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### НАВЧАННЯ ЛЕКСИКИ ДІТЕЙ У РАНЬОМУ ШКІЛЬНОМУ ВІЦІ У ПОЛЬСЬКИХ ШКОЛАХ ВЕЛИКОЇ БРИТАНІЇ

*Стаття є спробою проаналізувати як вчителі польської мови вчать лексики дітей у ранньому шкільному віці у суботніх школах Великої Британії. Текст складається з теоретичної частини та дослідницької, котра представляє результати анкетних досліджень. Закінченням статті є пропозиції автора, котрі впливають з проведених досліджень.*

**Ключові слова:** навчання дітей, польська школа у Великобританії.

#### **TEACHING LEXIS TO YOUNG CHILDREN -THE CASE OF POLISH SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL IN GREAT BRITAIN**

*The article presents what methods and techniques are used to teach lexis to young children in Polish supplementary schools in Great Britain for whom Polish is either the first or the second language. It is assumed, that in Great Britain there are over 140 supplementary schools, where there are 11 000 students.*

*The article consists of a theoretical part and a research one. The first part describes the Polish supplementary education in Great Britain and the most important issues concerning process of language acquisition and learning (Piaget's cognitive theory, Vygotsky's cognitive theory of human cultural and bio-social development, E.Ericoson's theory on psychosocial development in the school time). Besides, the article gives, accordingly, a general overview of child development in the early school years and of its consequences for the teaching process.*

*The reasearch part presents the results of an elaborated survey. It was made by using questionnaires filled in by 41 Polish teachers, who live in the United Kingdom. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts and had 14 questions.*

**Key words:** teaching children, Polish supplementary education.

#### **ОБУЧЕНИЕ ЛЕКСИКИ ДЕТЕЙ В РАННЕМ ШКОЛЬНОМ ВОЗРАСТЕ В ПОЛЬСКИХ ШКОЛАХ ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ**

*Данная статья является попыткой проанализировать как учителя польского языка учат лексики детей в раннем школьном возрасте в суботних школах Великобритании. Текст состоит из теоретической части и исследовательской, представляющая результаты личных исследований. Окончанием статьи есть предложения автора, вытекающие из проведенных исследований.*

**Ключевые слова:** обучение детей, польская школа в Великобритании.

#### **1. Introduction**

Lately researchers estimate that nowadays Polish are the biggest population after British and Indians in The United Kingdom. Especially after 2004 when Poland joined the European union Poles have immigrated to the UK. In London, the Polish language is spoken on the streets, in the tube or on a bus. There are few parts of London called *Polish districts* where you can find plenty of Polish stores, restaurants, churches and schools. In regards to the last mentioned, it is assumed, that in Great Britain there are over 140 Polish supplementary schools, where about 11 000 children are taught<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> D. Pietrasiewicz (2010) Paradoxy imigracyjnych instytucji: polskie szkoły sobotnie w Wielkiej Brytanii [www.rjp.pan.pl/images/stories/.../Polskie\\_szkoly\\_sobotnie\\_w\\_UK\\_3.ppt](http://www.rjp.pan.pl/images/stories/.../Polskie_szkoly_sobotnie_w_UK_3.ppt)

However, this reflects only 25% of the total number of children, who live in England. In comparison, out of 16 475 children attending British schools during the week, only 4 070 are having extra classes at Polish schools during weekends in London. Apart from London, other Polish assemblage are settled in Manchester, Bradford, Glasgow, Bristol and Liecester.

## 2. Polish school abroad

The Polish supplementary school is treated as a Polish school abroad, which despite functioning outside the Polish border, respects the Polish schooling system and sticks to Polish regulations. Its aim is to support language development, familiarize the target audience to the Polish culture in a classroom and teach children their identity so that they can stay in touch with their inheritance, tradition and history.

Being aware of your own identity and background is crucial in the process of socializing. Lesson are usually held on Saturdays, three to four lessons per day. Classes are focused on teaching the Polish language, geography and history of Poland.

The characteristic feature is the heterogeneity of the class. There are students who were born in England and those, who were born in Poland and lived there for some period of time before they emigrated with their parents. Thus a differentiating factor is the time of being abroad. It has an impact not only on language skills but also in a social aspect [12]. Frequently those who emigrated got a *culture shock* and are homesick. As a result, these children have serious problems with the assimilation to a foreign country. On the contrary, children born in England will never have such a dilemma because they do not know any other reality than England.

Students also have a different attitude to learning Polish. Some of them want to study and improve their language skills in order to communicate with their grandparents and other relatives in Poland. In any case settling in another country causes some children to feel the need of learning the language spoken in this specific country so that they don't see themselves inferior to others. As a result, they lost the competence and willingness to speak Polish.

A. Czeniek in an article *Jedna szkoła, jedna klasa, ale czy taki sam język polskie? O zróżnicowanym poziomie opanowania języka polskiego wśród dzieci polskiego pochodzenia na przykładzie prac dzieci mieszkających w Wielkiej Brytanii* presents four different profiles of Polish kids, who emigrated to the United Kingdom with their parents [1, p. 55]. It shows how various attitudes and behaviours can occur as a result of emigration.

The first kid, a 7 year-old, is emotionally connected with their family and friends in Poland who she likes visiting during summer. She has already got used to living abroad and has motivation to attend Polish supplementary school. However, after four years living in England she communicates easier in English than in Polish [1, 56]. On the contrary, the second girl hardly visits Poland and therefore does not feel a need to learn Polish at all, even when spending time with their peers at school on Saturday. The girl makes grammar and spelling mistakes and has a problem with the Polish word order. Moreover, she does not communicate in Polish at home [1, p. 57].

The third case is a 15 year-old teenager already born in England. At home her parents communicate with her in Polish and try to send her to Poland for every summer break. Despite these efforts the girl obviously prefers to speak English. She has good attitude and motivation to learn Polish but she makes mistakes caused by word by word translations from English to Polish [1, p. 58].

The fourth example is a girl from a Polish-British marriage. She speaks English at home and visits her Polish grandparents very rarely. For her, Polish is not important, not useful and a rather difficult language. She makes grammar mistakes and has problems with conjugation [1, p. 59].

Above-mentioned attitudes arose from many aspects such as place of birth, length of staying abroad, motivation, individual predispositions and the impact of parents in cultivating the Polish traditions. However, they can show some typical types of young emigration.

According to Maria Piotrowicz Polish teachers abroad should not only teach language and literature but also history and folklore. They should both educate and raise their students up. In order to create a substitute of what teaching is in Poland teachers need to correlate different subject and lead integrated lesson on a weekly basis, using attractive teaching resources [10, 193].

Apart from this, a very important issue is the cooperation between teachers and parents. They should keep good contact and educate about the benefits of and giving children bilingually [6, 12].

## 3. Language acquisition and general overview of a child's development early in school

It is commonly known that children until the age of seven are predisposed of learning languages quickly and smoothly by natural acquisition. In case of older kids, teenagers or adults this process is more complicated [7, p. 77]. The reason for this can be found in the *Critical Period Hypothesis* created by Lenneberg. Thus, the best time to get to know a new language is the childhood.

### 3.1. Piaget's cognitive theory

A child's cognitive development is about developing or constructing a mental model of the world. Piaget believed that children go through 4 universal stages of cognitive development. Development is therefore biologically based and changes as the child matures. As a result cognition develops in all children in the same sequence of stages<sup>2</sup>.

Piaget considered **the concrete stage (7-11 years)** a major turning point in the child's cognitive development, because it marks the beginning of logical or operational thought.

This means the child can work things out mentally in its head (rather than physically try things out in the real world). Children can conserve number (age 6), mass (age 7), and weight (age 9). Conservation is the understanding that something stays the same in quantity even though its appearance changes<sup>3</sup>.

Piaget's cognitive theory has an impact in teaching methods – especially in the primary education [7, p. 19]. It draws attention to the fact that parents and teachers should talk, teach and treat the children according to their level of development. Besides, there is the advantages that the child is curious about the world. By exploring and by means of proper teaching resources, teachers and parents can induce them to learn by action [7, p. 20].

### 3.2. Vygotsky's cognitive theory of human cultural and bio-social development

A different opinion to learning and development processes was given by Vygotsky. On the contrary to Piaget's theory, Vygotsky contended that intellectual and language development are evolving irrespectively to each other in order to unite later [7, p. 77]. According to him, every child has an individual way of behaving, called the *elementary mental function* [13, p. 48]. Vy-

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html>

gotsky's theory was a key foundation to the theory of *Zone of Proximal Development*=ZPD. Generally speaking, it concludes that children first need to see and immitate an action in order to do it themselves alone the next time [7, p. 22]. That is why Vygotsky exhorted to challenge children and to let them develop and increase skills.

Moreover, he pays attention to the role of culture in a children's life and development, especially in the intellectual area [13, p. 48]. According to him, tradition and social-culture interaction shape the child and its contact with its peers [9, p. 21].

### 3.3. E.Ericoson's theory on psychosocial development in the school time.

It is commonly known that culture and enviroment are very important in a child's development. Every child develops in its own pace, however the most significant increase occurs during its time in pre-school [11, p. 9]. According to E. Erickon's theory a child's speaking, reading, writing and thinking skills are honed during school.

Physical activity during this time is a major way to explore the world. Thus physical activity should be combined with music and used frequently as a teaching method [8, p. 10]. Besides, owing to dynamic developed memory and raising creativity, the kid becomes more and more sensitive to esthetic experiences like hearing stories or watching pictures, which can be kept in memory for a while [8, p. 34]. Remembering, resemling and understanding are necessary in a proper learning process. It is possible to mastering the dynamic thinking process during early school time [9, p. 26].

During the age of 7-10 a lexical stock increases, so children's utterance becomes more various and sophisticated. It helps to begin a regular education at school [9, p. 47].

## 4. Teaching process

### 4.1. The teacher and his role

G. Erenc-Grygoruk in his book *Nauczanie języków obcych w perspektywie wczesnoszkolnej* points out that a teacher apart from giving knowledge should inspire, motivate their pupils to work hard and enable them to shape and develop their personality [2, p. 11]. Teachers should be aware of his students' needs and concerns [9, p. 75].

### 4.2. The role of integrated learning

During early school education children should be sensitized to learning languages, both mother tongue and foreign languages. Thus is it one of the main tasks of the language education [8, p. 9].

Moreover, teachers should interlace learning languages with music, art and drama elements in order to make the lessons more attractive and interesting for pupils. During activities students have the ability to express themselves and be more open to interact with peers [8, p. 19].

Art can improve sensory and motor developement whereas music helps shaping hearing, voice and concentration skills. Research shows that singning and learnig lyrics by heart enables to understand and keep words better in mind [14, p. 75]. It can be very useful in enrich education outside Poland, because children's imagination and creativity can be awoken and help to better undestand Polish real life [4, p. 175].

Similar effects in language learning can be caused by drama acting. Being in a role can engage students to express themselves and discover individual potential [14, p. 94]. What is more, according to research it will be very helpful for introverts and extroverts alike. On the one hand observation shows that extroverts improved their smooth speaking, pronunciation and intonation. On the other hand, introverts thanks to feeling safe, became more open to interact with others [16, p. 146].

### 4.3. Playing activities in the learning process

Before normal school education playing ist he normal way to explore the world for a child. Later on at school, playing activities can be a great tool to solve a problem and as a results, achieve the goal [16, p. 181]. Though doing, exploring and being active children communicate and understand the meaning of different language situations, include cultural ones, easier [14, p. 49].

Without a doubt, play activities diversify lessons, focus student's attention and rise their motivation and perception skills [13, p. 56].

### 4.4. Story telling in early school education

According to Iluk, fairytales and other stories dedicated to children create optimal condition to shape the global understanding ability among young students. It is very important for them to understand the general meaning of the stories in order to later use them creatively for doing tasks based on the stories. Moreover, it creates a natural condition to immerse in language [3, p. 107].

### 4.5. Teaching lexis

Teaching lexis is a crucial part of language education. Teachers should encourage pupils to explore the language, to find out the meaning of words and associate them with vocabulary already known [9, p. 47]. In order to help them do this, a tutor should use all of the above mentioned teaching methods associated with early education in school.

## 5. Results of the research

The study presents the analysis of teaching lexis to children attending Polish supplementary school in Great Britain. Research was made by using questionnaires filled in by Polish teachers, who live in The United Kingdom.

The questionnaire was divided into three main parts and has 14 questions. There were 41 people (40 women and 1 man) who took part in the survey and filled out the papers. They work with children aged 7-9 as follows: 46% first class (7year) 28% second class (8year) 26% third class (9year).

The **first part** of the questionnaire was to confirm that family and surroundings have an impact on children's language competence. **Secondly** it was aimed to define the methods which are used in teaching lexis at Polish supplementary schools in England.

The **third question** refers to **the importance of the Polish language in children's life from the respondents' perspective**. 24% answered it is their first language (mother tongue), 7% named it second language but the interesting thing is that the majority of teachers (65%) answered that Polish and English are equal for their pupils. The reason for this is the fact that these children were already born in the United Kingdom. Therefore it is an understandable situation.

Another significant point was the **language spoken at home**. Almost 63% of the teachers believe that the parents communicate with their children in Polish while 37% claim communication to be in Polish and English. In this context it is important to highlight the fact that nobody marked English as the only language spoken at home.

The next question was directed towards the teachers' **communication with children during classes**. Over half of the interviewees (61%) answered that they use Polish, 32% sometimes use English when there is a need and 7% admitted to use both languages alternately.

The questionnaires also reveal that 76 % of the teachers **noticed a mixing of languages** among their pupils, only 24% do not see this problem.

**The second part of the questionnaire** refers to the **diverse proficiency of childrens' language competence**. This problem was highlighted by 78% interviewees. Only 22% of the teachers marked that they do not see a difference. The noticeable tendency, however is the fact students have a higher proficiency in English than in Polish.

The next question concerned **the typology of mistakes made by students**. In this case, teachers could choose more than one answer. As it turned out the most frequent errors are a low level of vocabulary, grammar and fonology mistakes. The reason for these difficulties is explained by the already mentioned diverse language proficiency and improper parents' attitude. Teacher emphasize the fact that care takers neither pay close attention to the language of their kids nor to their own language. As a result, children follow their parents and make the same mistakes, not only limited to grammar or lexis.

Second part of the questionnaire refers also to **teaching methods** used by teachers. Also, in this case, the respondent had a multiple choice. Results show that the most popular ones, which can stimulate lessons are **art activities** (95% all responses), **physical activities** and **reading stories** (both 80%). Drama was marked by 54% teachers. Apart from that, 9 interviewees mentioned their own ideas to make lessons more attractive. As examples the following were given: recitation of poems, slideshows, interactive games and dance activities.

According to the interviewed teachers, the **most popular ways to introduce new vocabulary** were pictures (82%) and giving definitions (73%). Many interviewees choose a technique of showing real items (66%) or presenting a new word in a concrete context (63%). Introducing new lexis by giving synonyms is used by 39% people. Other methods mentioned by teachers are the usage of interactive resources (watching cartoons, movies, fairytales or listening to music).

The topic of another question was the **intergration of artistic subjects into teaching lexis**. Opinion in this context were various. 35% respondents use both music and art, 20% only art while 17% use only music. However, over one-fourth (28%) admitted that they do not interlace any of them during classes.

The decisive majority of respondents (87%) admitted that they use **games and other activities as a form of introducing new vocabulary**. Only 13% do not use them at all.

The next question related to the **popularity of reading stories to pupils during a lesson**. 37% of the teachers responded affirmatively, from which 32% do this very frequently, 22% sometimes, 5% rarely, 2% sporadically and not as a part of the class. Only 5% claimed that they do not read stories to students.

**The aim of using a narrative strategy** is to enrich pupils' vocabulary (84%), to make lessons more interesting (78%), to integrate them to the group (39%) and to systematize knowledge (29%). Other reasons mentioned are: spread the knowledge about the Polish language and culture, become familiar with proper pronunciation and intonation, induce students to give their opinion, take part in a discussion and practice expressing emotions.

In regards to the **frequency of using drama technique in language learning** results are quite surprising. On the one hand, 39% teachers answered that they do this often and 3% very often as a temporary part of the lesson. On the other hand, 24% declared using it sometimes and 27 % sporadically. Only 7% admit not using it at all.

To summarise, teachers use willingly different kinds of teaching methods in order to make the lesson more interesting and useful for the children.

Teachers indicated the following as **popular drama techniques**: speaking activities to practise intonation (over 65%) gestures and mime (61%). Very popular are also simulation games (51%), children's theatre (41%) and short dialogues (31%). Other forms mentioned were for instance role reading, role and poem interpretation.

**The third part of the questionnaire** addresses **methods in testing a vocabulary knowledge scale**. Similar to previous questions, teachers could choose from multiple choices.

The most popular methods were matching words to pictures (81%), naming pictures (71%), eliminating a word which does not fit to others (68%), choose a word from a framework (66%) and crosswords (56%).

## 6. Conclusion

The hypothesis that family and surroundings determine children's language competence and shape their attitude towards culture and traditions of the country of descent was confirmed by research. Results uncovered also:

- 1) challenges which Polish children have to face when attending supplementary school in Great Britain,
- 2) specificity of teaching in Polish school in The United Kingdom
- 3) the most common lexis teaching methods abroad

It is important to highlight that the language competence of Polish children in the United Kingdom is quite different from their same-aged peers in Poland. Many of them were already born in England and attend British school, so they do not often have an opportunity to speak Polish. As a result, many of them consider Polish as a second language. The majority of them speaks Polish and English at home. Unfortunately, this results in mixing both languages and speaking none accurately.

The most problematic issue for teachers is the **diversity in language competence among children in one class**. It is indicated by almost 75% of the respondents. One of the reason for this is the different attitude of parents. Some of them feel a strong connection to Poland and want their children to cultivate these tradition. The conditions to do so are good because even abroad they stay in touch with their Polish community at home. Thus their kids have more opportunity to speak and hear Polish and their competence is on a higher level. Opposed to that, other parents do not foster Polish traditions and want to assimilate in the new country as quickly as possible. Children follow their example and find speaking and learning Polish rather useless.

Interviewees pointed out that most difficulties students experience in learning Polish are limited vocabulary, low grammar knowledge and the mixing of languages. With regards to emotional problems Polish students in the United Kindom are shy, do not feel any cultural attachment and tend to switch to English during communication.

In order to induce students to willingly attend Polish classes on Saturday, teachers try their best to make lessons interesting and fun – this statement was confirmed by over 70% of the interviewees. A diverse variety of teaching strategies brings benefits to all students. They are more creative and motivated to work. What is more, thanks to cooperation during classes, students with better proficiency can help others which creates the feeling of community in the group.

Teachers admitted to integrate art, music and drama in their language classes. It develops students' creativity, allows them to get to know the Polish culture and literature and persuades them to try it out themselves.

During introducing new lexis, respondents use pictures, giving definitions or descriptions and present methods. Over half of them claimed not using English when explaining new words to the kids. Only 5% pointed out that they always use English as help during class.

Moreover, games and other activities play a very important role in teaching. They are used by almost 90% of the teachers, both in introducing new vocabulary as well as testing knowledge. Reading stories is also very popular. Aside of filling a good part of the lesson, they have an impact on children's development also in a cultural framework.

In regards to testing vocabulary, the most frequent activities are matching word to pictures, picture naming and eliminating word which does not fit to others.

To conclude, most teachers claim that they create their own educational program based on Polish coursebooks, Internet resources and own materials. They admit that this demands more creativity, effort and time but gives them a chance to adjust the program to the specific needs of their group. As a result, the creation of high qualitative Polish classes abroad is accomplished.

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