy concerned the relationship between the educational needs identified by respondents and the actual allocation of teaching time within the curriculum. Structural analysis showed that lectures accounted for 53% of all classroom activities, whilst practical training accounted for only 16% of the program. At the same time, respondents consistently emphasized the need to devote more attention to practical skills directly related to chaplaincy ministry in a military environment. In particular, participants identified psychological support, conflict mediation, crisis intervention and communication in stressful situations as areas requiring additional practical training.

The results of the diagnostic assessment once again confirmed this imbalance. Although both components of competence showed positive trends, the cognitive component demonstrated significantly greater growth than the operational component. This finding suggests that the current curriculum is more effective at imparting theoretical knowledge than at developing the practical skills required for professional practice in combat and crisis situations. Qualitative comments obtained through the open-ended section of the questionnaire provided further insight into the challenges faced by military chaplains. Many respondents emphasized that practical readiness cannot be fully developed through traditional lecture-based teaching alone.

One participant noted: »Theoretical knowledge provides an important foundation, but the most challenging situations arise when a chaplain has



to support soldiers immediately following combat casualties or during acute psychological crises.« Another respondent emphasized the importance of practical training: »More scenario-based exercises would help us understand how to act in real-life situations, rather than simply knowing the theoretical principles.« Several chaplains also highlighted the growing importance of communication and mediation skills in modern military units. As one respondent explained: »Military chaplains are increasingly working with service personnel from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. This requires practical training in dialogue, mediation and conflict prevention.« Similar concerns were raised regarding psychological support: »The program should place greater emphasis on practical methods of psychological support and emotional stabilization, as these situations occur regularly during military service.«

The quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that the current model of professional development successfully strengthens theoretical training but offers fewer opportunities for the development of practical skills. The identified structural imbalance confirms the need for a gradual increase in practical training, simulation-based learning, case study analysis and other interactive educational methods capable of recreating the realities of military chaplaincy. The results of the educational monitoring have identified several areas requiring further improvement in the professional training system for military chaplains. The relationship between the identified problems, empirical data and recommended corrective measures is presented in Table 4.



Problem identified	Empirical data	Suggested improvement
Prevalence of theoretical learning	Lectures accounted for 53% of teaching activities, whereas practical training accounted for only 16%.	Increase the proportion of practical and simulation-based training activities.
Slower development of operational competencies	Operational competencies showed less growth compared to cognitive competencies.	Introduce additional scenario-based exercises and supervised field practice.
High demand for psychological support skills	Psychological support has been identified as one of the most important educational needs.	Expand the modules on crisis counselling and psychological first aid.
The need for innovative teaching methods	89.6% of respondents supported the wider introduction of innovative educational technologies.	Increase the use of interactive, immersive and case-based approaches to learning.
Demand for conflict mediation skills	Respondents highlighted issues relating to interpersonal and intercultural communication.	Strengthen training in mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution.

Table 4: Key issues identified through education monitoring, and recommendations for improving the curriculum

Table 3 showed that the existing curriculum provided a solid theoretical foundation but requires further adaptation to the practical realities of military chaplaincy service. The areas identified for improvement should be taken into account during future reviews of professional development programs. Overall, the results of the educational monitoring indicated a positive impact of the professional development program on the development of military chaplains’ competencies. At the same time, the study identified several structural discrepancies between the existing curriculum design and the practical requirements of modern military chaplaincy. The identified need for a greater practical focus, enhanced psychological training and wider implementation of innovative educational technologies underscores the importance of continuously reviewing the curriculum and making evidence-based educational decisions.



4 Discussion

The findings of the study pointed to a significant emphasis on the theoretical component within the chaplaincy training system. However, actual service required practical readiness to operate in extreme combat conditions. This situation highlighted a disconnect between the academic structure of curriculum and the practical demands of profession. It was proved that the existing training model focused on the accumulation of knowledge, which did not fully ensure the development of the skills necessary for an effective response to the challenges of the modern combat environment.

From the perspective of the competence-based approach, the predominance of lecture-based teaching methods might limit opportunities for developing practical skills (Hennessey et al. 2025). This was particularly true of those skills that require repeated practice in simulated scenarios. The identified difference in the dynamics of the cognitive and operational components of training confirmed that the assimilation of theoretical material occurred more intensively than the development of skills for the practical application of knowledge. Consequently, the survey results can be interpreted as an indicator of learners' demand for an expansion of practice-oriented and interactive forms of teaching. In the domain of education quality management, monitoring served as a verification tool. It enabled the comparison of students' actual achievements with the curriculum objectives regarding the cultivation of their professional competence. However, the findings revealed a number of problematic aspects that were not limited to technical measurement procedures alone. Instead, they pointed to deep-rooted systemic challenges in the organization of military chaplaincy training.

In this study, where the sample comprised representatives of 11 religious organizations, this denominational diversity presented objective obstacles to the standardization of theological assessment. However, the solution to this dilemma lied in shifting the monitoring focus. The object of government and educational control should not be the dogmatic content of religious doctrine but the military chaplains' professional conduct in ethical, communicative, and crisis situations. Hence, theological authenticity remained the exclusive prerogative and sphere of responsibility of the



relevant religious centers. At the same time, the chaplain's participation in monitoring could be realized through reflective tools, where it was not the »correctness« of faith that was assessed but the subjective significance and suitability of the knowledge acquired for providing spiritual assistance to soldiers (Strahle 2025). This approach allowed for the preservation of freedom of conscience, whilst ensuring a high standard of professional training for the specialist.

A natural question was invoked as to whether it was possible to develop standardized quality indicators for the theological stream without infringing upon the principle of freedom of religion and denominational specificity. For effective monitoring of educational quality, Bilyakovska (2021) suggested that objective data be systematically collected, which requires the development of uniform assessment criteria. Simultaneously, it was possible to solve this contradiction only by establishing a clear regulatory distinction between the concepts of vocational education and the denominational component, because if there was no such distinction, the monitoring procedures would be merely formal. According to Zelnytskyi (2023), monitoring was a complex structure of interdisciplinary system which included theological, psychological and military aspects. In the context of the Military Institute, this meant that the subject of state monitoring should be exclusively professional competencies (e.g., medical, tactical and psychological), while theological training should remain the responsibility of religious centers. In the absence of such a distinction, monitoring could turn into formal interference in the sphere of freedom of religion.

The curriculum monitoring was carried out using a range of complementary diagnostic methods and tools (Spivak 2022). Surveys were conducted in the form of questionnaires with military education students, graduates, academic and teaching staff, clients commissioning the training of military specialists, as well as representatives of management units, core units and units supporting the educational process. Observation involved conducting a didactic analysis of the educational process to determine its compliance with established standards. The analysis of documents involved examining educational programs, curricula, syllabuses, course outlines for academic disciplines, minutes of meetings of relevant bodies, and reports. Testing was aimed at objectively measuring the level of knowledge acquisition and the development of skills and competences among military



education students according to defined criteria. However, focus group interviews (Savelchuk 2024) and didactic analysis proved to be more effective because they showed both the volume of information acquired and the level of development of soft skills regarding conflict mediation and interfaith tolerance.

In line with the position put forward by Oliynyk et al. (2023) regarding the importance of an integrative and humanitarian foundation in education, it was established that the priority areas for improving curriculum at the Military Academy should be increasing the ratio of practical simulation of combat situations, developing mediation skills in a multi-faith environment, and the incorporation of international experience through the involvement of NATO experts. Thus, there was a need for military chaplains to receive a refresher course curriculum that provided a balanced structure between theory and practice.

Particular attention should be paid to the implementation of modern educational technologies, as monitoring results have shown that trainees are highly interested in more interactive and practice-oriented forms of learning. In the context of training military chaplains, the term *new technologies* means not only digital learning tools, but also a range of pedagogical approaches aimed at simulating real-life professional situations. Such technologies include simulation-based training, scenario-based exercises, case studies, role-playing, digital learning platforms and immersive learning technologies. Their use would allow for the recreation of conditions that were as close as possible to the real environment of military service, in which chaplains provide spiritual support to personnel, participated in crisis counselling, and mediate in conflicts.

Simulation scenarios that recreated situations involving combat stress, the loss of comrades, moral and ethical dilemmas, and interfaith interaction within military units were found to be especially relevant. Unlike traditional lecture-based formats, such technologies created conditions for the development of operational competencies, which developed slowly in contrast to cognitive competencies. Furthermore, international experience in training military chaplains indicated a growing role for interactive teaching methods and digital learning environments. The use of immersive technologies, team simulations, and interdisciplinary case studies allowed



psychological, communicative, ethical, and leadership aspects of training to be combined within a single educational space. In this context, the results of the monitoring confirmed the advisability of a gradual transition from a predominantly lecture-based training model to one focused on student participation and the practice of professional actions in conditions close to reality.

The content of the curriculum was analyzed and the form of the training was found to be very different from the contents of the training. This difference could be seen as an expression of the predominance of a reproductive approach that was somewhat incompatible with the provisions of Law of Ukraine No. 1915-IX of 30 November 2021 *On the military chaplaincy service* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021), the Concept of the transformation of the military education system (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 1997; 2022), and the Doctrine *Meeting spiritual and religious needs in joint operations* (Centre for Moral and Psychological Support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine 2020). The doctrine highlighted the need for the chaplain's readiness to function in the operational environment, where emphasis shifts from theoretical instruction to practical skills training for immediate field conditions. This gap reinforced the claim of Oliynyk et al. (2023) that the main goal of effective monitoring was to watch an object over time. If there was an absence of practical training, operational skills could develop more slowly and it might not be possible to monitor them comprehensively in monitoring procedures, allowing a greater focus on the assessment of theoretical outcomes than practical ones.

The results of the free answers given by the respondents showed that the need for psychological assistance was not limited to knowledge. Participants emphasized the need to master specific protocols for providing initial psychological support in cases of acute stress reactions and methods for preventing professional burnout among military chaplains. With regard to conflict resolution, the monitoring identified a need for mediation tools between military personnel of different faiths and for improving communication within the commander-unit-chaplain system. Shvydun (2021) noted that the issue of monitoring took on particular significance in the context of modernization. Therefore, revising the balance of classroom workload should be one of the first steps in such modernization. Hence, the necessity of this step was confirmed by the structural



imbalance in hours and the deep psychological indicators of the students' agency.

Within the scope of the monitoring, particular attention was paid to examining the perspectives of military chaplains and their views on the factors influencing their professional development. The research instrument included a set of questions regarding the hierarchy of factors affecting the quality of professional training. The analysis of the responses revealed a significant pedagogical contradiction: the strong need expressed by the participants to master self-improvement strategies, which was inherent to the person-centered nature of chaplaincy ministry, was at odds with the actual distribution of responsibility for learning outcomes. Therefore, the professional competence of a military chaplain should be based on an internal perspective, i.e., the ability to analyze one's resources and independently chart a course for improvement. This required the inclusion in curriculum of specially designed reflective practices and self-analysis training, which would help shift the focus from the passive consumption of knowledge to the formation of an active, subject-oriented stance on the part of the military chaplain.

As Zholtikova (2025) noted, the development of professional competencies among military personnel could not be reduced solely to the creation of a high-quality educational environment. Instead, internal motivation and an individual's capacity for reflective understanding of their experience played an equally decisive role. This point was fundamental in the context of training military chaplains as the effectiveness of their work depended directly on their level of personal maturity and self-awareness. Vovkotecha et al. (2025), in turn, emphasized that effective monitoring was an informational, diagnostic and prognostic system that was implemented primarily through managerial decisions. However, management decisions made without taking into account the students' reflective potential risked remaining superficial. Contemporary research demonstrated that project-based activities, which engaged participants in the joint analysis of results, were a more effective tool for fostering responsible agency than the passive acceptance of external control (Dubrovina et al. 2022). Therefore, one of the key avenues for developing the professional competence of military chaplains was their active involvement in creative collaboration and interaction.



The issue of measuring the effectiveness of training was also debatable. All monitoring models involved tracking results within the educational process: initial assessment, ongoing monitoring, and final evaluation. However, the specific nature of military chaplaincy lied in the fact that its true effectiveness was demonstrated not in the classroom but in combat conditions, i.e., in the military chaplain's ability to support the morale and psychological well-being of personnel and to establish a conflict-free dialogue within the unit (Bartles-Smith 2025). This meant that traditional monitoring within the framework of a professional development course could only measure an interim result (the level of knowledge acquired and skills developed) but not the final outcome (the quality of actual chaplaincy care and the level of professional competence) (Kaplilii 2022).

The analysis of the curriculum internal structure displayed a fundamental contradiction between the stated objectives and the actual content of the refresher courses. The current training structure exhibited a phenomenon of content fragmentation, in which the religious, psychological, and military components existed as isolated modules. This conflicted with the requirements of Order No. 637 of 27 October 2023 *On the approval of the concept of military personnel policy within the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine for the period up to 2028* (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine 2023), which identified the competency to interact with people from other disciplines as an important professional role of a military chaplain. However, there was a strong emphasis on teaching theoretical content, which was the opposite of the strategic direction of the implementation of the competence-based approach, laid down in the Concept for the transformation of the military education system approved by Resolution No. 1490 of 30 December 2022 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 1997; 2022).

Students were not taught any comprehensive interdisciplinary case studies, so they lacked the means to integrate knowledge into a coherent, systematic process of action. In the modern conditions, the efficiency of trainings was related to the operational resilience and the capacity of making independent decisions, as Rusnak (2024) stated. The discussion about training content architecture indicated some disconnections with the provisions of NATO Standard AJP-4.10, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Medical Support* (NATO 2019). The discrepancy consisted in the direction of focus. The key focus of international standards was the production of a



unit's moral resource through mediation and crisis debriefing tools. The domestic model tended towards theoretical and theological dominance (Kaplii 2022). This functional ambiguity of priorities, where the academic part was given more importance than the training part, meant that there was a large gap between the theoretical battlefield and the real battlefield.

As for this aspect, there was a need for conceptual improvement of the monitoring framework in Ukraine in the shape of a follow up assessment mechanism. This evaluation should not be viewed as a technical assessment that is completed 3–6 months post course. Rather, it is to be considered as a pedagogical and managerial strategy. This approach would be new to national pedagogy, transforming the monitoring process from merely documenting retained knowledge into a system for evaluating a military chaplain's working capacity. This should include confirming the specialist's competence to maintain a moral environment and to mediate effectively directly in combat stress situations. For this, a successful two-way communication between educational centers and combat units had to be set up. Within this framework, monitoring outcomes should become predictive and be used as a stimulus to prompt the timely adaptation of training programs, according to the security and defense sector needs.

In this respect, additional studies should involve the elaboration of a complete verification tool kit which could combine quantitative questionnaires with qualitative techniques (focus groups and in-depth interviews). A comparative study of monitoring systems of member states of NATO would be another priority area. To implement the international experience of interdisciplinary training in the Ukrainian context, a flexible military education system can be developed, which allows making management decisions in real time. An important step should be, of course, the introduction of follow-up monitoring, which will allow us to see how the knowledge acquired in the classroom works in the real world.

When interpreting the study results, several limitations should be taken into account. Firstly, the study was conducted within a single military educational institution, which might limit the generalizability of the results to other contexts of military chaplain training. Secondly, a significant portion of the data was based on participants' self-reports, which might have been influenced by subjective perceptions and individual experiences.



Thirdly, the study primarily focused on immediate educational outcomes and did not include long-term follow-up monitoring of professional practice after the program's completion. Finally, although the mixed-methods design provided valuable insights into the participants' educational needs, future research could benefit from a broader range of qualitative data collection methods, including in-depth interviews and longitudinal observations.

Conclusions

The results of this research enabled to see the issue of educational monitoring not only as another admin check but also as a dynamic instrument, which may change the quality of education. The figures were studied and analyzed with feedback from students, and a huge gap was identified. As a result, the educational concept was theoretical, while the operational environment required the military chaplain immediately to be ready.

The study at the Military Institute was a complete evaluation of the military chaplaincy training system from the educational monitoring point of view, i.e., its content, structure and effectiveness. It was established that the predominance of lecture-based formats (53%) necessitated a review of the curriculum to increase the proportion of practical sessions. The data suggested a risk of insufficient operational readiness among specialists due to a lack of interactive practice in chaplaincy scenarios, a finding supported by students' subjective assessments of the educational process.

Therefore, the solution to this situation lied in a shift towards functional monitoring. In other words, learning outcomes should be assessed not by how many hours the military chaplain spends in the lecture theater, but how well they perform in situational models or interdisciplinary case studies. The measure of a military chaplain's effectiveness should be the level of moral and psychological resilience among personnel. Therefore, the priorities for the strategic development of the military chaplaincy institution should be the development of a reflective culture among chaplains, the intensification of practice-oriented training, and the harmonization of domestic curriculum with international standards.



Based on the findings, several areas for improving educational monitoring within military chaplaincy training programs can be proposed. Firstly, monitoring procedures should be expanded beyond classroom assessment to include ongoing evaluation of chaplains' professional performance in operational settings. Secondly, greater attention should be paid to outcome-based assessment methods, including simulations, case studies and scenario-based exercises. Thirdly, feedback from service personnel, commanders and psychological support specialists should be incorporated into the monitoring system to ensure a more comprehensive assessment of chaplains' professional effectiveness. Finally, the integration of quantitative and qualitative monitoring tools will enable educational institutions to gain a more complete understanding of both learning outcomes and practical readiness for service as a military chaplain. The foundation for the modernization of chaplaincy education should be the transformation of the student from a passive recipient of knowledge into a proactive agent in the development of their own operational capabilities. This would allow the transformation of a theoretical command of knowledge into real readiness to deploy a professional mission in extreme contexts.



Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during this study are held by the corresponding author and are not publicly available due to legal, ethical, and security restrictions. Public disclosure could compromise participant confidentiality and national security. Aggregated and anonymized results are presented in this article.

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