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**English in the kindergarten  
and in the early primary school education  
– teacher's competences, aims,  
the teaching content and assessment**

**Introduction**

Foreign languages should be introduced to the child's environment at the earliest possible age. The earlier the child is in touch with the given language, the easier and faster it learns it. Therefore, teaching foreign languages is the most effective and the least laborious before the age of 12, but the earlier it starts, the faster and better the child learns the language<sup>1</sup>.

Natalia and Krzysztof Minge in their book titled *Jak kreatywnie wspierać rozwój dziecka?* (*How to support child's development in a creative way?*) attract attention to the fact that it is worth teaching languages to children early because it is the time when they acquire the language in a natural way – without learning words by heart or learning grammar. Owing to it, they have an opportunity to learn a foreign language really well. The more languages the child learns, the easier it is for the child to learn anything. The brain accustomed to storing a great amount of information will learn fast and it will last until the old age<sup>2</sup>.

The knowledge of English is a basic means of communication today. It is an ability without which it is difficult to find employment. English is a universal language without which it is impossible to manage in the world of computers, the Internet and, generally speaking, the world of information. Therefore, exactly 3 years ago, the compulsory English classes were added to the core curriculum for the pre-school and early primary school education, that is children aged 3-6 and 7-9.

<sup>1</sup> Minge N., Minge K., *Jak kreatywnie wspierać rozwój dziecka?*, wyd. Samo Sedno, Warszawa 2011, s. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, s. 150.

According to Hanna Komorowska, the early period of learning, that is the first stage of pre-school and early primary school education – is the so called stage of sensitization, (sometimes even occurring in form of *sensitisation*). The essence of this stage of sensitisation to a foreign language mainly consists in developing language awareness<sup>3</sup>.

The aims of the language work at this stage are:

- encouraging a child to learn a language and sustaining learner's motivation,
- familiarization with the sounds uttered in a foreign language,
- making the child aware of the coexistence of different languages and cultures,
- preparing a child for the stage of systematic foreign language learning<sup>4</sup>.

Komorowska claims that in order to achieve the language aims, there is only one basic strategy at this stage of education which should be emphasized in the syllabus and this language skill is listening. While listening, it is worth giving the child an opportunity to listen to different people speaking and various voices in different situations. The essential task is to get the child accustomed to a situation when the child listens although he or she does not understand or does not fully understand the text. Therefore, too difficult activities and critical remarks should be avoided. Otherwise, frustration will discourage the child from listening and from learning the language. Only at the later stage comes speaking and even further away – preparation to learn how to read and write<sup>5</sup>.

### **Educational aims concerning teaching English in the kindergarten and in the early primary school education**

On the 30th of May 2014, the Minister of National Education signed the Regulation amending the regulation on the core curriculum for the pre-school education and general education for primary schools concerning early primary school education (I stage of education, grades I-III of the primary school) [Journal of Laws, item 803]. As it was mentioned, compulsory foreign language lessons are obligatory in the kindergarten for all 5-year-old children from the 1st of September 2015, whereas from 2017 – for all the children attending the kindergarten.

In accordance with the core curriculum for kindergarten education, there are twelve aims of pre-school education. The text concerning a foreign language is included in the eleventh point and it reads: 'preparing children to use a modern foreign language by developing their language and cultural awareness and creating positive motivation to learn foreign languages at further educational stages and in case of

<sup>3</sup> Komorowska H., *Programy nauczania w kształceniu ogólnym i w kształceniu językowym*, wyd. Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa 2005, s. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

moderately or severely mentally handicapped children – making the children aware of the coexistence of different languages and cultures’.

This aim, similarly to others, should be applied to ‘all educational areas in the kindergarten’, therefore it is worth paying attention to the aims which are to be accomplished during language classes. They will be mentioned below.

The aims of the pre-school education are:

- supporting children in developing skills and shaping intellectual activities necessary in everyday activities and for further education;
- developing children’s social skills which are essential to provide proper relations with children and adults (paying attention to the speaker, following rules in games and play, introducing oneself);
- creating conditions facilitating playing together in harmony and learning various physical and intellectual abilities by children;
- encouraging children to participate in fun activities and sports games;
- building up children’s knowledge of the social, natural and technical world and developing presentation skills to demonstrate own thoughts in a way which is clear to others (knowledge of plants and animals living in different natural environments, awareness of the changes taking place in the plants and animals living in subsequent seasons of the year);
- introducing children to the world of aesthetic values and developing speaking skills through music, dance, singing, short theatrical forms, and plastic arts (acting out roles, using speech, mimics, gestures and movements and props, singing songs, expressing themselves in various art techniques);
- creating in children the sense of belonging to the society (to a family, a peer group or some national community) and patriotic attitudes;
- providing children with better educational opportunities through supporting their curiosity, activeness, and self-reliance and also by shaping such knowledge and skills which are important for school education.

In order to achieve these aims, child’s development should be supported; children should be brought up and shaped in the following areas:

- supporting intellectual development together with mathematical education (counting, addition and subtraction, distinguishing between the right and the left side, identifying the directions and the location, knowledge of the sequence of seasons of the year, days and nights);
- supporting the development of speech (the ability to talk to the interlocutor, paying attention to accuracy of expression, the skill of attentive listening, asking questions and talking about one’s needs and decisions);
- shaping the readiness to learn to read or write (identifying directions on the sheet of paper, looking at pictures paying attention to detail, recognizing the

meaning of the simplified drawings, signs and symbols, manual dexterity and eye – hand coordination, arousing children's interest in reading, writing and books).

The core curriculum for pre-school education emphasizes that kindergartens and other forms of kindergarten education and individual teachers undertake activities aiming at supporting the child's individual development in accordance with child's needs and capabilities, and in the case of the disabled children, including the ones who are mildly or severely mentally retarded – the development should be also adequate to their physical and mental as well as communication capabilities and the pace of their psycho-physical development.

Preparing children to use a modern foreign language should be a part of various activities carried out within the pre-school curriculum and should be mainly based on play activities.

At the stage of primary school, the most important thing is also, as in case of pre-school education, further sensitivisation of children to English and familiarization with it as well as developing motivation to learn English through play activities and the descriptive form of assessment.

According to the core curriculum, general educational aims are to include:

- supporting children in their intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical and aesthetic development.
- aspiration for developing the system of knowledge and abilities necessary to learn about the world and understand it.
- care of the child to make it aware of its social belonging (to a family, a peer group and a national community) and understand the need to care about the nature.

The tasks of the school included in the core curriculum for the early primary school education consist in:

- implementation of the curriculum focused on the child, its individual pace of development and learning capacities;
- respecting the idea of three entities participating in the process of bringing up and education: learner – school – family home;
- developing child's predispositions and cognitive abilities;
- shaping in a child a positive attitude to learning and developing curiosity in learning about the world around and seeking the truth;
- respecting the dignity of a child, providing the child with friendly, safe and healthy conditions to learn and play, to work individually and in a group, to develop self-reliance and responsibility for oneself and the closest surroundings, providing the child with conditions to develop artistic, musical, theatrical and movement expression, research activity as well as the creative activity;

- equipping children with reading and writing skills, knowledge and mathematical abilities necessary for them in real life, in school situations and to solve problems;
- providing a child with the possibility to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to understand the world which include offering the child access to various sources of information and possibilities of using them;
- supporting the development of personal characteristic features necessary for active and ethical participation in the social life.

According to the annex to the Recommendation of the European Parliament of 18 December 2006, the following key learners' competences should be also developed:

- communicating with other children, adults and representatives of other nationalities (f. ex. through communication in the classroom, correspondence);
- critical and logical thinking (by solving puzzles, tasks consisting in guessing, matching or predicting, etc.);
- cooperating in a group (f. ex. project work, performing tasks which involve conducting class surveys, participating in class games and plays);
- improving their effective learning techniques;
- acting and active participation in learning (f. ex. in roleplays, class and language games, while starting a conversation);
- searching for (f. ex. materials and the opportunity to use the language outside the classroom).

Despite the fact that the first grade of the primary school is the initial stage of the 'serious' learning of English, it is a well-known fact that many of child's abilities are acquired in the kindergarten and then they should be only developed. The proposed changes in the core curriculum include detailed abilities which children should achieve as preparation for using the foreign language. On the basis of these regulations, it was assumed that the child finishing the kindergarten and beginning education in the primary school can:

- participate in various types of games which take place in the kindergarten and are provided in English. These can be the musical games during which children sing, tap the rhythm and react to the sounds of music. These can be movement games during which children act out the activities given by the teacher, perform gestures illustrating the lyrics of the song or a poem. Games with the use of English may also concern artistic activities when for example children make a collage together, illustrate the learned words or a story. Construction games described in the core curriculum may consist in constructing objects from building blocks (buildings, animals, etc.), which names children learn in a foreign language. Theatrical games include acting out scenes, stories and preparing simple performances in English;

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- understand very simple instructions given by the teacher or coming from the recordings or from other learners and react verbally or non-verbally to them. It is important for the children participating in the games to have a chance to show that they understand the messages directed to them. At the beginning, it is enough for the children to perform the instructions, but with the time, they should start answering using single words or expressions to confirm that they understand and know how to respond in a given situation.
  - repeat rhymes, simple poems and sing songs in a group. Repeating and singing in a group is an important stage in getting accustomed to a foreign language. It gives the sense of safety and creates the opportunity to practise own skills and pronunciation before children are ready to perform individually in front of the group or parents;
  - understand the general sense of short stories told or read by the teacher who uses flashcards, props or movement, mimics or gestures while telling or re-ading. Children are capable of understanding the text from the context and with a skilful use of gestures by the teacher or with the use of visual aids they can understand the general context of the story even if it exceeds the range of the learned vocabulary or structures. The teacher should choose the stories from the suggested repertoire for children, especially traditional fairy tales but also use the works from the contemporary British or American literature for children<sup>6</sup>.

Language skills developed in a group of kindergarten children are listening and comprehension as well as speaking in a foreign language.

Developing the skill of listening and comprehension consists in getting the children accustomed to the instructions given in a foreign language, listening to fairy tales, songs and rhymes as well as the use of a foreign language in plays and language games.

Developing speaking in a foreign language means encouraging children to repeat phrases and expressions while singing songs, reciting poems and rhymes and also the use of a foreign language in games and plays and during everyday activities performed in the kindergarten. The listening skill:

- sensitivisation to the sounds in a foreign language,
- language familiarization,
- developing the ability of using a movement to react to some verbal input in a foreign language,
- developing understanding the meaning from the context.

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<sup>6</sup> Szpotowicz M., Szulc-Kurpaska M., *Język angielski w wychowaniu przedszkolnym. Program nauczania 3, 4, i 5-latków*, wyd. Oxford University Press, London 2014, s. 7.

The speaking skill:

- repetition of expressions and sentences in a foreign language,
- participation in the permanent parts of the lesson (f. ex. greetings, saying goodbye),
- singing songs and reciting poems in a foreign language,
- answering teacher’s questions.

Yet, another specific educational aim in teaching a foreign language is developing self-reliance in learning. Children aged 3-4 are not aware of the process of learning and due to it they cannot develop self-reliance in this process. They learn about the world through play and they do not realize the fact that they learn in this way. With 5-year-old children, the teacher may gradually aid the development of the self-learning skill, however modifying methods and techniques in accordance with the age and developmental differences among children. Owing to the activities aiming at developing self-reliance in learning, the child feels that learning a language is important and that his or her opinion, point of view and experiences are of great significance for the teacher who asks questions and listens to the answers.

The atmosphere of cooperation and the possibility to talk freely about the language experiences make children more engaged in learning and as a result, in the future they can become more conscious and responsible learners<sup>7</sup>.

The specific objectives are perceived as broadening of the overall aim and general aims resulting from the core curriculum. In order to achieve the overall aim at the stage of primary school education, main emphasis should be placed on developing listening and speaking skills, at the same time treating reading and writing as additional skills, introduced subsequently.

The listening skill:

- gradual familiarization with sounds and intonation in English (teacher, recording);
- listening to different types of texts in English (teacher’s instructions, fairy tales, roleplays, songs, etc.) suitable for this age group in different forms (recording, teacher, other learners in the classroom);
- developing the skill of understanding teacher’s instructions and responding to them properly (with words or the body);
- developing the listening skill in order to understand the general situation (e.g. classroom communication or roleplays) and to respond properly;
- developing the listening skill in order to understand the context (fairy tales, stories, roleplays);

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, s. 8.

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The speaking skill:

- gradual practising of correct pronunciation and intonation in English;
- acquiring the language habits by:
  - choral and individual repetition,
  - repetition of the typical interactions taking place in the classroom (e.g. asking about the date or how the children feel),
  - using the same expressions or language phrases (*formulaic chunks*) which require verbal interaction to react to questions and other people's statements;
- encouraging children to express themselves freely and to experiment with the language (without the risk of making a mistake) on the subject chosen by the learner or other topics suitable for this age group.

The reading skill:

- developing the skill of recognizing the graphic forms of the words and associating them with the phonetic forms;
- gradual exposure to the graphic forms of the words, then the sentences;
- developing the skill of reading aloud;
- gradual development of a passion for reading for pleasure in children (e.g. individual reading of the well-known fairy tales).

The writing skill:

- gradual introduction of writing single words (from copying the pattern to signing pictures);
- gradual development of the skill of writing single sentences and short texts by partial rewriting or filling in the model text.

### **Preparing the teachers of English to work with children in the kindergarten and in the early primary school education**

There is a common belief that no specially qualified teaching staff are required to teach foreign languages in the primary school or the kindergarten because children learn the language extremely easy and the teaching process mainly consists in providing the simplest grammar structures, very limited vocabulary, fun activities as well as singing songs and the teacher may be replaced by the video tape. It is the most erroneous point of view because the empirical studies confirm that the effectiveness of the early primary school education depends to a great extent on the language and methodological competence of the teacher and the atmosphere during the lesson. It results from the fact that children at this age group do not have the ability to learn on their

own, they cannot use the written texts yet, therefore they need to have an emotional bond with the person who is an authority for them and who is to organize the process of knowledge and skills acquisition in a foreign language in the nice atmosphere and in a competent way<sup>8</sup>.

Agnieszka Kostrzewska in her guidebook titled *Teaching a foreign language in the kindergarten after the 1st of September 2015* writes that the officially binding in this respect is at present (state of the beginning of June 2015) the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2014 amending the regulation on specific qualifications required of teachers as well as on determining schools and cases in which teachers who have not completed higher education or have not graduated from teacher training institution can be employed.

At present, the foreign language teacher does not need to hold a higher education diploma in the field of English philology, the teacher training college of foreign languages or the childhood education with the English language: 'On the basis of Art. 9 item 2 of the Act of the 26th of January 1982 – Teacher's Charter (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 191) it is ordered as follows: § 1. In the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 12 March 2009 on specific qualifications required of teachers as well as on determining schools and cases in which teachers who have not completed higher education or have not graduated from teacher training institution can be employed (Journal of Laws of 2013 item 1207) after § 28 § 28a shall be added with the wording § 28a<sup>9</sup>.

Until 31 August 2020, qualifications for teaching foreign languages in the kindergarten are also granted to a person who has qualifications to perform the job of a teacher in the kindergarten determined in § 4 points 1 or 2 and who is a holder of a certificate of a given foreign language at least at elementary level, which is mentioned in the annex to the regulation<sup>10</sup>.

In accordance with the wording: 'recommended conditions and the way of implementation', fulfilling the new area of the core curriculum of the following wording 'preparing children to use a modern foreign language' may be the task of a teacher or teachers who work with a given group if they possess the skills necessary to teach a foreign language in the kindergarten or the teacher whose job will be to introduce only elements of a foreign language.

And here, reference should be made to Hanna Komorowska who points out that in case of integrated teaching, there are three distinctive curriculum variants related to introducing a foreign language both at the stage of kindergarten and at the first stage of primary school education.

<sup>8</sup> Iluk J., *Jak uczyć małe dzieci języków obcych?*, wyd. Gnome, Katowice 2002, s. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Kostrzewska A., *Teczka materiałów do nauczania języka angielskiego w przedszkolu zgodna z nową podstawą programową*, wyd. Forum, Poznań 2015, s. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, s. 8.

- Variant I means full integration. Here, a foreign language becomes an element of overall educational concept, it is taught by the same teacher or a teacher who is the partner of a form teacher and both of them work as a team to accomplish the joint concept which is described by the term *embedding*. The example of such variant may be the integration by the teacher or the integration through the teaching content.
- Variant II is the medium option. A foreign language is introduced here as a separate subject taught by the specialist teacher during separate classes. However, the syllabus is worked out with the teacher of grades I – III, the accomplishment of the individual contents is fully correlated and, while doing it, teachers use a certain amount of the same materials and they use the same teaching methods.
- Variant III is the parallel option. Here, a foreign language is introduced as a totally separate subject by the teacher coming to the kindergarten or the primary school, often not employed by the institution on the basis of employment contract and at the same time – fairly connected with the institution. Teaching is carried out in accordance with the language syllabus which is often totally suitable for the given age group and is based on proper materials from the methodological point of view; however there is no real cooperation between the language teacher and the form teacher, there is also no real integration<sup>11</sup>.

Agata Klim-Klimaszewska stresses the fact that both the kindergarten headmaster and the teachers are obliged to provide special care while working with children and to provide the level of language the children are exposed to. The amendment to the curriculum concerning the rules for introducing a foreign language constitutes the starting point for developing the sense among the teaching staff that yet there is a need to integrate teaching English with what the children are taught in the kindergarten (and at school) – and mainly developing a feeling that what the children learn in the kindergarten or at school is connected with everyday life. It depends on the headmaster how much foreign language children will learn and to what extent it will be incorporated into children's everyday activities. It is worth introducing a wider range of foreign language teaching – everyday communication in Polish and in a foreign language together with the group work during which only a foreign language is taught. It should be remembered that the tendency to introduce the language elements starting from the stage of kindergarten will definitely be more and more common soon and in a few years' time, it will become the usual practice<sup>12</sup>.

The organization of language classes in the kindergarten should be coherent with what the children experience in their closest surroundings. The teacher has to remember that simultaneous introduction of the English language into child's everyday life needs to be done gradually in the surroundings which are safe for the child, without

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<sup>11</sup> Komorowska H., op. cit., s. 120-121.

<sup>12</sup> Kostrzevska A., op. cit., s. 9.

punishments, with due respect to the child's development path and also with respect to the fact each individual child develops at its own pace and bearing in mind that particular abilities do not develop at the same time in case of each child<sup>13</sup>. The regulations of the present core curriculum oblige teachers to treat each child as an individual person, with due respect to his or her identity, possibilities and needs.

A good language teacher is a creative teacher who also develops creativity in his or her students. He or she should be characterized by fluency, flexibility and originality in terms of thinking during the process of teaching a foreign language. The fluency of thought with regard to the language teacher means that this person can spontaneously react in some situations which occur during the classes and which require immediate modification of the action plan and also following the child's way of thinking and adopting the next forms of work to the child. The flexibility of thought, which is associated with this feature, assumes that the teacher can shape the process of foreign languages teaching in accordance with the specific characteristics of the group he or she is to work with. Whereas the originality of thought allows the teacher to provide the interesting form of classes and can be manifested by the choice of methods and language content to be taught, owing to which the gifted language learner can develop the creative attitude by discovering, searching and self-improvement<sup>14</sup>.

Jan Iluk in his book titled *Jak uczyć małe dzieci języków obcych?* (*How to teach foreign languages to little children?*) gives a list of teacher's competences and qualifications directly connected with foreign language teaching. These are:

- good knowledge of child's predispositions to learn foreign languages and their learning styles;
- variant forms, confident, lively and phonetically correct linguistic competence, providing comprehensive input, (impeccable mastering of the oral code entails good phonetic preparation);
- the ability to tell stories, fairy tales, etc. with the use of proper vocal modulation, mimics, gestures and simple vocabulary;
- knowledge of the optimal methods and forms of teaching foreign languages to children in the kindergarten and in the primary school, especially the ability to apply the principles of integrated and activity – based teaching in practice ;
- artistic skills (theatrical, musical, artistic);
- knowledge of foreign cultures and habits;
- knowledge of inherent features of genres used in the original version (poems, fairy tales, guessing games, songs, etc. ) and the possibilities of applying them as forms of didactic teaching;

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, s. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Sobańska-Jędrych J., Karpeta-Peć B., Torenc M., *Rozwijanie zdolności językowych na lekcji języka obcego*, wyd. Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, Warszawa 2013, s. 37.

- possessing the knowledge of publications concerning teaching early grades in the primary school;
- the ability to evaluate glottodidactic materials and to choose them as well as to prepare own teaching aids;
- the ability to plan, determine language, competence and educational aims as well as the correlation with contents of other subjects<sup>15</sup>.

In order to be effective in his or her work, the language teacher should try to be an authority, that is he or she should pay attention to self-development of such features as interpersonal skills, that is being communicative, empathy, approachability, authenticity. The person should be punctual, conscientious, work diligently and seem committed. The person should be characterized by being just, objective and truthful. Finally, the person should possess such a positive feature (i.e. personality, passion, outstanding general knowledge or even enthusiastic attitude towards performed work) which distinguishes him or her from others and impresses his or her children<sup>16</sup>.

It is also worth mentioning here the aspect of the language teacher's cooperation with the parents of the children he or she teaches, especially in the kindergarten. Such a teacher can quickly keep the parents informed about the child's progress or point out the ways how to help the child learn a foreign language at home.

### **Content of English in kindergartens and in the early primary school education**

*Język angielski w wychowaniu przedszkolnym. Program nauczania 3,4 i 5-latków (The English language in the kindergarten. The syllabus for 3-, 4- and 5-year- old children)* written by Magdalena Szpotowicz and Małgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska suggests the content which includes the list of topics, grammar structures, functions and situations which can be introduced in the group of 3-5-year-old children.

Teaching a foreign language in the kindergarten is characterized as being quite flexible as far as the range of the introduced vocabulary and grammar structures is concerned. It results from the need to teach a foreign language in an interesting context and the one which is close to children (toys in the kindergarten, objects brought to the kindergarten by the children, things found during the walk in the forest or in the park) and from the variety of the used materials, including songs, poems or fairy tales, often in the original version, that is not adapted to the learners' needs.

It means that the progress in learning a language can be difficult to observe. Vocabulary and expressions arising from children's needs, their interests or coming from

<sup>15</sup> Iluk J., op. cit., s. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Werbińska D., *Skuteczny nauczyciel języka obcego*, wyd. Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa 2005, s. 96-97.

the learned songs or poems are not always simple and commonly introduced at the beginning of the process of learning.

While teaching this age group, it is essential to revise the material very often in order to consolidate the songs or poems, but also because children willingly come back to their favourite games or fairy tales. Giving the children a chance to choose a song, a poem or a fairy tale will allow them to influence the classes and as a result it will encourage them to actively participate in the games. Revisions will also help learners who are often ill to make up for the missed classes and will also make it possible for the youngest children in a group, i.e. the ones born at the end of the calendar year to keep up with the developmental differences. About 2/3 of each class should be devoted to material revision (in various attractive forms).

The teacher should take advantage of any situations to interact with children in a foreign language so as to make them accustomed to use English not only during the language classes but also in everyday situations in the kindergarten<sup>17</sup>.

Contents taught in the primary school are arranged spirally. It means that the thematic ranges are repeated every single year at the simultaneous widening of the lexical and grammar material. Due to the broader range of children's interests in further grades, new topics are gradually introduced, e.g. *me and my hometown*, *me and my country*, *me and other countries*. When children get older, the teaching forms and techniques also change so as to be adequate to the developmental needs of the children. New forms and techniques allow children to revise the material in the new context.

The material proposed by Magdalena Szpotowicz and Małgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska in their syllabus for teaching English to children in grades I – III of the primary school refers to the whole stage and was not divided into different grades in which it is taught. It results from the fact that the teachers in the early primary school education may choose any syllabus for grades I-III and they have a chance to adjust the pace of work to the needs of particular groups of children. Differences in the chosen content in the subsequent grades may also result from the teaching content in a given textbook<sup>18</sup>.

### **Evaluating skills in foreign language learning – control and assessment of children's achievements in the kindergarten and in the early primary school education**

The control and assessment are extremely important elements of the teaching process. The aim of control and assessment is to provide learners and their parents with

<sup>17</sup> Szpotowicz M., Szulc-Kurpaska M., op. cit., s. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Szpotowicz M., Szulc-Kurpaska M., *Język angielski w nauczaniu zintegrowanym. Program nauczania języka angielskiego dla klas I-III szkoły podstawowej*, wyd. Oxford University Press, 2009, s. 10-11.

information concerning the acquired skills and knowledge. For the teacher, they are a source of knowledge concerning effectiveness, efficiency and the organization of the process of teaching<sup>19</sup>.

Assessing young learners' progress is an extremely responsible and difficult task. The assessment of children's work and their achievements always burdens the teacher and raises some doubt. Attention should be drawn to the fact that teacher's assessment is aimed at correcting mistakes, indicates what needs to be further developed and therefore is a condition which ensures effective learning.

Agnieszka Kostrzewska in *The portfolio of materials for teaching English in the kindergarten in accordance with the new core curriculum* emphasizes that children are sensitive to criticism, therefore even the slightest progress should be praised, supporting in this way the readiness to speak. Not only should the child's progress be assessed but also his or her intentions and the degree of engagement during the classes. Teacher's assessment at the stage of kindergarten is more useful to the teacher himself or herself than to the or their parents.

Children cannot write or read; therefore special techniques should be applied in their case. The most important one of them is the day-to-day observation of children, writing down the assessment and the remarks concerning each child in the teacher's observation notebook after each class.

The examples of exercises to check children's understanding of a foreign language are:

- arranging illustrations in the correct order in accordance with the story heard,
- drawing the missing details,
- answering questions asked by the teacher,
- indicating the differences between pictures,
- indicating which element from a range is the odd one out (e.g. a range of elements presenting toys and one - presenting the floor),
- joining subsequent elements, e.g. toys with the right colour in accordance with the instruction,
- placing people (animals, pieces of furniture, fruit and vegetables, etc.) in the right places, in accordance with the heard text,
- games which are based on the idea that the teacher wants to mislead the children – he or she shows a certain activity (for example touching the nose instead of eyes), using the words to express something different: children's task is to perform the task expressed in words not by gestures in the correct way<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Pamuła M., *Metodyka nauczania języków obcych w kształceniu zintegrowanym*, wyd. Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa 2004, s. 99.

<sup>20</sup> Kostrzewska A., op. cit., s. 2-3.

The assessment of pre-school children's progress is only of descriptive character. At this stage, assessment is only informative. At any one time during the conversation between the teacher and parents, parents should learn from the teacher that children are developing at their own individual pace. The fact that they perform many tasks to a minimum degree may mean that it is the natural stage in their development before they familiarize themselves better with a foreign language.

The assessment of children's language progress in the early primary school education is prepared in a descriptive form which eliminates unnecessary comparisons among learners, reduces the tendency to compete and showing their superiority over others; it also reduces shyness preventing the development of complexes. Hanna Komorowska claims that the descriptive assessment should clearly list which abilities the pupil has already developed and which ones still constitute some problems. So, it should be aimed at achievements and competences. Pointing out at deficiencies, the assessment should clearly determine what type of deficiencies they are and in particular how to get rid of them. The favourable forms of descriptive grade are the copied forms which include the list of numerous expressions or sentences describing child's behaviour where the teacher only underlines the ones which relate to a given learner<sup>21</sup>. It is recommended to continuously assess the children in form of short notes concerning child's workload and by collecting exemplary works made by children. Recognizing children's individual achievements may be done with the use of the so called pupil achievement sheets. Certainly, there is also a formal mark at school (tests are marked with points or percentage), however it is of marginal significance and only used for diagnosis, so is to make the teacher aware what should be further developed with the whole class and what seems to cause problems to individual pupils, and not to diversify the children.

In order to make the use of pupil achievement sheets easier, it is worth grouping the assessment exercises in accordance with the skills included in the sheet.

Below there are the exemplary forms of oral and written assessment, checking the particular language skills according to Magdalena Szpotowicz<sup>22</sup>.

Checking and assessing the listening and comprehension skill:

- *Listen and choose the picture in the story* – learners listen to the recording of the picture story and indicate the picture which illustrates the recording at a given period of time. In this exercise, children practise following the plot. They can also look at the pictures illustrating various everyday situations and listen to what is said by the participants and next they can choose the situation described, e.g. choose one out of the three pictures.

<sup>21</sup> Komorowska H., *Metodyka nauczania języków obcych*, wyd. Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa 2005, s. 197.

<sup>22</sup> Szpotowicz M., *Diagnoza i ocena postępów uczniów na lekcjach języka obcego w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, [w:] Sikora-Banasik D. (red.), *Wczesnoszkolne nauczanie języków obcych. Zarys teorii i praktyki*, wyd. Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli, Warszawa 2009, s. 153-155.

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- *Listen and say what happened* – learners listen to a fairy tale, a story or a picture story in a foreign language and next they answer teacher's questions in Polish. The teacher asks about the general information and detailed information concerning the text.
  - *Listen and colour/ draw* – it is the dictation in which learners colour the picture, draw a picture or draw up some elements of the picture in accordance with the instructions given by the teacher.
  - *Listen and write the numbers* – children listen and write down the dictated numbers.
  - *Listen and do* – it is a TPR (Total Physical Response method) type exercise in which learners perform teacher's instructions. They can be very simple, for example *Stand up. Open your book!* or the more complex ones: *Put your left hand on the right ear!*
  - *Listen and circle the picture* – learners listen and circle the picture which presents the word which was said (one out of four).

Checking and assessing the speaking skill:

- *Tell me what it is* – learners respond to the visual incentive, for example pictures or a drawing on a piece of paper, a page in a book.
- *'Dialogues in pairs' technique* – the teacher sets the speaking task to children which is performed in pairs and the teacher himself or herself listens to children speaking in pairs. This way the ability to ask and answer questions, understanding questions and children's readiness to participate in the interaction in a foreign language are checked.
- *The interview technique* – learners receive pieces of paper with the tables which they are to fill in with the information received during the conversation with other pupils.
- *The technique of acting out dialogues or scenes from a story* – the teacher gives children time to prepare or learn the dialogue in pairs or read it aloud in front of the class or act it out in form of a short roleplay. It gives the possibility to check pronunciation and the ability to copy the sentences fluently.
- *'Memory games' technique* – learners one by one try to give the greatest number of things or objects from memory: *I like tea and juice and cola and milk and lemonade and ...* This way the amount of the memorized vocabulary can be checked.

Checking and assessing the reading skill:

- *Match the picture with the word* – learners draw lines to connect the picture with the matching words or use flash cards or word cards and arrange them next to each other.
- *Arrange the words in groups* – learners circle, colour or underline the words belonging to one category or theme group, e.g. animals, shapes, professions.

- *Read, colour/ draw the missing part* – learners read a short, few-sentence text and colour the picture, draw the missing part of the picture in accordance with the given description.

Checking and assessing the writing skill:

- *Solving crosswords technique* – learners receive an easy crossword next to which there are a lot of pictures of objects which names are to be written in the blank spaces. This way, spelling and the ability to write down the words from memory are checked.
- *Sign the picture* – learners sign the picture either by choosing the word from the table or by remembering the spelling.
- *Arranging the scattered elements in words or sentences technique* – learners receive sentences on worksheets where the word order or the letters in the words are mixed. The task for the learners is to rewrite the sentences in such a sequence as to be logical and correct in terms of grammar and spelling.
- *Filling in the gaps in single sentences or in a short text* – learners are given a text or sentences with single words removed to read. Their task is to fill in the missing words either by remembering them or by choosing them from the list of words given near the text.

Learner's self-assessment is a very important part of the assessment process and it should be promoted from the first grade. Thus learners feel more responsible for their learning and they willingly provide the teacher with valuable feedback concerning the level of their individual skills. Encouraging children to self-assess may be done in a formal way or it can take the form of a joint conversation with the teacher about what the children learned during the given lesson, while covering the whole unit or after a term or at the end of the school year. The next step to self-assess is the reflection on the fact if the children tried hard, whether they consider they put a lot of effort in order to perform the task. Many examples of self-assessment can be found in the textbooks for children. The exercises or periodic self-assessment sheets to be completed by children can be usually recommended<sup>23</sup>.

## Conclusions

The introduced compulsory educational activities in English in the kindergartens and in the early primary school education undoubtedly prove the dynamics of changes in the contemporary reality and the need to build language competences starting from the possibly earliest age. As it was shown in the above article, they also condition the need to introduce changes concerning teachers' approach to teaching a foreign language to the group of such young recipients as well as the way of assessing learners in terms of language competences. Issuing the core curriculum, The Ministry of National Education determined only the aims and teaching contents for teaching

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, s. 157-158.

English to children. However, the way how the aims and the teaching contents will be accomplished and evaluated belongs to the teachers who are to perform these tasks. Let us hope that they will spot the specific differences between educating children and the previously carried education of the youth and adults.

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### English in the kindergarten and in the early primary school education – teacher's competences, aims, the teaching content and assessment

**Abstract:** In the article the subject matter of a number of determinants connected to the mandatory learning of the English language since the preschool stage that is instituted in Poland has been taken up. The core curriculum of preschool education in Poland sets a frame and a basic aspect related to teaching English to children aged 3 to 6 years old. The article brings up such subjects as the goals and substance of education in the field of the English language in kindergartens as well as methods of evaluating students' abilities and grading them. The author also brings up the question of qualifications of English teachers in preschools while paying close attention to conditions of teaching children in this age group and to the specific preparation which is expected from such tutors.

**Keywords:** English, teaching, kindergarten