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## The child with hearing impairment. Implications for theory and practice.

Dziecko z dysfunkcją  
słuchu. Implikacje  
teoretyczne i praktyczne.

Editors:  
Anna Zwierzchowska  
Iwona Sosnowska-Wieczorek  
Krzysztof Morawski

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## Teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students English as a Foreign Language in Inclusive and Integrated Primary Schools in Poland

### Contemporary Polish education system – an overview

The Polish education system consists of three main levels: preprimary (kindergarten), primary (grades 1 to 8) and secondary (grades 9 - 12). Preprimary education is available but not obligatory for children starting from age 3 – it depends on the parental decision if the child attends or not. Kindergarten education is obligatory and provided to every child by the state only one year before the school entry age. Children start school at the age of 7 or, with their parents' consent, at the age of 6. There are three main types of schools in the country: special, integrative and mainstream (inclusive). Special schools in Poland have been typically designed for three groups of children: 1. with intellectual disabilities, 2. with vision impairment, 3. deaf and hard of hearing. They are segregated schools and children have less opportunities for socializing with their non-disabled peers, but at the same time qualified instructors and teachers very often make it a place where children can develop their life skills and learn independence in a safe environment. The second type of schools/classes are integrative schools. Such units are specially designed – in groups smaller than in usual classes – with about 75% of students being non-disabled and 25% of students having different disabilities. Lessons are given by two teachers – the main teacher and the

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needs to participate fully in the teaching and learning process, e.g. using subtitles that enable the child to watch the film together with their peers. Modifications, on the other hand, mean changes in the teaching content, which usually means narrowing the facultative parts of the curriculum, e.g. children with hearing problems might be waived from learning the pronunciation of a foreign language.

### English as a foreign language in Poland

According to the latest Ministry of Education Rule on the National Curriculum (14.02.2017), foreign language lessons in Poland are obligatory starting from the 1st grade. Children in grades 1-3 learn a foreign language for 2 hours a week and children in classes 4-8 have 3 hours of foreign language classes a week. Starting in the 7th grade, students start learning their second foreign language for 2 hours a week. Foreign language classes are also obligatory in postsecondary schools – e.g. in a lyceum, students learn their first foreign language for 3 hours a week and their second foreign language for 2 hours a week. According to the educational rule, children and adolescents with hearing loss can be waived from learning a second foreign language based on their parents' request and consent.

Each stage of education – primary and secondary – ends with a final external exam designed by the Central Examination Board and students with special educational needs may apply for modified and adapted exam procedures.

It is worth adding that many children in Poland start learning a foreign language in kindergarten. Thus far it consisted of a private initiative of the part of parents, who paid for such classes (until 2015). It was quite popular for 3-5-year-old children to play with English during these classes, which usually lasted for 60 minutes a week. In 2015-2017 foreign language classes at state kindergartens were free of charge and given by English teachers.

supportive one. Integration started in Poland only after the 1989 transformation and it is necessary to admit that education integration in many communities started the process of social integration on a scale not previously described. The mainstream schools (lately often named as inclusive) provide education for every child who lives in a given district, but parents have also a right to search for a place in other schools – and this plea might be accepted only if there are enough places. It is advised that children with special educational needs enter those schools which are closest to their place of living and to which they would sign up for if they were not having special needs. A spirited discussion is currently underway in Poland whether such institutions are truly well prepared for supporting children with special needs. The main point is that teachers during their university education receive only a limited amount of training on special educational needs and they report that they need more instruction so as to be able to work effectively with SPE children. On the other hand, the social advantages of inclusion are not to be underestimated and the acceptance and need for inclusion is growing in Poland.

Deaf and hard of hearing children and adolescents and their parents have also been involved in this system and its changes (Domagała-Zyśk, 2014; Krakowiak, 2016; Kaepinska-Szaj, 2013). Nowadays, a vast majority of deaf and hard of hearing students (more than 80%) attend integrative and mainstream classes and enjoy the benefits of integration and inclusion. Nevertheless, the situation needs constant improvements. Even with the most modern hearing aids and cochlear implants, deaf and hard of hearing students still remain students with specific needs that should be met in order to provide them with the most effective education. There are two types of changes to be made in the education process: accommodations and modifications. Accommodations aim at changing the form of the existing materials, teaching methods, techniques and strategies so as to enable students with special

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Starting from September 2017, foreign language classes are obligatory for 5-year-olds and must be given as an integrated part of the kindergarten curriculum by kindergarten education teachers who should have adequate qualifications for this role.

It should be also mentioned that in many schools in Poland, especially in towns and cities, parents pay for extra English classes for their children for 2-3 hours a week. There are plenty of private language schools who specialize in this service and parents tend to be very mindful of supporting the language education of their children.

### English school curriculum requirements in the foreign languages in Poland

As was mentioned previously, Polish children begin learning foreign languages while in kindergarten. The National School Curriculum states that Polish kindergarten pupils should learn English during their everyday school activities. Teachers, who since 2017 should have the required qualifications to serve as regular English teachers, are encouraged to create educational situations where children can become more interested in foreign languages and other cultures (National School Curriculum, Kindergarten tasks, point 17) and incorporate English instructions, play and games into regular daily activities. It is expected that before entering primary school, children finishing their kindergarten education (5- or 6-year-olds) are able to understand and follow simple instructions in a foreign language, participate in foreign language music, motor, artistic, constructive and theatre activities, use foreign words and expressions in everyday activities, repeat foreign language rhymes, poems and songs together with a group of other children, and understand short stories when they are accompanied by pictures, visuals, movements, mimics and gestures.

Foreign languages are also an important part of the National School Curriculum in primary schools. One of the main aims of primary schools in Poland is to prepare students to communicate effectively in their national and foreign languages (National School Curriculum, 12). The primary school program consists of two parts: 1. Classes 1-3 which have integrated teaching, and 2. Classes 4-8 which have subject teaching.

At the first stage (grades 1-3), children are expected to understand very basic instructions in standard forms of a foreign language, to be able to use very basic language to talk and write about themselves and their environment, and to translate simple words and expressions. It is also expected that children should understand language diversity and have some knowledge about foreign countries (National School Curriculum 47-48).

At the second stage (grades 4-8) foreign languages are taught as separate subjects, but still it is advised to incorporate foreign languages (especially English) into the teaching of different subjects. Teaching content is provided in a spiral form – students at this stage should enlarge and expand their language skills so as to use it at a basic level (in comparison to a “very basic” at the first level of primary school). Achievements are expected in 5 different areas: 1. Knowing language elements in its lexical, grammar, spelling and phonetic form; 2. Understanding spoken and written language; 3. Using language in speech and writing; 4. Using language in communication situations; 5. Transforming language.

### Teaching deaf and hard of hearing students English as a foreign language in Poland – formal issues

The situation described above has a great influence on the language education of deaf and hard of hearing children and adolescents. As was mentioned, these students participate on par with their peers in language classes

provided by the school system. It should be stressed that it is absolutely necessary to take care of the deaf and hard of hearing children's foreign language education from the very beginning and to create such educational environment so as to enable them to learn foreign languages together with their peers. It is true that in kindergarten, children learn English by singing, chanting and drawing which seems to be only play. Unfortunately, children with hearing problems are sometimes not fully included in these games; some parents and teachers think they should have more time for improving their Polish, some think it is too early to learn a foreign language while others are afraid that learning a foreign language might impede learning the national language. It is also problematic that not all foreign language teachers have the qualifications to be teaching children with special needs – and they feel helpless when they are to include a deaf and hard of hearing child in activities based mainly on listening and speaking.

Many years of teacher and parent observation shows that deaf and hard of hearing children want and can learn foreign languages even in kindergarten; it does not impede their language development – on the contrary, it helps to know the language better. Kindergarten English rhymes, songs, and play as well as understanding basic instructions in English form a great basis for later English classes, which are more formal, and include reading and writing. Deaf and hard of hearing children bereft of these experiences meet barriers in their language education from the very beginning when they should be developing their interest in and motivation for learning foreign languages. When they do not receive proper support in kindergarten, they begin their primary school education feeling delayed and different from their friends.

### Principles of the modification and accommodation of the English National School Curriculum for deaf and hard of hearing students

Deaf and hard of hearing students do not form one homogenous group, as the level of hearing loss and other factors (e.g. family social capital, rehabilitation paths and effects) influence their level of national language acquisition, and thus foreign language learning. Generally this group can be divided into two subgroups, with each of these groups having its own needs.

A basic barrier for deaf and hard of hearing students is the ability to perceive a language in its spoken form, as contemporary foreign language methodology stressed the necessity to base all teaching on this approach (Komorowska, 2009, 2011). Taking this into account, it is not possible or recommended when teaching deaf and hard of hearing students to remove some material or skip spoken language material (like listening or pronunciation exercises) necessary to provide language input; on the contrary, it is indispensable to provide adequate accommodations for these aspects. Before the class students should be given a handout or clear information about the class topic and types of activities planned for the lesson. Some of the activities students are able to do together with the whole class, such as drawing, writing, reading, coloring or completing written grammar exercises, but some of them need changes, e.g. while the class is listening to a recording, deaf or hard of hearing students might be watching a visual material, such as pictures with subtitles as part of a PowerPoint presentation. Films used during the lessons should have specialist subtitles. Listening comprehension exercises might be modified into visual-based activities or accompanied by subtitles or tapescripts.

Older children might be expected to prepare classroom notes or do exercises based on their notes prepared while watching a film or listening to a tape. It is absolutely necessary to remember that deaf and hard of hearing

students cannot listen or watch and complete notes at the same time; specialist support provided by a notetaker it is necessary here (Domagała-Zyśk, 2013a, 2017). If a professional notetaker is not available, peer students should be asked to serve as volunteers and share their notes with those in need. For teachers it is also important to remember not to do two or more things at the same time, e.g. writing on the blackboard and explaining grammar – students can either lip-read the teacher or analyze some visual materials.

It is a very important thing to let deaf and hard of hearing students know who is speaking and what is going on during the class. If discussion is a part of a lesson, it is advisable to signal who is speaking, e.g. by raising one's hand. If necessary, the teacher can repeat the statements of other pupils. Homework and other information should be written down in a visible plane – e.g. on the blackboard. As for the presentation of one's own skills, the written form will be the most convenient one. It is worth differentiating between forms here – this not only consists of linear text, but also a poster, presentation, chat or forum statements. Translations might also be done into Polish Sign Language, if the teacher is able.

It is also important to secure supportive external conditions. Students with hearing problems should learn in a classroom with good acoustic conditions. Desks should be located in such a way as to make it possible for children to see other students' faces while speaking (in the shape of a circle or a horseshoe). Children should undergo deafness awareness training so as to know how to speak and communicate with their peers. Children should also be encouraged to support their peer, e.g. in notetaking or other tasks. If necessary, sign language or cued speech might serve as tools for communication and learning (Podlewska, 2013, 2014)

Deaf students who use sign language as their primary means of communication have limited abilities to use auditory channels of language perception. Usually they do not speak in their national language; if they do, they likely use speech in a very limited way. Because of this they do not participate in listening or speaking activities and learning a foreign language is mainly done in its written form.

The most important principle – according to the rules of universal learning design – is to present the language material in an accommodated way. This does not definitely mean simply resigning from listening and speaking activities, but being accommodating, changing the activities in such a way as to enable the children to participate in them. The most crucial role is played by visual elements – pictures, photos, subtitles, PowerPoint presentations or texts which could provide for the listening output.

Polish Sign Language – or the Polish Sign Language System (if this system is used by students) – should be incorporated as a tool for communication, but the scope of its usage should be controlled by the teacher. Using it too extensively might restrict students' exposition to the target language and limit their opportunities to learn it. Some experts suggest using British Sign language or American Sign Language as elements of the teaching and learning process. If possible, the teacher should know some BSL or ASL signs but it is also possible to use short internet films – they could help students to understand cultural and language diversity and enlarge their scope of interest.

Another important question regards speaking in a foreign language. Generally, deaf and hard of hearing students are able to speak a foreign language to the extent they are able to use speech in their national language. The majority of students want to learn some speaking, especially everyday expressions or greetings, but those for whom speaking in Polish is not achievable usually do not want to learn speaking in a foreign language. This issue should

be discussed individually with the student. Speech and pronunciation correctness should not be taken into account if the student's difficulties are connected with the restrictions caused by their hearing loss.

**Hard of hearing students** have difficulties in perceiving speech sounds, but thanks to hearing aids, cochlear implants, lip-reading and good rehabilitation results they are able to use speech in their national language as their main means of communication. Consequently, they are able to learn not only to read and write, but also to speak and listen in a foreign language, though they need special accommodation in this endeavor.

Hard of hearing students generally can learn foreign languages together with their hearing peers, but in some cases it is necessary to provide teaching in small groups or even individually in order to create opportunities for better language perception (face to face classes) and expression – more opportunities for using language in a comfortable environment. The teacher's role will definitely be to motivate students to lip-read and speak, as these skills are crucial in using foreign language. At the same time, it is absolutely necessary to understand the student's barriers and to respect their right to withdraw from listening and speaking activities if they are unachievable to them.

The basic rules of good communication should be respected by all class participants, the teacher and hard of hearing students: only one person should speak at a time, his/her face must be well visible for the hard of hearing student, everybody should speak clearly and at a natural pace, and, if necessary, it is important to repeat and/or reformulate statements. The majority of these students use hearing aids and cochlear implants. Students (with their teacher's support for younger children) should make sure this equipment works properly and cooperates with external equipment, such as induction loops or TH systems, if they are used.

Table 1 below contains some examples of modifications and adaptations of the National School Curriculum for deaf and hard of hearing students. For each instance, they should be recognized on individual basis (Domagała-Zyśk, 2016a; Domagała-Zyśk i Kontra, 2016).

Table 1

*Some examples of modifications and adaptations*

	National School Curriculum	Deaf or hard of hearing student
1	Knowing language elements in its lexical, grammar, spelling and phonetic level	May not learn the pronunciation of language elements
2	Student understands simple spoken statements	Student needs extra information to learn the meaning of the words in his/her national language
3	Student is able to create basic oral statements	If a student does not speak in his/her national language, he/she may use the form of a chat/mail/short message to convey the meaning in a spoken context
4	Student prepares basic written texts	Student needs more time for instruction as sign language grammar (visual language) may interfere with foreign language grammar (phonic language)
5	Student has knowledge about foreign countries and their culture	Student has knowledge about the life of deaf and hard of hearing persons in foreign countries, their achievements, problems and special events, e.g. Deaflympics.

## Conclusion

Deaf and hard of hearing children and adolescents are, more than other students, at risk of losing their motivation to learn foreign languages, and as a consequence, experience lower educational outcomes and a lower social status. In order to protect them from this development, English teachers should from the very beginning support them in fulfilling the requirements of the National School Curriculum and provide proper accommodations and

modifications so as to help them to gain educational success in spite of their difficulties.

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