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## The Integration of Foreign Languages in Early Education in Poland based on Own Research

Integracja języka obcego w ramach wczesnej  
edukacji w Polsce na podstawie własnych badań

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### KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

integrated education,  
holistic educa-  
tion, broad based,  
education, foreign  
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foreign language,  
young learners

Foreign languages have been an obligatory educational area in early integrated education since 2008 and, as a result, there should be integrated content, methods and didactic devices in the process of the foreign language teaching of young learners. The aim of this article is to describe the situation of the integration of the teaching of foreign languages into integrated educational studies of I–III classes. However, the main question of this research is if the foreign language is integrated enough in that area of education of the young learners. The research of that article was conducted thanks to quantitative methods – namely a survey. After the analysis of the research, some conclusions are suggested that all foreign language teachers should understand the idea of integration, consult the content, didactic methods and didactic devices with the main teacher and integrate it with other educational areas of early education. According to the research, an insufficient number of groups do so. There have been many valuable publications about the early education integrated studies but there are only a few books and articles about the integration of foreign languages. The theme of the teaching of foreign languages in the model of integrated studies has not yet been developed and this is why this research offers something quite new and interesting, albeit in need of further study.

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

nauczanie zintegrowane, nauczanie holistyczne, nauczanie całościowe, obcy język, nauczanie języka obcego, młodzi uczniowie

## ABSTRAKT

Obcy język został wprowadzony w edukacji zintegrowanej jako obowiązkowy obszar edukacyjny w 2008 roku, czego rezultatem powinny być zintegrowane treści, metody i środki dydaktyczne w procesie nauczania języka obcego młodszych uczniów. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie sytuacji integracji nauczania języka obcego w przestrzeni edukacji zintegrowanej w klasach I–III. Głównym pytaniem tego artykułu jest, czy język obcy jest dostatecznie zintegrowany w przestrzeni tej edukacji młodszych uczniów. Badania zostały przeprowadzone dzięki metodzie ilościowej – ankiecie. Po analizie badań nasuwają się następujące wnioski. Wszyscy nauczyciele języka obcego powinni rozumieć ideę integracji, konsultować treści, metody i środki dydaktyczne z nauczycielem klasy i integrować je z pozostałymi obszarami edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. Według badań niewystarczająca grupa nauczycieli obecnie tak czyni. Jest wiele cennych publikacji na temat integracji w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej, ale tylko parę książek i artykułów na temat integracji języka obcego. Temat nauczania języka obcego w modelu zintegrowanej edukacji nie został jeszcze dostatecznie zgłębiany. Dlatego badania związane z tym artykułem są stosunkowo nowe i interesujące, jednakże są fragmentaryczne i wymagają kontynuacji.

## Introduction

One can observe nowadays wholesale globalization that is increasingly compelling people to learn foreign languages. According some philosophical and sociological theories, the world is a global village and the citizens of each country can move to others to study and work. However, they have to speak a foreign language or foreign languages. This is a necessary condition to assimilate into the society of the country they choose to live in and also why the Ministry of Education in Poland has started to emphasize the important role of teaching foreign languages from the stage of early education. Moreover, the model of integrated studying has been implemented since 1999 in early education in Poland. Teachers have to provide young learners with the basic competences of foreign languages and the foreign language has to be integrated with other educational areas. The most important thing is that it should not be a separate part of teaching with its own topics but ought to be interwoven with the topics of every day teaching, correspondingly with the rules of early education integrated studies. To obtain effective links between the foreign language and other educational areas, the constructive activity of the foreign language teacher is

indispensable since they can be a separate teacher or main teacher who has the suitable competences to teach young learners the foreign language. Moreover, early education is a milestone in long-life learning which researchers, pedagogists and psychologists believe is vital to provide the young learners with the best start.

The model of early integrated education was inspired by some other models and approaches of some popular pedagogists and thinkers. These include the systems/thoughts of Comenius (1592–1670), Jean J. Rousseau (1712–1778), Jean H. Pestalozzi (1746–1827) and John Dewey (1859–1952). One may also find some inspiration in the idea of early integrated studies from the thoughts of Ovide Decroly (1871–1932) or even Maria Montessori (1870–1952). In Poland, significant contributions have been made by Jan W. Dawid, Henryk Rowid, Janina Maćkowiak, Antoni Mackowiak, Jadwiga Walczyna, Łucja Muszyńska, Jan Zborowski, Maria Cackowska, Maria Grzegorzewska and Jadwiga Hanisz.

### The definition of the early integrated studies in Polish literature

Now in Poland early integrated studies consists of three classes of elementary education, from class I to III. There are many definitions of integrated studies in Polish literature that are dependent on the interpretation and approach of the author. Some of them are connected to a certain pedagogical approach or some goals of education, others relate to the integration of learning content into different fields of knowledge, and others recognize integration as a whole process of development and education of the child.

At the beginning it is worth presenting a general definition of integration education provided by W. Okoń. He claims that “integrated education is the process of making the wholeness from the parts, consolidating and combining elements together”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, integrated education at the early level joins all elements into a logical and cohesive process.

Integrated education according to Łucja Muszyńska is a process that aims for the comprehensive personal development of the child and preparing him/her for active and creative involvement in the society as a whole. It requires engaging young learners in various activities and the author understands the integrated education as the process of providing the children with knowledge, skills and competences that shape their cognitive, emotional and moral sphere and allow them to be active member of society in the future”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 2001, s. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ł. Muszyńska, *Integralne wychowanie i nauczanie w klasach I–III*, Warszawa-Poznań 1974, s. 21.

There is considerable diversity in the use of a single term for integration in education as various options present different understandings of integrated education and they use disparate terms, an issue noticed by Ryszard Więckowski. He claims that other authors use terms like: “integrated teaching, inclusive teaching, interlocked teaching, integration of cross-curricular”<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, according to Józefa Bałałowicz, the integrated education is “cross-curricular, rich in content, holistic model of furtherance of a child to shape his/her individual relationship with culture, his/her personality and social competences that allow him/her to accommodate himself/herself to always dynamic reality”<sup>4</sup>. The author depicts a model of integrated education that supports the holistic development of the child.

However, the integrated education may also be called a holistic education. Krystyna Duraj-Nowakowa characterizes it as the didactic process that is concentrated around some topics that the child is taught every day and that topics respond to his/her interests, needs and abilities – they are chosen individually for him/her<sup>5</sup>.

To conclude, the integrated education is understood as the holistic teaching and learning that is natural for young learners. The integration has to be connected to all didactic elements, including content, didactic methods and didactic devices. It is also recommended to organize the time and space of class in different ways – there are no strict lessons but rather larger time units and the classroom should be divided into some educational areas. The teachers should pursue some of the personal talents, interests and possibilities of the young learners to fulfill their needs. Children can thus develop in a harmonious way and learn with pleasure. Moreover, the process of teaching and learning is much more pleasant, dynamic and fruitful. These are the determinants of integrated education in the theory. However, there is a question of whether they are kept in practice? It depends on the school and region of the country that wishes to implement it.

## The situation of the integration of foreign languages into early education Poland – the changes, educational law and goals

The policy of teaching foreign languages has changed considerably in recent years in Europe and also in Poland. The Council of the European Union put forward the recommendations for the improvement of teaching and learning foreign languages at

<sup>3</sup> R. Więckowski, *Pedagogika wczesnoszkolna*, Warszawa 1995, s. 19.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bałałowicz, *Założenia edukacji zintegrowanej w nauczaniu początkowym*, [w:] *Integracja w edukacji. Dylematy teorii i praktyki*, red. J. Jakóbowski, A. Jakubowicz-Bryx, Bydgoszcz 2002, s. 25.

<sup>5</sup> K. Duraj-Nowakowa, *Zintegrowanie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, Kraków 1998, s. 125.

each level of education in the countries of European Union in Barcelona 2002. The obligatory teaching of a foreign language on the level of early education has also been proposed and most European countries, especially some of the more well-developed, have accepted them and faced that challenge. These recommendations related to respecting both national and foreign languages, promoting multilingualism, starting the teaching and learning of foreign languages as early as possible in the educational institutions, cooperating between schools that promote the early teaching of foreign languages, developing the didactic and language competences of the language teachers, enhancing some motivation to learn foreign languages and the improvement of the didactic methods and devices<sup>6</sup>.

Poland acceded to European Union in 2004 and has since then paid increasing attention to the teaching of foreign languages, also at the level of elementary education. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December in 2008 the Regulation of The Ministry of Education about the National Curriculum of preschool education and general education has been implemented. It introduced the obligatory teaching of a foreign language from the first class of elementary, integrated education. According to it, the young learner that has finished the first class should: understand some simple instructions in foreign language, name the objects in his/her environment, be able to recite some rhymes and poems, sing some songs, understand some simple stories when supported by some gestures and pictures. Moreover, the young learner that has finished the fourth class should also understand that people speak different languages, have motivations to learn foreign language, react in the appropriate way on some instructions of the teacher, read with understanding, ask and answer some questions, rewrite some words, phrases and sentences, can use some dictionaries and other educational aids and cooperate with other learners during learning languages<sup>7</sup>.

The New National Curriculum of preschool education and general education was implemented in 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017 and it will apply from the first of September 2017. The aims are divided into achievements in the field of listening, achievements in the field of speaking and sound production plus achievements in the field of reading and writing. It is much broader than the previous National Curriculum for learning foreign languages. To the first mentioned field, the young learner should also distinguish between the meanings of words of similar sounds in the range of the words that he/she has known during the activities. As for the achievements in the field of speaking and sound production, he/she repeats some words, phrases and sentences

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<sup>6</sup> M. Pamuła-Behrens, *Nauka czytania w języku obcym w okresie wczesnoszkolnym. Teoria i praktyka*, Kraków 2012, s. 24–25.

<sup>7</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z 23 grudnia 2008 roku w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz kształcenia ogólnego w poszczególnych typach szkół (Dz. U. z 2009, nr 4, poz.17), s. 211.

after the teacher, use some polite phrases and communicate with his/her peers with some known words, phrases and sentences. And as for the achievements in the field of reading and writing, he/she can read some sentences and understand them and write few sentences/ a short story by himself/herself<sup>8</sup>.

### The integration of foreign languages and the primary curriculum – theory

According to psychology, young learners – until they are 12 or 13. learn holistically and the teaching of foreign languages has to be embedded in their general primary curriculum<sup>9</sup>. Foreign language activities should not be separate units which only present and practice new language that was once learnt. Foreign language teachers are obliged to care to establish clear links between language lessons and the knowledge and skills young learners acquire at school. Such an integration of foreign language and the general curriculum can take place at different levels and in a number of ways. The phenomena of drawing upon primary teaching is its emphasis on its learner-centredness and the creation of a supportive learning environment<sup>10</sup>.

Moreover, S. Halliwell has presented some arguments for the integration of English into the primary curriculum. First of all, she believes that language learning should be natural and not be “set apart from the rest of learning. The learners should see the language as something that they manipulate not only in the classroom but also outside (home, playground)”. Secondly, she refers to language acquisition theory which stresses the importance of receiving and producing messages, as well as dealing with “the real meaning of the language rather than learning just words and structures for their own sake”<sup>11</sup>.

Moreover, there are a number of other models of the integration of foreign languages and the primary curriculum: integration through the topic (topic-centred learning), integration through the methods (activity-based learning), integration through the teacher and integrated to the learners. Integration through the topic means that young learners do not learn separate subjects, they learn the knowledge of that subject together, correlated through one theme for a period of time (a day or

<sup>8</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z 14 lutego 2017 roku w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz kształcenia ogólnego w poszczególnych typach szkół (Dz. U. z 2017).

<sup>9</sup> A. Pinter, *Teaching young language learners, Oxford handbooks for language teachers*, Oxford 2006, s. 9, 86.

<sup>10</sup> M. Szpotowicz, M. Szulc-Kurpaska, *Teaching English to young learners*, Warszawa 2011, s. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Tamże.

a week). According to research, learning from the topic perspective is beneficial for children. The integration through the methods is lively and enjoyable for the young learners and it can be well exploited not only to learn the foreign language items and the language skills, but also to practice or acquire other, non-linguistic skills. Moreover, the integration through the teacher is possible mostly when the foreign language teacher is a main teacher of the class and have time to implement some foreign language activities and other educational areas. Such situation lends itself ideally to topic-based teaching.

The most suitable and the most desirable according to the idea of the integrated teaching and learning in the area of early education. It first of all establishes the individualization of the process of teaching and learning that is one of the most important factors of early education and education in general. Integration through method is also useful and acceptable in the didactics of early education of the integrated model. However, even when the teacher uses this kind of the integration of the foreign language he/she should remember that the learners are the most important in that process.

### The role of teachers of foreign languages in teaching foreign languages in the early integrated education – problems and possibilities

The foreign teacher of young learners can be the main teacher or a separate teacher. Both of them have to be qualified foreign language teachers and have met the challenge to fulfill that obligation since the integrated model of early education was implemented. Most have had to complete their qualifications and expand their competences.

The teaching of a foreign language to young learners is unique. According to Adriana Klimas, foreign teachers of young learners have to possess the linguistic knowledge that is characterized by the flexibility of the language that they teach and the knowledge of the structure and specifications of that language. Moreover, they are obliged to become acquainted with the pedagogical and psychological knowledge connected to the way young learners acquire the foreign language. Another aspect is that they ought to know how to teach – have methodological information and use it in the proper way<sup>12</sup>.

They should also be experienced teachers – to have spent some years teaching foreign languages to young learners. Unfortunately, in Poland there are not many

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<sup>12</sup> A. Klimas, *Nauczyciel, nauczyciel języka obcego dzieci w wieku wczesnoszkolnym*, [w:] *Nauczanie języków obcych dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym i wczesnoszkolnym*, red. J. Karbowniczek, D. Ficek, Częstochowa 2010, s. 267.

qualified and experienced foreign language teachers of young learners. Teaching young learners is not an easy task and most foreign language teachers prefer to teach adults or teenagers to see the results easily and quickly. Children learn by storage and they show their knowledge later on, mostly in the third class or even fourth when they leave integrated education. Parents often ask teachers: “Why does my child not speak English/German when we go abroad” and they do not understand the way their children learn – that they need time to be fluent in the language. That is why teachers have to explain to parents a situation which is sometimes difficult. Another factor is that foreign language teachers change their jobs to be become, for example, translators to earn much more money and to feel appreciated. As a result, young learners are taught by two, three or sometimes four foreign language teachers during their integrated studies of three years. This situation is inconvenient for them and there is a need to work as a team in the area of integrated studies – the main teacher should cooperate with the foreign language teacher to fulfill the idea of integration studies of early education. However, most foreign language teachers do not assimilate and work together with the main teacher.

### The methodology of the research

This research is an example of a relatively rare but useful type which can help to diagnose and change the situation for the better. The author has adjusted a quantitative method (survey) because she found them the most suitable for this kind of research.

The subject is the integration of a foreign language with other educational areas in early education in Poland. The theoretical purpose of the research is to collect, analyze and then show the knowledge about the integration of foreign language in the area of integrated early education. The practical purpose of the research is to depict the range of the integration of foreign languages in the early education in our country.

Moreover, the main problem is: at what range there is an integration the foreign language with other educational areas in the early education in our country? There are some detailed problems: 1. Do the foreign language teachers try to integrate content, methods and techniques with other educational areas in the early education? 2. Does the integration of a foreign language into early integrated studies education bring some expected results?

The survey consists of 18 questions and was conducted in 2015 on 100 foreign language teachers in early integrated education in the Małopolska and Podkarpackie provinces. The author was able to utilise data gathered by her postgraduate seminar students.



## The integration of the foreign language into the early integrated education – the analysis and results of the research

### The characteristics of the research group

97 women (97%) and 3 men (3%) were surveyed; 65 people (65%) were between 20–30 y. o., 29 (29%) between 30–40 y. o. and 6 (6%) people over 40 y. o.; 58 (58%) persons lived in towns and 42 (42%) in villages; 33 (33%) teachers graduated from bachelor studies and 67 (67%) from master studies; as for the course of the studies: 23 (23%) graduated from early education studies with a foreign language, 3 (3%) teachers graduated from early education studies and also finished a foreign language course and 65 (65%) – foreign language philology with a pedagogical course. Most of them were only teachers of a foreign language – 73 (73%), but there were some foreign language teachers that were also main teachers – 27 (27%). To conclude, most respondents were women that lived in towns, had a masters diploma in a foreign language philology course together with pedagogical preparation. There were also separate foreign language teachers.

### The findings of the research

The first question in the survey was connected to the cooperation the foreign language teachers with the main teachers as for the content, didactic methods and didactic devices. Most respondents – 62 (62%) answered that they have consulted these didactic aspects with main teachers. The rest of them consulted only in terms of some behaviour problems of young learners. However, 78 (78%) foreign language teachers integrated the content of the foreign language with the content of other educational areas. Unfortunately, 22 (22%) people admitted that they do not do it. The other two questions of the survey are connected to the methods of teaching and the didactic devices that the respondents have used during teaching the foreign languages the young learners. According to their answers, all teachers – 100 people (100%) use both various teaching methods (both passive and active) and various didactic devices useful for teaching foreign languages and that is correct to the idea of integrated early education studies. As for the effects of integrated teaching of foreign language, most teachers claimed that the kind of teaching has a positive impact on the effects of young learners in the field of foreign language. They especially have higher and inner motivation to learn – 57 (57%) teachers admitted it. Most teachers – 79 (79%) said that young learners take part in the activities very easily and with pleasure. Most teachers claimed that young learners like active tasks the most. Unfortunately,

only 33 (33%) teachers said that young learners try to use the knowledge of other educational areas during the activities of foreign language and use the knowledge of the foreign language during lessons such as mathematics, Polish or other educational areas.

### The conclusion of the research

The subject in the area of early education was a big change and challenge for headmaster, teachers, parents and young learners as well. It is not an easy task to show the natural connection of some educational area to young learners that they can observe in the real world that surround them. Teachers are obliged to use real situations to teach young learners, to use various methods and didactic devices and make the connection among the content of many educational areas. Another difficulty is to integrate the foreign language into the whole of early education, mostly because it may be difficult language for some learners and most teachers are separate teachers – they are not main teachers, and the communication between the main teacher and language teacher is another challenge. According to the research, not all language teachers cooperate with the main teacher. Nearly half of them do not discuss the current content that they use, methods and didactic devices. They also do not hold joint activities with the main teacher. They only talk about some of the behavioural problems of the learners if they have them. However, the language teachers claim that they know the range of the content in the curriculum and they try to make the connection between maths, Polish and other educational areas. Fortunately, most of the various methods and devices used are needed in the model of integrated early education. To answer the main question that was taken in the methodology part of the article, the foreign language is not fully nor sufficiently integrated in the early education system and the results of using this kind of model of teaching are at present unsatisfactory.

### Some directions for future best practice in the integration of foreign languages and the primary curriculum

Foreign language teachers should be taught how to understand and then implement the idea of integrated studies into their daily practice. They should know the definition/ definitions of the integrated model of early education, some disadvantages and the advantages of that model and how to use it in real school situations.

The headmasters and the main teacher should involve the foreign language teachers in the discussions about what content, didactic methods and didactic devices they all have to choose at the certain time of the process of teaching of young learners.

At school there should be some training for foreign language teachers how to implement the idea of integrated studies in the area of early education.

There should be much more books and articles (or even brochures published at each primary school) about the practical (not only theoretical) aspects of the integration in early education teaching. They would help foreign language teachers to study the content themselves and then consult with more experienced teachers at school.

Cooperation between foreign language teachers, headmasters, main teachers and also parents should be promoted at schools.

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