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# Teaching the learners with a migrant background – teachers' perspectives

## Introduction

The number of immigrants in Europe has continued to rise in recent years. When considering the statistics regarding only the persons who apply for asylum in Europe each year, one could conclude that the figure rose five times in 2016 when compared to the number in 2009.<sup>1</sup> At the same time European countries have been implementing various policies regarding migration and integration—some are more open, while other are virtually air-tight. Countries such as Canada, Sweden, and Germany maintain pro-immigration policies. Other countries like Switzerland, Austria, and Estonia are halfway favourably disposed towards immigrants and support differently integration processes. Comparisons of integration conditions in various countries (European states as well as Switzerland, Norway, the US, and Canada) are possible thanks to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). It describes the level of the guarantee of equal rights “which are important from the point of view of immigrant integration in such areas as: mobility in the labour market, ability to reunite families, access to education, political participation, ability to achieve long-term stay, access to citizenship, and in matters associated with

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/454836/number-of-asylum-applications-in-the-eu/>

anti-discrimination laws.”<sup>2</sup> In the most recent report of 2015,<sup>3</sup> Poland was listed 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 38 countries, achieving a result of 41 points. That is a rather low score, which indicates that Poland belongs to the group of countries with a low level of migrant acceptance, though not yet in the group of countries which do not accept newcomers at all. Poland achieved also the lowest score in the area of education (only 20 points). The best in that category was Sweden with 77 points. That means that Poland belongs to a group of countries unfavourable to migrant integration in education area. The report read that the group included countries which did not perceive education as a major element of integration, where teachers believed that learners with a migrant background (hereinafter: learners with MB) constitute a major problem, where schools are not able to establish contact with parents of learners with MB, where language support is minor or non-existent, where no one teaches the language of their country of origin, where teachers are not coping with diversity at schools well and do not take any preparatory training for accepting foreign learners. As a result, migrant learners achieve poor education results and are in a considerable danger of failing at school.

Surely the situation of learners with MB in Poland in 2019 is different from that in 2014; the data presented in the MIPEX report referred to the latter. That was when changes were introduced to the education of foreigners,<sup>4</sup> and a growing number of learners began to use additional options for learning Polish. The tendency was presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of learners being Polish citizens who do not know Polish/know Polish poorly.

School year	Number of students (Polish citizens) with very weak Polish language or without knowledge	
	Participant of extra Polish Language Classes	Participant of extra compensatory classes
2012/2013	280	196
2013/2014	380	227
2014/2015	438	305
2015/2016	807	479

2 [http://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/polska\\_abridged\\_migrant\\_integration\\_policy\\_index\\_mipexiii\\_2011\\_pl.pdf](http://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/polska_abridged_migrant_integration_policy_index_mipexiii_2011_pl.pdf)

3 <http://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/pdf/files/custom/a4/2018.01.10-03.30.38-mipex-2015-custom-book-a4.pdf>

4 U. Majcher-Legawiec presented an interesting study regarding the changes introduced in teaching children with migrant background in Polish schools. Cf. Idem “Prawne aspekty pobytu i nauczania języka polskiego ucznia z doświadczeniem migracyjnym w szkole polskiej”, *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia ad Didacticam Litterarum Polonarum et Linguae Polonae Pertinentia* 2016, vol 7, col. 223, pp. 110–125.

2016/2017	1355	709
2017/2018	1786	929
2018/2019	2663	1166

It is noteworthy that in the 2018/2019 school year, the number of learners with MB in Polish schools was 44,410, which means that in comparison to the 2012/2013 school year it rose six-fold. A continuing and steady increase in the number of learners with MB was presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Number of learners who are not Polish citizens attending Polish schools.

School year	Number of students (Polish citizens) with very weak Polish language or without knowledge	
	Total	Participant of Polish Language Classes
2012/2013	7 311	1 402
2013/2014	8 147	1 807
2014/2015	10 064	2 626
2015/2016	15 299	4 106
2016/2017	20 911	6 808
2017/2018	29 942	9 780
2018/2019	44 410	14 353

Currently, the Polish education system ensures free-of-charge education for all foreigners at all state schools. It is conducted in general admittance classes or at preparatory classes (that is a solution legally established in September 2016<sup>5</sup>). Learners with MB can attend Polish lessons 2 hours per week and attend additional compensatory classes, so long as the total number of hours does not exceed 5 per week.

However, one must remember that to work with learners with MB, teachers must possess additional skills and knowledge. Key issues include teaching/learning a second language, the processing of learning a language within a school education, the psychological aspects of migration, and openness to other cultures and a keen interest in the Other, as we are living in a time when anyone can become the Other, as Jerzy Nikitorowicz stressed.<sup>6</sup>

5 The conditions of receiving education by foreigners in Polish schools was defined by the following regulations: – Art. 165 and 166 of the Education Law Act of 14 December 2016 (Journal of Laws of 2017 Item 59) and the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 August 2017 on the education of non-Polish citizens and Polish citizens.

6 J. Nikitorowicz, *Kreowanie tożsamości dziecka*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 12.

A study of school reality indicates that few teachers are able to work with learners with MB. Many feel a lack of support in a situation in which they have no say. Since teachers are the key to successful education and integration of learners with MB, the study presented in this text was intended to diagnose the problems and needs of teachers working with learners with special education needs resulting from migration. Once we defined the needs, we were able to formulate conclusions which could be used by education theoreticians and practitioners for amplifying integration. A well-thought-through policy in the area seems necessary as the number of migrants are forecast to increase in the coming years. It is education policy that can help better integrate newcomers within the accepting society. Such a position is in line with that of EU authorities: "... it is of paramount importance to become proficient in the national/ first/ official language, which is vital for general competences and good outcomes in final examinations at school. Proficiency in the mother tongue has a positive influence on later fortunes and successful life stories of the youth, as indicated by PIAAC studies. Those requirements apply in particular to learners from migrant communities, who have to overcome the language barrier and various instances of economic shortages."<sup>7</sup>

### Teachers involvement in education and integration of learners with migrant background

It is clear that teachers play a major role in the process of the education integration of migrant children, and they have a major influence on their successes in that respect. Many teachers lack the appropriate training for working with learners with MB. The problem also applies to teachers in Poland, though it has been studied more in countries with long-standing traditions of accepting migrants.<sup>8</sup> In Poland, there are few studies regarding teachers working with learners with MB, for until recently there have been few such learners in the system. The majority of the studies apply to the attitudes and behaviour of teachers towards learners with MB.<sup>9</sup> It

7 J. Pakulski, "Różnicowanie językowe – wielojęzyczność – języki narodowe. Refleksje z perspektywy europejskiej", *Annales Universitatis Cracoviensis. Studia ad Didacticam Litterarum Poloniarum et Linguae Polonae Pertinentia* 2017, vol 8, col. 227, p. 24. [Unless indicated otherwise, English versions of quotations were translated from Polish]

8 Cf. K. Tellez, H.C Waxman, *Quality Teachers for English Language Learners, The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education*, 2005. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED508447.pdf>; O. García, A.M.Y. Lin, S. May, *Bilingual and multilingual education*. Springer International Publishing, 2017; J.F. Samson, B.A. Collins, *Preparing All Teachers to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners. Applying Research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness*, 2012. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535608.pdf>.

9 M. Polakowski, D. Szelewa, *Polityka społeczna a problemy migracji*, 2011, p. 18. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/warschau/10685.pdf>; K. Gawlicz, P. Rudnicki, M. Starnawski, *Dyskryminacja*

is noteworthy that they were usually fulfilled at the schools of the Mazowieckie Voivodship.<sup>10</sup> That is only natural as, according to statistical data, the voivodship has the largest population of foreigners. In 2018, according to the Office for Foreigners, there were 325,894 foreigners living in Poland, out of whom 105,263, i.e. nearly a third, live in the Mazowieckie Voivodship.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the study presented in the text was planned differently, considering both the respondents and the area to which it applied. Its purpose was to gather the opinions of teachers in Lesser Poland, and carefully consider their needs and the problems which they face every day. The study was entitled “Wysłuchując się w głosy małopolskich nauczycieli pracujących z uczniami z doświadczeniem migracji – badanie potrzeb” [Listening closely to the opinions of teachers in Lesser Poland working with learners with a migrant background – a study of needs]. The research project was conducted in 2017. In the statistics of the Office for Foreigners, the voivodship was second in the country in terms of the population of foreigners. In early 2018, 31,034 foreigners were living there. Based on the statement by the Krakow Department of Education one can say that the number of foreign learners in Krakow schools has been increasing steadily.<sup>12</sup> One purpose of the study was to support the authorities by providing them with information regarding teachers' needs, which could enable better planning of support activities. The discussed study also matched the city's programme “Open Krakow”,<sup>13</sup> which assumed the task of education support for foreigner children and children returning from abroad. However, for the initiatives to be successful, it is necessary to consider the current situation in Krakow schools, and, mainly, the needs of the teachers who work there.

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w szkole – obecność nieusprawiedliwiona. O budowaniu edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce. Raport z badań. Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskryminacyjnej, Warsaw 2015; B. Stańkowski, *Wychowanie w duchu wielokulturowości. Raport z badań empirycznych wśród nauczycieli na Podhalu*, Wydawnictwo WAM, Krakow 2007; K.M. Błeszyńska, *Dzieci obcokrajowców w polskich placówkach oświatowych – perspektywa szkoły. Raport z badań*, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, Warsaw 2009; M. Pamuła-Behrens, A. Hennel-Brzozowska, “Osobowość nauczycieli a ich praca z dziećmi migrantami w szkole podstawowej”, *Studia Edukacyjne* 2017, issue 46, p. 169–192.

10 M. Badowska, “Różnorodność kulturowa uczniów wyzwaniem dla współczesnej szkoły”, *Kultura-Społeczeństwo-Edukacja* 2015, issue 1 (7), pp. 179–192.

11 UDSC statistics, 2018. <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki/zakres/polska/typ/dokumenty/widok/mapa/rok/2018/?x=0.838&y=0.3149&level=0.25> [accessed on: 4.01.2018].

12 Statement released by the director of the Department of Education in Krakow during the “Open Krakow” conference organised on 23–25 February 2017.

13 On 14 September 2016 Krakow joined other cities which support cultural and language diversity among their inhabitants. The members of the Krakow City Council passed the “Open Krakow” Programme, which was developed as a joint initiative of the Interkulturalni.pl Association and the Municipal Social Initiatives Support Centre. The city formally confirmed the focus in its social policy on building an open society which includes national and ethnic minorities and foreigners, and which utilises the potential of being multicultural and diverse.

## Research design

As we mentioned earlier, the purpose of the study was to diagnose the needs of teachers related to teaching children and teenagers with MB to later define how they could be supported in the process of acquiring and supplementing their professional skills necessary in working with those learners. Further on, it would mean ensuring a better quality of education and better support for the process of integration of learners with MB.

The research overview was divided in two phases. Phase 1 was fulfilled in February 2017 through workshops for teachers and headmasters organised during the “Open Krakow” conference: “Uczeń z doświadczeniem migracyjnym w polskiej szkole” [learners with a migrant background in Polish schools]. Its purpose was to collect and organise the dispersed qualitative data regarding the analysis of the needs of the education community in terms of working with learners with MB. The goal was to diagnose the problems related to the education and integration of persons accepting education in Lesser Poland. Conference participants (teachers, headmasters, parents of learners with MB and migrants) were asked one question: What do schools need to be able to better teach and integrate learners with MB?

The data collected in the study was divided into four categories indicating the needs most commonly reported by study participants, and various perspectives when considering the complex problem area of education, and the integration of migrants and re-immigrants:

1. The system perspective: organisational, institutional (e.g. the lack of core curriculum).
2. The teacher perspective:
  - a) problems related to the lack of appropriate teaching material;
  - b) problems resulting from insufficient teacher competences.
3. The perspective of learners with MB and their families (e.g. problems related to acculturation).<sup>14</sup>

Because the study was intended to indicate the problems and needs of teachers, we decided to conduct Stage 2 to expand on the data collected in Stage 1. In Phase 2 (April 2017), we focussed on two perspectives: the teacher perspective and the headmaster perspective. Our intention was to define how teachers could be helped in the process of acquiring and supplementing the professional competences necessary in their work with learners with MB.

In order to fulfil the planned objectives, we chose a focus study, which is used relatively rarely in education research.<sup>15</sup> The tool, as stressed by Dale T. Griffie,<sup>16</sup> applied in a supplementary manner, can offer valuable details which

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<sup>14</sup> A detailed report was published in 2018: M. Pamuła-Behrens, M. Szymańska, *Uczenie uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji. Analiza potrzeb*, Ridero 2018.

<sup>15</sup> L. Cohen, L. Manion, K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, Routledge 2007, p. 377.

<sup>16</sup> D. T. Griffie, *An Introduction To Second Language Research Methods. Design and Data*, TESL-EJ Publications, Berkeley 2012, p. 160.

cannot be gathered using more general techniques of data collection. A focus study is an in-depth group interview organised in order to discuss a specific topic. The main advantage of in-depth group interviews is that through them one can collect more detailed information on the studied problem and data which presents a group-based and not a personal perspective.<sup>17</sup> A group study can also ensure a more casual atmosphere and mutual stimulation as a result of interactions not only between a researcher and the subjects, but also between the subjects themselves. For the preparatory phase, the key issue is to prepare interview questions which should be open-ended, which encourage expanding on the topic, and which exclude “yes/no” answers. During the interview, the interviewer has the opportunity to encourage subjects to provide examples, expand on their thoughts, and ask other subjects to explain, clarify or add to what has been said.

The focus group in the study consisted of teachers from a Krakow school which had a large group of learners with MB (foreigner learners and Polish re-immigrant learners). Five teachers and the headmaster participated in the in-depth group interview. Our intention was for the group to include teachers of exact and natural sciences, humanities, and integrated education teachers. Therefore, for the interview we invited a maths teacher, a natural sciences teacher, a Polish teacher, a history teacher, a foreign language teacher and a basic education teacher. They all possessed extensive teaching histories (between 15 and 35 years), and experience in working with foreigner learners. Two teachers (marked in the study as N1 and N2) completed post-graduate studies in teaching Polish as a foreign language. The curriculum of the studies included classes in teaching learners with MB the language of school education, stimulation of the second language, and the psychological aspects of migration. The remaining teachers lacked such training.

For the purposes of the focus group interview, we developed a detailed scenario for the meeting's moderator. We included four questions in the scenario.

1. How well prepared do you feel to be for working with learners with MB?
2. What problems arise in everyday work with such learners?
3. What kind of help and from whom would you expect it in your everyday work with learners with MB?
4. Are there any areas of professional education in this context that you might find interesting?

Since the interview was supposed to offer an in-depth reflection on the topic of working with learners with MB, it was necessary to trigger a discussion among the study subjects. During the 60-minute-long recorded interview the teachers shared their experiences and as a group keenly discussed the problems they faced in working with foreigner learners and Polish learners who arrived in Poland from abroad. They offered specific examples from their professional practices, and they offered

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

detailed descriptions of the situations they discussed. They spoke openly about their needs and problems, both from their personal perspectives, and from the perspective of their school.

## Findings

Below, we present the data collected during the in-depth group interview – questions and the answers of study subjects.

### 1. How well (to what extent) do you feel you are prepared for working with learners with MB?

- *Czuję się teraz już trochę przygotowana, natomiast problemy cały czas są, większe lub mniejsze. [I feel somewhat more prepared now, but the problems are still there, bigger or smaller] (N1)*
- *Nie czuję się przygotowana do takich zajęć. [I do not feel prepared for such lessons] (N5)*
- *Nie potrafiłabym takiego dziecka, które dopiero zaczyna uczyć się polskiego uczyć mojego przedmiotu. [I would not be able to teach my subject to a child that is just starting to learn Polish] (N6)*
- *Czasami, na przykład jak uczę o (...), to nie mam pojęcia, jak to dziecku niemówiącemu po polsku przekazać. (...) Dziewczynka uczy się na pamięć. (...) Bazuujemy na tym, że ona pięknie pisze, spokojnie siedzi. Jak jest praca w grupie, to ona patrzy na rysunek, ale nie wiem, co ona myśli i czy coś rozumie. Nie przekaże mi tego w żaden sposób. Jak poproszę Anię (jej koleżankę dwujęzyczną): “Zapytaj Hanię, czy wie, kto jest na tej ilustracji i niech ci powie po wietnamsku, a ty mi to przetłumacz”, to wtedy wiem, czy ona dobrze myśli, czy nie. Na tej zasadzie się czasami komunikujemy. Wychowawczynie chciałyby, żeby ona siedziała z polskim dzieckiem, żeby szybciej nauczyła się tego polskiego, ale na moim przedmiocie, to by nam było trudno pracować bez tego tłumacza, bez tej drugiej uczennicy. [Sometimes, for example when I’m teaching (...), I have no idea how to convey that to a child that does not speak Polish. (...) The girl learns by heart. (...) We focus on the fact that she writes beautifully, that she sits calmly. When there is a group work activity, she looks at a picture, but I don’t know what she thinks or whether she understands anything. She cannot communicate that in any way. When I ask Ania (her bilingual friend): “Ask Hania whether she knows who is in the picture and ask her to answer you in Vietnamese and then, please, ‘translate’ that back to me,” it is only then that I know whether she thinks correctly or not. That is how we sometimes communicate. The form teacher would prefer it if she sat together with a Polish child, so she would learn Polish quicker, but when I teach my subject it would be more difficult to work without that interpreter, without the other student] (N3)*

The interview showed that teachers, even those who worked with learners with MB everyday, feel unprepared for such work. Often, they worked based on intuition alone. They lacked knowledge on the processes of learning a new language, the problems with acculturation which learners face, and the methodology of working with learners with MB. They expected the learners to quickly learn Polish. They were convinced that once a child masters the language of everyday communication, it is a sign that she/he will cope well at school.

The two teachers who attended post-graduate studies and the related classes in second language acquisition, bilingualism, the methodology of teaching the language of school education and migration psychology declared that they were better prepared for working with such learners. That indicated that longer forms of professional improvement are more efficient and offer teachers competences necessary for working in that special context.

## 2. What problems arise in everyday work with learners with MB?

### Problems of class form teachers in terms of contacts with learners and their parents

- *Jako wychowawca miałam takie właśnie dzieci i tu widzę taki problem: jeśli rodzice nie znają języka polskiego, to wszelkie moje rozmowy z rodzicem odbywają się za pośrednictwem dziecka i niestety nie o wszystko mogę zapytać, jeżeli dziecko jest tym pośrednikiem. Jeśli jest problem z dzieckiem, to może on wynikać na przykład z jakiejś sytuacji w rodzinie, w środowisku, a ja nie jestem w stanie dotrzeć do rodzica. Poszukuję wtedy osoby dorosłej z otoczenia dziecka. Widzę potrzebę takiej osoby, która byłaby tłumaczem, która by pomagała, może nie codziennie, może w czasie spotkań z rodzicami. Dziecko i jego funkcjonowanie w szkole zależy od środowiska, a to środowisko jest takie... nierozpoznane, wiele można się domyślać, ale my, niestety, patrzymy na to dziecko tak wyrywkowo. [Being the form teacher, I had exactly such children and that is where I see the problem: if parents do not know Polish, all of my discussions with them must be mediated by the child, and, unfortunately, I cannot ask about everything if the child is the intermediary. If there is a problem with a child, it may be caused by, e.g. a situation in the family or in the community and I cannot reach the child. Then I seek an adult from the child's environment. I see a need for such a person, who would be the interpreter, who would help, maybe not everyday, maybe during meetings with parents. A child and their functioning at school depends on their environment, and the environment is so... unrecognised, you can guess a lot, but we are, unfortunately, looking at the child in a fragmented way] (N4)*
- *Mam w klasie dziecko wietnamskie, które płynnie mówi po polsku i od pierwszej klasy jest przedstawicielem swojej rodziny w szkole, w urzędach. I mam podobne zdanie. Nie podoba mi się to, że muszę przez dziecko rozmawiać z rodzicem, który potrafi się tylko zapytać: czy on OK? Zdarzyło się, że uczeń przyszedł z tatą*

na zebranie. Inni rodzice byli oburzeni. W przypadku omawiania jakiejś trudnej sprawy, pojawiło się pytanie, czy ten uczeń ma zostać i tłumaczyć tacie, czy powinien wyjść. Często uczniowie wykorzystują tę przewagę językową nad swoimi rodzicami i nie informują ich o różnych rzeczach. Z czasem problem narasta i rodzice są bezradni. Jak proszę, żeby uczeń przetłumaczył rodzicowi, że nie odrabia zadań, to nie wiem, co on przekazuje rodzicowi. [In my class there is a Vietnamese child who is fluent in Polish and since first grade has been their family's representative in school and offices. And my opinion is similar. I do not like it that I have to talk to a parent through a child where all that the parent can ask about is: he be OK? Once a pupil came to a parents' meeting with his dad. Other parents were outraged. When we were discussing some difficult situations, there were questions whether the child should stay and interpret for the dad or whether he should leave. Pupils often use that linguistic advantage over their parents and do not inform them about some things. With time, the problem grows, and parents are helpless. When I ask a pupil to interpret to their parent that the pupil is not doing their homework, I don't know what they are actually telling their parents] (N1)

### **Problems in the teaching process. Materials, time organisation, grading**

- W codziennej pracy najtrudniejsza jest codzienna praca w klasie z dziećmi polskimi i cudzoziemskimi. Konieczne jest przygotowywanie materiałów dla jednych i drugich. Podręczniki są napisane takim językiem, że dzieci cudzoziemskie ich nie rozumieją. [In everyday work, what is the hardest is the work in a class which consists of Polish and foreign children. It is necessary to prepare different sets for them. Textbooks are written in such a way that a foreign child would not understand it] (N1)
- Najważniejszą rzeczą, bolączką, jest brak materiałów, jakimi moglibyśmy dysponować, szczególnie do pracy na poziomie A1. Na pierwsze lekcje możemy takie materiały przygotować, ale potem jest to trudne. Podręczniki do języka polskiego jako obcego są bardzo drogie. Brakuje po prostu takiego podręcznika dla uczniów na różnym poziomie, takiego podręcznika do języka edukacji szkolnej. [The biggest issue, problem, is the lack of material which we could use, especially when working at the A1 level. For initial lessons, we can prepare such material, but then it becomes difficult. Textbooks for teaching Polish as a foreign language are expensive. There is no textbook for learners at various levels, a textbook for learning the language of school education] (N2)
- Zajęcia z dziećmi cudzoziemskimi zaczynamy w październiku, jak Urząd Miasta wyrazi zgodę na ich rozpoczęcie, a więc są one poza siatką godzin, które są od września. Z tymi dziećmi można zatem pracować po lekcjach. (...) Jak pracuje dziecko, które jest od siedmiu godzin w szkole, można sobie wyobrazić. Mają siedem godzin, potem dwie godziny spędzają na świetlicy, a potem mają dodatkowe zajęcia z języka polskiego. Takie dziecko, o takiej godzinie może pracować najwyżej 20 minut. Nie jest w stanie więcej pracować w pełnym skupieniu czy zaangażowaniu. [We start lessons with foreign children in October, once the City

*Hall officially consents to it, so they are outside the timetable which applies from September. Therefore, you can work with those children once regular lessons end. (...) Everyone can imagine how well a child works after spending seven hours at schoolworks. They have seven classroom hours, then they spend two hours in the common room, and then they have supplementary Polish lessons. Such a child, at that time of the day, can work 20 minutes tops. They cannot work longer maintaining full focus and engagement]* (N2)

- *Ogromny problem jest z ocenianiem tych dzieci. Nauczyciele dokonują cudów sztuki nauczycielskiej, żeby oceniając tych uczniów nie doprowadzić do tego, żeby one były wdeptane w ziemię. Mamy całkowicie zindywidualizowany system oceny, dopasowany do tych dzieci, na ile jest to możliwe. Nie zawsze udaje nam się oceniać dzieci zgodnie z wymaganiami, bo tego się to po prostu nie da zrobić. [There is a huge problem with grading those children. Teachers do teaching wonders not to crush those learners when grading their work. We have a completely individualised grading scheme, tailored to those children, as much as it is possible. We don't always manage to grade students according to the requirements, because that is something you can't do]* (N6)
- *Mamy wiele problemów. Taki prosty przykład: nie wiemy na przykład przy zapisie do szkoły, co jest imieniem dziecka, a co nazwiskiem, rozbijamy się często o takie najprostsze rzeczy. Nie wiemy, kto zapisuje dziecko do szkoły, czy to jest rodzic, czy dziadek, czy sąsiad. Status dzieci nie jest do końca nam znany: na jakich zasadach są w Polsce, czy mają obywatelstwo polskie czy nie mają. Uzyskanie wszelkiego rodzaju zgód dotyczących funkcjonowania dzieci w szkole. Rodzice często podpisują te zgody nie wiedząc, co podpisują. Dużo jest takich codziennych problemów organizacyjnych. [We have many problems. A simple example: when school registration takes place we don't know what is their first or last name, we sometimes have even such basic problems. We don't know who is registering a child to the school: whether its their parent, grandparent or neighbour. The status of those children is not entirely known to us: how it is that they are in Poland, whether they have Polish citizenship or not. Acquiring all kinds of consents regarding the child's functioning at the school. Parents often sign the consents without knowing what they sign. There are many such everyday limiting problems]* (N6)

## Intercultural problems

- *Nam, nauczycielom brakuje wiedzy na temat kultury tych ludzi. To jest odmienna kultura, nie słowiańska, ale azjatycka, z drugiego końca świata. Moja wiedza na temat kultury azjatyckiej, kultury wietnamskiej jest naprawdę znikoma. [We, teachers, we have lack the knowledge about the cultures of those people. It is a completely different culture, not Slavic, but Asian, from the other side of the world. My knowledge about Asian culture, Vietnamese culture is really scant]* (N6)

- *Oni przyjechali do nas, to pasowałoby, żeby to oni tak bardziej się dostosowali. [They came to us, so it would be proper for them to adjust more to us] (N3)*
- *Dobrze byłoby wiedzieć, co to za ludzie, dlaczego reagują w taki właśnie sposób, czego można się po nich spodziewać. Dla mnie te dzieci kulturowo i wychowawczo są inne niż dzieci polskie. To są dzieci bardzo zdyscyplinowane, obowiązkowe, bardzo starające się, mające szacunek dla dorosłego człowieka. [It would be good to know what kind of people they are, why they react as they do, what can we expect of them. For me, those children are different in cultural and education terms than Polish children. Those are very disciplined, dutiful children who always do their best and who respect adults] (N6)*

The problems indicated in Stage 1 of the study which applied to working with learners with MB also resonated in the in-depth interview. Teachers need support in terms of access to materials, work organisation, they need culture assistants who could help learners in their everyday struggles with learning the language and functioning in the new cultural code, but also to support teachers and the headmaster in contact with the parents.

The interviews also indicated a phenomenon identified by other researchers: some teachers are convinced it is necessary for those learners to assimilate quickly. They do not see the benefit of bilingualism and biculturalism. All study subjects declared they did not know the culture from which their foreign learners came, and only some indicated openness and willingness to participate in a teachers' meeting during which those notions were discussed. They were more interested in employing a culture assistant who would help them in contact with parents, yet they failed to notice the role of the assistant as a cultural intermediary.

### **3. What kind of help and from whom would you expect it in your everyday work with learners with MB?**

- *Powstanie podręcznika i materiałów do języka edukacji szkolnej. [Creation of a textbook and materials for the language of school education] (N2)*
- *Klasa przygotowawcza byłaby bardzo potrzebna, szczególnie w takiej sytuacji, gdy jest grupa dzieci z tego samego regionu językowego. Można by te dzieci łatwo podzielić na grupy. Rok klasy przygotowawczej, gdzie one byłyby w stanie poznać elementy języka polskiego i wdrażać się do systemu edukacji polskiej, to byłoby tym dzieciom łatwiej. Dopiero potem przyporządkowywać dzieci do wybranych klas, niekoniecznie kierując się tylko kryterium wieku. [A preparatory class would be very necessary, especially in a situation when it is a group of children from the same language region. Those children could be easily divided into groups. A year of preparatory class where they could learn the elements of the Polish language and enter the system of Polish education, then it would be easier for those children. Only then assign children to specific classes, not necessarily focussing on the age criterion.] (N6)*

- *Powinien być bank osób, które mogłyby pracować jako asystenci kulturowi, bo znaleźć taką osobę nie jest łatwo. Nawet jeśli z urzędu płynie informacja, że znalazłyby się finanse na opłacenie zatrudnienia takiej osoby, to dyrektorowi trudno taką osobę znaleźć. [There should be a bank of people who could work as culture assistants because it is not easy to find such a person. Even if some official body informs us that there could be some funds for employing such a person, the headmaster has trouble finding them] (N3)*
- *Widzę potrzebę takiej osoby, która byłaby tłumaczem, która by pomagała, może nie codziennie, może w czasie spotkań z rodzicami. Dziecko i jego funkcjonowanie w szkole zależy od środowiska, a to środowisko jest takie... nierozpoznane, wiele można się domyślać, ale my niestety patrzymy na to dziecko tak wyrwykowo.<sup>18</sup> [I see a need for a person who would be the interpreter, who would help, maybe not every day, maybe during meetings with parents. A child and their functioning at school depends on their environment, and the environment is so... unrecognised, you can guess a lot, but we are unfortunately looking at the child in a fragmented way] (N4)*

The study subjects stressed that it would be helpful to have textbooks and materials for teaching the language of school education. They also indicated that the organisational solution proposed in the resolution on the education of learners with MB, i.e. the creation of a preparatory division, could help solve the problems which pupils face who come to Polish schools without knowing Polish. Yet they added that such an organisation would require support from the managing body. In the case of a school employing a culture assistant they would also expect help from institutions responsible for formal education in their city.

#### **4. Are there any areas of professional education in this context that you might find interesting?**

- *Jak miałabym uczyć dzieci z DM mojego przedmiotu, szczególnie takie dzieci, które zupełnie nie mówią po polsku? [How could I teach my subject to children with MB, especially those who can't speak Polish at all?] (N6)*
- *Jakimi metodami pracować z uczniami z DM? [What methods should we use in working with learners with MB?] (N4)*
- *Jak przygotowywać materiały ćwiczeniowe dla uczniów z DM? [How should we prepare practice material for learners with MB?] (N5)*

The teachers displayed interest mainly in the methods of teaching Polish as a language of school education. They did not indicate any interest in professional development in the area of intercultural communication, cultural mediation, or the psychology of migration.

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<sup>18</sup> This statement has already been used, but we included it again as it indicated two problems associated with working with learners with a migrant background.

## Conclusions

Since the proper understanding of a child learner's culture and the language they use at school is one of the major elements of the successful integration of a child, it is worth making the effort to increase the success rate of the integration of learners with MB. Systemic, organisational, social and educational shortcomings, and the negative attitudes towards migrant children are the causes of many school failures or even dropping out of the educational system. As a result, those people possess a poor level of education and low qualifications, which impacts their social inclusion. That is where the problems of social exclusion and integration difficulties emerge.

The study indicated that in the context of the growing number of migrants, education in Poland faces many challenges. It is necessary to undertake actions both at the national level (systemic actions), and local actions supporting the integration of newcomers. Below, I summarised the main needs and expectations of teachers, and of other people associated with education who participated in the study. However, one could assume with considerable certainty that those are the needs of the entire community.

- Teachers expect the Ministry of National Education not only to issue resolutions, but also to offer commentary on how certain legal or organisational solutions should be implemented. That mainly applies to the organisation and functioning of preparatory divisions. Teachers also need materials for teaching Polish as the language of school education.
- It is necessary for schools headmasters and superintendent offices to include persons who can help better organise support for learners with MB. That applies to the organisation of preparatory divisions, employing culture assistants, and the provision of legal aid in complex situations of migration.
- Teachers need the support of psychological and upbringing centres. These should employ persons competent in diagnosing the problems of learners with MB. Such places should be equipped with materials and tests for a diagnostic assessment of bilingual learners linguistic competences.
- Teachers need to have professional competences to work successfully with learners with MB. Many teachers often feel unprepared and lack the knowledge or skills in terms of the processes of teaching and learning Polish as a foreign/second language, bilingualism, the psychology of migration, interculturalism, the methodology of teaching Polish as a foreign or second language and Polish as the language of school education. They should expand their competences through longer forms of professional training or during their original professional training, and not through short courses as the study subjects indicated that those offer little success.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> H. Timperley, "Teacher professional learning and development", *Educational Practices* 2007, Series 18. [http://edu.aru.ac.th/childedu/images/PDF/benjamaporn/EdPractices\\_18.pdf](http://edu.aru.ac.th/childedu/images/PDF/benjamaporn/EdPractices_18.pdf).

Finally, we would also point out that the discussed study material revealed only a section of the current situation. A more extensive study conducted nationwide would be surely necessary, as it could indicate not only the problems common for teachers from different regions, but also the territory-specific ones.

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Małgorzata Pamuła-Behrens, Marta Szymańska

## Nauczyciele uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji – problemy i potrzeby

### *Streszczenie*

Wzrastająca liczba migrantów w Polsce powoduje, że szkoły przyjmują coraz więcej uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji (imigrantów jak i reemigrantów) i nie zawsze mogą skutecznie pomóc nowoprzybyłym w dobrej integracji. Konieczne jest zatem podejmowanie konkretnych działań wspierających. Niedobory w tym zakresie są przyczyną wielu porażek szkolnych, przedwczesnego opuszczania edukacji i w rezultacie bardzo niskich kwalifikacji wielu migrantów. Jednocześnie badacze zwracają uwagę na rolę nauczycieli w procesie edukacji dzieci z doświadczeniami migracji. Od ich przygotowania i jakości wsparcia, jakie mogą zaoferować, zależy sukces uczniów.

W artykule zaprezentowane zostały badania (szczególnie ich II etap), których celem była diagnoza i analiza potrzeb środowiska oświatowego w zakresie edukacji i integracji migrantów. Punktem wyjścia było pytanie: Czego potrzebuje szkoła, aby mogła lepiej uczyć i integrować uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji? W badaniu potrzeb, zorganizowanym jako grupa fokusowa, wzięli udział nauczyciele uczący uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji o różnym stopniu przygotowania, a także dyrektor szkoły przyjmującej migrantów. Analiza zebranego materiału pokazała trzy główne obszary, w których nauczyciele potrzebują szczególnego wsparcia: systemowa organizacja przyjmowania i kształcenia uczniów z doświadczeniem migracji, dostęp do materiałów, możliwość szkolenia się i zdobywania nowych kompetencji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** potrzeby nauczycieli, nauczanie migrantów, kształcenie nauczycieli,

## Teaching the learners with a migrant background – teachers' perspectives

### *Summary*

As a result of the growing number of migrants in Poland, schools accept increasing numbers of learners with a migrant background (immigrants and reimmigrants), and they are not always able to successfully help the newcomers in their integration. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake specific support activities. Related shortcomings result in many school failures among many migrants, their dropping out of schools and as a result gaining little if any qualifications. At the same time, the researchers indicated the role of teachers in the education of children with a migrant background. The level of their training and the quality of the support they can offer determines the success or lack thereof of their pupils.

In the article the researchers discussed a study (Stage 2 in particular) the purpose of which was to diagnose and analyse the needs of the education community in terms of migrant education and integration. The following question was the starting point: What do schools need to be able to better teach and integrate learners with a migrant background? The study of needs organised as a focus group gathered teachers teaching pupils with a migrant background with various levels of training, and a headmaster of a school attended by migrants. The analysis of the collected material indicated three areas where teachers need particular support: systemic organisation of accepting and educating learners with a migrant background, access to materials, and the ability to participate in additional training courses and acquire new competences.

**Keywords:** teacher needs, teaching migrants, teacher education

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