Early literacy policy and practice in Poland

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This chapter aims to review the policy and practice of early literacy education in Poland for native Polish-speaking children. It opens with a brief overview of the Polish language and Polish educational system, followed by a discussion of the structure of the Polish phonology and orthography and its impact on early literacy development. The focus is then shifted to the early Polish literacy policy and its implementation. The provision for children with special educational needs as well as variety of literacy materials are also reviewed. The chapter closes with a discussion of major challenges for the current and future early literacy provision.

Polish is an Indo-European language belonging to the Slavic group. It is the official language of Poland with its population of 38.5 million, as well as one of the official languages of the European Union. The actual size of the Polish population is difficult to estimate, given that many Poles have moved to Western Europe in the past decade and are still migrating and immigrating.

Contemporary Poland is a very ethnically and linguistically homogeneous country, with 97 per cent of its population speaking Polish as their mother tongue. Minorities, which account for the remaining 3 per cent of the population, are either national (Byelorussian, Lithuanian, German, Ukrainian) or ethnic (Karaim, Lemko, Romani and Tatar). Members of minorities who live in Poland are predominantly bilingual.

Another important fact is that the Polish language used in contemporary Poland shows relatively little variation. Standard literary language, which is the main variety taught in schools and used in the media, is uniform. In the north, there is a small community speaking a regional language called Kashubian. Additionally, in a few regions, there are larger groups of people who still speak dialects of Polish at home, such as the Podhale dialect used among inhabitants of the Tatra mountains in the south or the Silesian dialect in the south-western Poland. However, most of these people can also use the standard variety of Polish. Generally speaking, in most of the Poland’s territory, regional variation within spoken Polish is limited to minor phonetic and lexical differences.

The national educational policy is developed and enforced centrally by the Ministry of National Education, while the administration of education is decentralized and delegated to local authorities (communes). Compulsory education lasts from the age of six to 16, and is free in public schools. Educational institutions include preschool facilities as well as schools of primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary levels.
The optional preschool education, which is offered to children aged from three to five, is attended by 72 per cent of Polish children. The mandatory age of starting school is seven years old, but according to a recent regulation, parents may decide to send their children to school at the age of six, provided they have completed a preschool (kindergarten) preparation class one year earlier.

Primary school is divided into two cycles of three years. The first cycle (grade: one to three, age: seven to nine) offers integrated teaching: pupils are taught all subjects by one teacher specialized in early childhood education. In the second cycle (grade: four to six, age: ten to twelve), teaching is subject-based and provided by several teachers. All pupils who leave primary school have to continue their education at a general three-year lower secondary school, with a compulsory external examination taken at the end. Free public education offered at further levels is not compulsory.

The existing educational system was created in 1999, with numerous subsequent modifications introduced over the last 16 years. The recent political developments have brought significant changes to the educational policy, some of them reversing the status quo, such as the recent abolishing of a regulation lowering the school entry age from seven down to six years. These trends indicate that the information presented in this chapter may become outdated by the time the current government leaves office.

**Typological characteristics of Polish and its impact on orthographic and phonological representations**

In terms of comparative morphological typology, Polish is typically referred to as a fusional inflecting language, characterized by rich morphology, both inflectional and derivational. Nouns, adjectives and verbs are inflected according to complex declensional and conjuga-tional paradigms, therefore each word appears in a range of varying forms. The use of inflec-tional endings and derivational suffixes is associated with numerous systemic morphological alternations of the word stem or root. Alternations concern stem vowels and/or consonants, for example:

\[
\begin{align*}
/\text{drog}/ & \quad \text{drog-a} \ ‘\text{road’ (Nom. Sg.)} \\
/\text{droz}/ & \quad \text{droz-e} \ ‘\text{road’ (Dat. Sg.)} \\
/\text{druk}/ & \quad \text{druk-O} \ ‘\text{road’ (Gen. Pl.)} \\
/\text{druz}/ & \quad \text{po-droz-n-y} \ ‘\text{traveller’} \\
/\text{druj}/ & \quad \text{droz-k-a} \ ‘\text{small road’ (diminutive)}
\end{align*}
\]

The phonological inventory consists of 37 phonemes, among them six vowels, three semivowels and 28 consonants (Ostaszewska and Tambor, 2004). The ratio of consonants to vowels is relatively high (as it is the case of most Slavic languages). Unlike in Czech or Slovak, vowel length is not distinctive in Polish. Contrary to Russian, where the word stress is distinctive and unstressed vowels undergo reduction, Polish has indistinctive penultimate stress, which does not influence the pronunciation of sounds (as it is the case, for instance, in English). Among consonants there are characteristic three series of sibilants and affricates: dental /s/, /z/, /ɕ/, /ʑ/, palatal /ɕ/, /ʑ/, /ʝ/, /ʎ/ and alveolar /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ɧ/, /ɧ/.. Polish pronunciation involves systematic devoicing of voiced consonants, occurring either in final position or preceding an unvoiced consonant, with the voiced phoneme being preserved in writing (comparable with German). The prosodic structure of Polish words allows for open and closed syllables as well as for a number of consonant clusters to occur.
The Polish alphabet, created on the basis of the borrowed Latin alphabet, is composed of 23 basic letters and nine supplementary letters (with diacritics): A Ä B C Ć D EĘ F G H I J K Ł Ł M N Ń O Ō P R S Ś T U W Y Ć Ż Ź. Additionally, 11 diagraphs (SI, CI, NI, ZI, DZ, RZ, CH, SZ, CZ, DŽ, DŽ) and one trigraph (DZI) are used to represent Polish phonemes. Altogether, the Polish alphabetical system uses 44 graphemes, i.e. letters and letter combinations referring to particular phonemes.

Only 14 letters of the Polish alphabet, namely A, Ć, E, F, H, J, Ł, M, Ń, O, Ō, P, T, are always read in the same way regardless of the graphic and phonological context. As for the remaining letters, their correct reading requires an analysis of the closest graphic context because some letters, namely C, D, G, I, K, N, R, S, Z, Ź and Z, may appear not in their basic function of designating phonemes but as a part of complex graphemes referring to other phonemes, e.g. letter Z used to form digraphs such as DZ, SZ, CZ, RZ.

There are eight phonemes which have double graphemic designations. Five of them form a series referring to soft consonants: Š = SI, Ž = ZI, Ć = CI, DŽ = DZI and Ń = NI. Depending on the phonetic/graphemic context, softness may be marked either by a diacritic or by the letter I. Children have to learn the rule governing their distribution, but it is not very difficult.

Most difficulties in the acquisition of Polish spelling are caused by the following three, historically motivated, doublets, namely:

U = Ō corresponding to /u/
Ž = RZ corresponding to /ʒ/
H = CH corresponding to /x/.

Their distribution is much less systematic, as they are related to historical changes in Polish phonology and morphophonology, which may be quite obscure to contemporary speakers of Polish. In order to decide which grapheme has to be used in a given word form, one has to refer to a complex system of rules, many of them requiring the reference to the lexical meaning of the word as well as to the related morphological units: other inflected forms of the word or other words derivationally related. In addition to this, there is a corpus of words containing phonemes /u/, /ʒ/ and /x/, whose spelling is not rule-governed at all and has to be memorized. Orthographic problems involving those three doublets significantly impair transparency of the Polish spelling and create difficulties, which can persist in the adult age with some people.

How transparent is the Polish orthography? Transparency refers mainly to the relationship between sound (Ph for Phoneme) and sign (G for Grapheme). In transparent (shallow) systems, there is a full correspondence between them: one phoneme is always represented by one grapheme and vice versa (Ph = G). However, such systems are very rare among natural languages.

Some Polish words, such as chrzan (‘horseradish’), for example, may appear ‘scary’ to non-native speakers. However, the graphic system is not as complicated as it seems. In the case of chrzan, two out of five consonant letters are parts of digraphs, thus the word contains only three consonantal phonemes: /ʃʃan/. Overall, Polish spelling is moderately transparent (shallow) as compared with some other languages, such as English or French. However, it is not as shallow as that of Serbian or Croatian, which are known for having a very close match between graphemic and phonetic representation.

When evaluating the transparency of the graphic system, one should distinguish two directions of the G–Ph relationship. The transparency of mapping from graphemic to
phonemic form (G → Ph) determines how easy it is to read words in a given language, i.e. to decode them into the strings of sounds. The transparency of mapping from phonemic to graphemic form (Ph → G) determines how easy it is to write words in a given language, i.e. to convert a string of sounds into a correct graphic form.

In general, the transparency of Polish writing system is much higher in the G → Ph than in the Ph → G direction, which means that it is much easier to read than to write in Polish. Unlike in English, one can decode a Polish written text and read it correctly without even knowing what it means. Of course, since the correspondence of letters and sounds is not perfect, readers have to first acquire some general rules about digraphs, alternative marking of soft consonants, devoicing and others, but they do not need morphological information in order to decode words correctly. However, in the Ph → G direction, the correspondence is not as transparent and proper spelling (orthography) is not that simple. One has to refer to morphology, both lexical and inflectional/derivational, in order to decide about the specific issues in the specific case: for example, whether an unvoiced consonant should be written as such or replaced by the original voiced counterpart (e.g. the string /kot/ may be written as kot ‘cat’ or kod ‘code’, depending on the meaning) or which one of the graphic doublets to choose for phonemes /u/, /x/ and /y/. For instance, hearing the sequence of phonemes /druk/ one has to use the semantic and syntactic context in order to decide whether it refers to the lexeme druk ‘print’ or the Gen. Pl. form dróg of droga ‘road’. When the latter is chosen, before writing correctly the form dróg one has to refer to the Nom. Sg. form drog-a, which contains the information that /k/ is in fact a devoiced /g/ and therefore should be written with G, whereas the phoneme /u/ should be written as Ō rather than U, because the regular morphonological alternation of /o/ vs. /u/ is rendered in writing as O vs. Ō.

Principal methods and content areas of literacy instruction

Acquisition of literacy may start with graphic signs and the sounds to which they refer (G → Ph, reading first) or with phonemes and the way in which they are designated in writing (Ph → G, writing first). Due to the properties of the Polish orthographic system, the first option seems to be more appropriate for Polish children. However, in order to prevent them from applying the phonological strategy in the other direction (i.e. when learning to write), it is highly recommended by Polish educational authorities that learning to read and write takes place in parallel (simultaneously). Common practice in Polish literacy education follows this recommendation.

On the other hand, due to the inflectional characteristics of the Polish language, the global method (the global recognition of words) seems ineffective, as words appear in many different forms. The characteristics of relatively shallow alphabetical writing suggest the coexistence of analytical (from large units like words to smaller units) and synthetic (from small units to larger units) processes throughout learning to read and write. Therefore, the optimal method of teaching literacy, which prevails in Poland, is the lexical variant of the analytical and synthetic method. It consists in performing a visual and auditory analysis of a word containing a letter or phoneme, and then synthesizing it back. The adequacy of this method is confirmed by research on how children acquire reading and writing in Polish language – beginning with the stage of analytical reading based on phonemic analysis (Krasowicz-Kupis, 2006; Awramiuk and Krasowicz-Kupis, 2014).

Learning to read and write focuses on common goals: mastering technical skills, development of the ability to understand/speak and to increase emotional involvement in
the performance of both activities. Practical tasks in phonetic analysis involve auditory isolation of phones in a word. The most common type of such practice tasks involves pronunciation of a word and deciding on the location of a given phone. At the beginning, children search for initial and final phones, and with increasing hearing sensitivity in children, the level of difficulty increases, as a searched phone may occur anywhere in a word. Often, practice tasks in phonetic analysis are reinforced by visual stimuli in which the phonetic structure of analysed words is visualized.

In the teaching process, during the introduction of a new letter, many primers follow the principle: presentation of the entire word (\textit{woda} ‘water’), division into syllables (\textit{wo-da}), division into phones (\textit{w-o-d-a}) and re-presentation of the entire word (\textit{woda}).

The core curriculum does not impose any single teaching method. A teacher has the right to choose his or her teaching method independently, taking into account the individual abilities of the children and bearing in mind that teaching of reading and writing should be combined. In addition to the analytical-synthetic method in its lexical variant, which is the most popular method of teaching literacy in Poland, other teaching methods are also applied. Among the abundance of teaching proposals, there are those in which a syllable is the basic unit of analysis and/or synthesis, and those that completely break with the traditional approach, proposing the global reading method. New teaching materials demonstrate a clear trend to introduce a variety of elements; for example elements of the global method are introduced in the analytic-synthetic method.

At the initial stage of learning, an important role is given to concepts used for distinguishing the elements of language such as sentence, word, syllable, phone and letter. They do not occur in isolation but form a template with some key concepts. This conceptual structure helps the children to organize their knowledge in a hierarchical order. Moreover, these concepts may serve as a consistent and logical basis for conscious learning at higher levels of education. Children learn concepts through observation and independent thinking (e.g. drawing conclusions, summarizing), rather than by learning their definitions.

\textbf{Early literacy}

Learning to read and write begins in Poland in grade 1. Kindergarten education aims to develop children’s readiness to learn to read and write (e.g. manual skills and eye-hand coordination, phonological skills), as well as ignite children’s interest in reading and writing.

At the preparatory stage, attention is given to both the technical aspect of the acquired skills (\textit{code-based skills}) and reading comprehension (\textit{meaning-construction skills}). Reading begins with monosyllabic words, thus children are in contact with the meaning of graphic strings that they learn from the very beginning. The inventory of letters used at first is limited to the most unproblematic ones. Gradually, digraphs and more difficult letters and letter combinations are introduced. After the first year at school, children would have eventually acquired all the letters of the alphabet. They can read and understand brief texts and write simple, short sentences, giving attention to the aesthetics and correctness of writing. Over time, the pragmatic aspect of reading and writing gains importance.

The core curriculum identifies final learning outcomes for the entire three-year cycle of early childhood education (CC, 2014: 11–12), not for particular grades. Distribution of material and decisions on how much time should be devoted to mastering knowledge and skills in specific areas are made solely by the teacher, who can adjust the teaching to individual pupils’ needs.
According to the core curriculum, pupils who successfully complete grade three education should be able to read and make sense of texts written for their reading level. They should also be able to search for necessary information in a text, as well as use child-friendly dictionaries. They are supposed to read children’s literature, both books of their choice and those indicated by the teacher, and to speak about them. They should also be able to produce oral and written communications composed of several sentences (short stories and descriptions, personal letters, greetings, invitations). They should have learned to write clearly and neatly, giving attention to correctness in terms of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Minorities who live in Poland have the right to be taught the minority language and culture at school. The core curriculum for preschool education takes into account preparation for speaking the language of a national or ethnic minority, or a regional language (Kashubian). These guidelines are implemented by kindergartens. Children who belong to national and ethnic minorities and to communities speaking a regional language may continue learning their language at later stages of education or, if there is a school offering it, they can receive teaching in the minority language. Learning outcomes at the end of early childhood education in terms of the native language of a national or ethnic minority are consistent with the objectives defined for Polish language education.

There has been a recent increase in children for whom Polish is a foreign language. These children’s parents are either refugees from other countries or people who settle in Poland for professional or personal reasons. For such children, additional Polish language classes, compensatory school subject classes and classes about the language and culture of their country of origin are organized. There is also a rising number of Polish citizens who attended schools operating in foreign education systems. With the support of the Ministry of National Education, several additional materials are being developed to support children from different backgrounds (Barzykowski et al., 2013).

The learning of a modern foreign language begins in kindergarten. Preparing children to speak a modern foreign language is included in various activities carried out under the preschool education programme and takes place mainly in a fun way. Within the early childhood education cycle, foreign language tuition is provided by a qualified teacher during separate classes. According to national curricula, pupils who complete grade three should be able to produce, understand, read and copy words and simple sentences in the foreign language they learn. Children should be supported in communicating with people who speak another language and motivated to learn foreign languages.

Throughout grades one to three, there is no quantitative grading: only descriptive assessment is used. It is based on careful systematic and multi-dimensional observation of the child by the teacher, who takes into account the child’s performance and progress, as well as the results from tests, worksheets and workbooks.

A ‘semester assessment’ is the result of a six-month observation of a child, and is the basis for issuing report cards drawn up on the basis of the core curriculum. It also provides guidelines for further work. In addition to typical school skills, reading, writing and counting, other factors are taken into account, such as ability to cooperate with others, organization of one’s own work, interests and abilities.

**Policy implementation in practice**

Legislation has introduced identical quality assurance approaches in early childhood and school education. These include three main elements, which aim to improve the quality of education, and are as follows:
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- system of pedagogical supervision, including evaluating outcomes of educational, care-related and other statutory activities undertaken by schools and supporting schools in the performance of their tasks;
- internal teacher appraisal, including assessment of teachers’ performance, carried out by the school head as part of internal pedagogical supervision;
- external pupil assessment, carried out by institutions which are external to the school, including the Regional and Central Examination Boards (Smoczyńska et al., 2012).

At the end of early childhood education stage in primary school, there are no mandatory state exams, as is the case at the end of the entire primary school education cycle. Schools may participate in voluntary national or international tests that assess the achievements of pupils as well as the school’s performance. The most common test is the National Study of Third Graders’ Skills (OBUT), which has been in place since 2010. OBUT’s primary objective is to provide schools with information on the level of knowledge and skills of individual pupils and classes that complete the first stage of education, and thus to determine at which level children are, in terms of their:

- basic skills (reading, mathematics, communication);
- Polish language and mathematics teaching content;
- use of background knowledge and skills for problem-solving (Pregler, 2014).

An important result of this study is to provide the schools with national comparative data in terms of individual students, classes and the entire school. After analysing such a report, teachers obtain additional information about each child’s strengths and the difficulties that the child faces regarding the skills under examination. A summary of class and school results in different skill areas is most important for the improvement of the school’s effectiveness. OBUT results are also one of the key elements for internal school review and identifying opportunities to improve teacher practice (Pregler, 2014).

In 2011, Polish third-graders took part in an international reading skill study – PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), the aim of which was to assess reading comprehension (Konarzewski, 2012). Tests used in PIRLS measure the four basic skills that make up the reading proficiency: (1) finding information that meets specified criteria in a text; (2) drawing conclusions from evidence contained in a text; (3) combining and interpreting the information contained in a text; (4) examining and evaluating the content, language and layout of a text.

In the PIRLS context, the OBUT study, which assessed a similar set of specific skills, allowed teachers to conduct an objective assessment of their pupils’ reading skills, serving also as a valuable element of their teaching skills self-assessment. In PIRLS, Polish children were ranked 28th among children from the 45 countries participating in the study. If we take into account their age, Polish pupils were classified close to the middle of the scale, i.e. 11th among their peers from 22 countries who participated in the study (Konarzewski, 2012).

Future teachers may upgrade their qualifications at higher education and postgraduate courses. Training for teaching in kindergarten and in grades one to three of primary school is offered as part of education studies. Graduates have basic knowledge and skills in Polish language, mathematics and natural science (including the ability to create texts, make mathematical calculations and demonstrate natural phenomena with experiments). The acquisition of these competencies is a prerequisite to begin teacher training, which includes
basics of psychology and pedagogy – at a general education level, as well as tailored to a particular educational stage.

**Provision for children with special educational needs (SEN)**

Adapting educational requirements to the individual psychophysical and educational needs of children with SEN refers primarily to the groups that have been referred to special education and to individual learning or have been issued with a statement by a psychological and pedagogical unit, for example concerning specific learning difficulties or language disorders. The Polish education system provides the possibility to organize early development support, which is carried out in order to stimulate the motor, cognitive, emotional and social development of a child from the diagnosis of a disability to the beginning of schooling. Early development support teams function under the regulation of the Ministry of National Education (Regulation, 2013), ensuring that every child and the child’s family receive specialist support and development stimulation in accordance with the child’s abilities.

In the case of children who are subject to compulsory schooling and who qualify for the SEN group due to disability, the education system provides the opportunity for them to receive education in all types of schools – public, integration and special schools in accordance with children’s individual developmental and educational needs and abilities.

Special education for a child is based on a decision that such a need exists issued by a public psychological and pedagogical unit or other specialized entity. Special education covers pupils who require special organization of learning and working methods (deaf and hard of hearing children, children with visual impairment, physical disability, including aphasia, intellectual difficulties and autism, including Asperger’s syndrome). Psychological and pedagogical assistance for all SEN children includes assessment, providing direct assistance to pupils and their parents, implementation of preventive tasks and supporting educational institutions.

Unfortunately, children with learning difficulties do not receive systemic support. In this area, diagnosis, which begins with school readiness screening and screening for risk of disorders such as dyslexia, is most efficient. It allows children ‘at risk’ to receive support measures and for them to be possibly referred for in-depth specialized diagnostic tests (Bogdanowicz, 2008).

A child with dyslexia or another learning disorder obtains a specialist opinion stating the diagnosis. On its basis, the child may participate in therapeutic classes (remedial, speech therapy, compensatory) at school. According to the statement issued by a psychological and pedagogical unit, a teacher is required to adapt educational requirements to the individual psychological and educational needs of the pupil taking into account his or her abilities/strengths and limitations/dysfunctions. In addition, a pupil with dyslexia has the right to have the conditions and forms of state examinations adjusted.

**Early literacy resources**

A primer is the basic teaching material for early literacy. For many years, commercialized and sponsored primers were available on the Polish education market. The choice of a primer was made by the teacher.

In most EU countries, providing free access to basic teaching aids to pupils at the compulsory education stage is a standard practice. In 2014, a decision was made that the state would bear the costs of providing pupils in primary and secondary schools with free access
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Changes in this area are being implemented gradually. The first free textbook, *Nasz elementarz* (Our primer), was developed at the request of the Ministry of National Education in 2014 for first-grade pupils. Currently, the choice of appropriate teaching materials is still made by a teacher and approved by the school head.

A modern primer is not only a textbook intended for early literacy, but also a textbook that introduces knowledge in mathematics, natural science, art and social relations. The new textbook is accompanied by a rich teaching framework in the form of a curriculum, worksheets and letter albums for children, materials for teachers (teaching guides with class scenarios, a proposed distribution of material and artistic inspirations) and adaptation for children with special educational needs (visually impaired, hard-of-hearing or deaf children, children with learning difficulties and/or communication difficulties). The content of the textbook is to be interpreted as a suggestion, which may be used in different ways by each teacher. Its purpose is to provide inspiration to the teachers rather than to be followed to the letter.

Other publications also offer comprehensive educational packages. Typically, they contain additional practice materials for pupils, guides for teachers and kits for children with difficulties in learning to read and write. The basic textbook in the first grade is supplemented by textbooks and educational materials for learning modern foreign languages. There are also textbooks for minority pupils whose learning process is aimed at preserving a sense of national, ethnic and linguistic identity.

Learning to write at the initial stage during the first year involves familiarizing children with the shape and manner of writing of upper-case and lower-case letters, and writing the letters in words. Particular attention is given to proper copying of letter shapes, their appropriate merging, and linking the sound of words with their graphic image. Learning to write is supported with special sheets, which contain graphic practice tasks as well as sheets for learning to write letters and numbers in which children first write letter-like signs. Children then reproduce the shape of letters in their standard form and copy syllables, words and sentences. Graphomotoric practice tasks are usually boring and tedious, but they tend to be more attractive when they are carried out in a fun way (e.g. ‘Connect the dots and see who has visited Kate’s garden’) and allow children to experiment with different kinds of graphic materials and surfaces.

There are workbooks for learning to write by right-handed and left-handed children, books for therapeutic work at school and at home for pupils with a risk of dyslexia or who experience difficulties in learning to read and write. Pupils with special educational needs have access to a variety of therapeutic materials at every learning stage.

According to national curricula, the selection of written material to read has to include the following genres of children’s literature: fairy tales, fables, legends, short stories, poems, comics, while their selection should be guided by the real reading skills of children and their educational needs. Children should be taught to memorize poems, fragments of prose and lyrics. The National Study of Third Graders’ Skills conducted in the years 2006–2011 and the OBUT study showed that pupils are better at reading literary texts and short texts rather than popular science texts, and prose rather than poetry (Murawska, 2011).

There is no set reading list for children in early childhood education programmes. Teachers are free to select children’s literature, but despite the freedom of choice, many teachers resort to traditional publications, including worldwide literary masterpieces, such as fairy tales by Andersen and Perrault, Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* and Polish classical prose and poetry by Brzechwa, Tuwim, Chotomska and Makuszyński. Teachers use a variety of methods to encourage pupils to read: they read aloud excerpts of books in the classroom,
organize contacts with the school or public library, encourage children to prepare a book presentation and organize reading and writing competitions.

**Major challenges for current and future early literacy provision**

In the PISA study of reading and interpretation skills (2012), Polish 15-year-olds were among the best in the EU, along with students from Finland and Ireland. During the last three years, the average reading result of Polish students has significantly improved, which is interpreted as a positive effect of curriculum modifications over the last decade. However, not all problems have been resolved. Despite the measures taken, there is certainly much to be done in terms of developing effective solutions to support the education of children with different linguistic and cultural experiences. Poland is a fairly uniform country in terms of culture and language, but taking into account the experiences of other democratic countries, we may expect this situation to change.

In reference to children with SEN, the Polish education system provides the opportunity to organize specialized teaching methods in different forms: it provides the right for parents to choose the form of education, an individualized learning process adapted to the psychophysical abilities of pupils, revalidation classes and psychological support. However, in the case of children with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia and language impairment, that is children who are most exposed to failures in early literacy, there are no adequate system solutions, and the existing regulations are too universal. In the case of language disorders, there is little knowledge about the issue and practically no solutions at all.

A further challenge for the current system is the obligatory learning of a foreign language at the primary school level. There are many educated English philologists in Poland, but not all of them have the talent and qualifications to work with young children. Currently, not enough kindergarten teachers are qualified to teach a foreign language.

During preparation of this chapter, Poland’s educational policy was undergoing changes. The country is facing different challenges, and the coming years will show how they will be handled.

**Note**

1 This exam will be abolished in the future, as announced recently by the Minister of National Education.

**References**


