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Courses Preparing for Teaching English in Early School Education at Selected Polish Universities – an Example of (Dis)unity?*

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Abstract

In the following paper, the author attempts to investigate whether the fact that the curricula of courses preparing for teaching English in pre- and early school education in Poland are supposed to follow the same formal guidelines included in both European and national regulations is reflected in their unification indeed or still certain discrepancies between them exist that can influence their quality. In order to achieve the anticipated goal, the author studies selected curricula of teacher training courses in Poland with the view to comparing them and, hence, demonstrating potential similarities and contrasts between them. The research is based on four teaching programmes organized by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and the University of Warsaw.

Importantly, to provide the answer to the question posed in the very title of the article, the author scrutinizes the Polish Qualifications Framework and the guidelines for organizing teacher training included in specific national regulations that constitute the background to the further examination of the problem in the paper. Then, a thorough analysis of the curricula of the aforementioned teaching courses is conducted. In the next step, the studied programmes are compared and the author concludes that in spite of the apparent unification of standards in terms of teacher training organized by Polish education institutions, certain discrepancies

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between the courses still emerge and they may influence the quality of the programmes. Thus, the final part of the paper is devoted to a brief consideration of the question, whether diversifying the curricula of teaching training courses constitutes an asset for students or rather it may have pejorative consequences leading to inequality of the gained qualifications that are supposed to be satisfactory in each case.

Keywords: early school education, English teachers, Polish schools, university curriculum, teacher training

Introduction

What cannot be denied is that in modern times, the form of education is changing at a rapid pace and so does the role of a teacher. Moreover, teaching foreign languages, especially English, is regarded more and more vital and in numerous countries it is becoming an obligatory subject at the earliest stage of education. Hence, it can be advanced that the training of future English teachers has to be modified and adjusted to the current needs of schools and learners, which is transparent in the measures suggested and implemented by European institutions as well as particular member states. It seems to be crucial that Poland is no exception and tertiary institutions appear to do their best to comply with the rules established by the EU and the recommendations offered by particular European organizations, including *Common European Framework of References for Language* (2001), *European Qualification Framework* (2008), *European Higher Education Area* (2010), or *European Common Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications* (2010).

However, what is worth studying is the way in which Polish education institutions interpret the valid education law and the guidelines concerning teacher training in the field of English, particularly teaching English at the level of pre- and early school education. Significantly, the following paper does not describe any particular theoretical background to the issue in question, yet it is due to its specifics; the conducted research is based on the provisions of relevant Polish resolutions regarding the topic in question and includes investigating the programmes of courses preparing for teaching at the aforementioned stage organized by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and University of Warsaw. Importantly, the study enables, at least to a certain degree, answering the question, to what extent the selected courses are unified in the light of the Polish legal regulations and what consequences this (dis)unity can have for the quality of teacher training in our country. What ought

to be explained at this point is that these are only Polish regulations that are discussed in the following sections as the subject of the present paper is wide and the space available in the journal is not sufficient to describe meticulously all the valid official documents. Nevertheless, these scholars who are engrossed in studying teacher training in Poland are advised to familiarize with regulations on European level as well due to their key importance. Moreover, it should be stated that the analysis conducted by the author in the present paper is based mainly on her own investigation owing to the visible lack of secondary sources concerning the examination of the selected curricula.

Polish Qualifications Framework

Initially, what is worth emphasizing is that both the European Parliament and the Council of Europe aim at unifying the standards of educating the citizens of various states. Importantly, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) that has been created for this purpose recommends all Member States to develop their own National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) complying with the European standard. It is believed to be possible thanks to a “national referencing process, which is based on a set of criteria agreed at European level. Following extensive national consultations with stakeholders, countries present the results of this referencing process to the EQF Advisory Group and publish their referencing report on this portal” (<https://ec.europa.eu>). Likewise the EQF, NQFs describe knowledge, skills, and competences that are expected to be achieved at particular levels as well as possible ways of moving between various stages (<http://www.ehea.info>). In addition, with regard to the official requirements, NQFs are supposed to corroborate with the EHEA (<http://www.ehea.info>).

In accordance with the “Referencing Report. Referencing the Polish Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework” published in 2013, the introduction of the Framework served the purpose of creating the possibility to compare the Polish qualifications with those adopted in other European countries (Sławiński and Dębowski, 2013, p. 20). In addition, it was supposed to enhance the transparency of the Polish system for the citizens and it is perceived as a vital factor contributing to the development of the strategy of lifelong learning (2013, p. 20). Therefore, the “Report” attracts the readers’ attention to the necessity of promoting the Pqf in order to familiarize possibly the largest number of people with it (2013, p. 21).

Noticeably, the Polish Framework fulfils all the requirements set by the European institutions since not only does it consist of eight levels, which entirely

complies with the structure of the EQF, but it also uses the same descriptors to characterize particular stages, not to mention the obvious implementation of learning outcomes (2013, p. 21). Significantly, the “Report” stresses the fact that they can be achieved “through formal and non-formal education, as well as informal learning” and that they are related to a broad range of aspects in order to make it substantially complete, for instance, knowledge is described in terms of “depth” and “scope”, skills include factors, such as “problem solving, the innovative application of knowledge in practice, learning and communication”, whereas social competence is measured by one’s “readiness to work with others and to assume responsibility for assigned tasks” (2013, p. 21). Transparently, those criteria resemble the descriptors used in the EHEA, which also proves that the PQF corroborates with the European standards. Importantly, it can be argued that thanks to it, they can be used effectively to accomplish their anticipated purpose. What is more, each of the above-mentioned aspects is further divided into more detailed elements. This point can be illustrated, for instance, with “Problem solving and applying knowledge in practice” that contains indicators, like “complexity of the problem”, “innovation in the approach”, or “independence of actions” (2013, p. 22). The factors included in “Cooperation” may constitute another example justifying the same point as this particular descriptor is subdivided into “team work”, “conditions under which one acts”, and “leadership” (2013, p. 22).

What the authors of the “Report” regard as crucial is that the descriptors used in the PQF are located on two levels: the first concerns the whole education system in Poland, while the second is devoted to specific sectors, namely the general, vocational, and higher education (2013, p. 96). Moreover, it is highlighted that the subsequent stages of the Framework can be drafted in the future as well and the main objective of such solution is to provide more and more meticulous descriptors of Polish qualifications (2013, p. 23). In addition, all the levels are expected to support each other (2013, p. 22), which visibly respects the legal rule stating that detailed regulations must conform to the more general ones. Another issue emphasised in the publication is that these are learning outcomes that are the most essential in the PQF, and not the process of achieving them (2013, p. 24). Thus, the quality of education in Poland does not constitute the main issue tackled in the Framework, though it is still important (2013, p. 24). What the “Report” pinpoints is that ensuring the quality of education falls with the competency of particular institutions organizing courses (2013, p. 25). Interestingly, the publication points also out that the plan for creating one online national register of qualifications available in the country has been put

forward (2013, p. 27) and it was launched indeed on 15th July 2016 (<http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl>).

What can be noticed is that the Polish education system lacks an appropriate Level 5 of the Qualifications Framework and, hence, it is not entirely coherent with the Bologna Framework, as, according to the document, “Ministers agreed that the Framework would include, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications” (<http://www.dges.mctes.pt>, p. 3). Noticeably, until 2015 these were teacher training colleges that had performed such function. Yet, when they were closed, the gap was not bridged with a new stage of that kind and the situation has not changed since that time, which arguably needs fixing in the following years. It is worth pointing out that the development of the PQF is supported by a few Resolutions that are examined in details in the following sections.

“Resolution of the Minister of Education of 2 November 2011 on the National Qualifications Framework for the Higher Education”

For the author of the present paper, the most essential Resolution in question seems to be “Resolution of the Minister of Education of 2 November 2011 on the National Qualifications Framework for the Higher Education” since teachers in Poland are trained at Level 6, 7, and 8 of the PQF. Importantly, Resolution divides the higher education into main field domains: humanities, social sciences, exact sciences, life sciences, engineering and technology, medical sciences, health sciences, and physical education, agricultural, forestry, and veterinary sciences, and, finally, fine arts. Moreover, each of them is characterized by learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and social competency. Nevertheless, it can be observed that not only are the descriptors very general, even though aside from a universal level, they are located at a practical one as well, but they also relate only to Level 6 and 7 of the Framework. Owing to the fact that this paper is focused on teacher training, the author analysed learning outcomes for humanities. For instance, at the point of completing the first cycle, with regard to knowledge, students are expected to demonstrate an in-depth proficiency of the content and methodology of a particular studied area that they are capable of developing in an innovative way (2011, p. 14723). Furthermore, learners are supposed to know the basic and advanced terminology underlying humanities as well as they should have a comprehensive general knowledge of their field of study (2011, p. 14723).

By contrast, when the second cycle of the higher education is taken into account and, especially, learning outcomes concerning skills and social competence, it can be remarked that they are more advanced than those anticipated at the end of the first cycle and the level of mastering the similar ones is increased, for example, students graduating from the cycle in question ought to be able not only to find and select appropriate data, but also approach them in a critical manner (2011, p. 14725). In addition, the emphasis is put on demonstrating research capabilities on both a basic and extended level that enable learners to solve problems connected with their area of academic interests (2011, p. 14725). What differs these two outcomes are the modifiers since in the latter one, the applied solutions are supposed to be “original”, research tools are not only expected to be “selected”, but also “constructed”, and, finally, students ought to manage to integrate their knowledge and various encountered ideas in order to examine a specific issue (2011, p. 14725). Transparently, both types of the aforementioned learning outcomes are marked as general competences in Resolution. To provide the instances of the outcomes at a practical level, it is worth mentioning how they are presented in the case of social competence at the end of the second cycle for they are focused on three main ideas, according to which not only are students supposed to be cognizant of the purpose and importance of their own lifelong learning, but they should also be able to stimulate the development of other people, cooperate in a team in various roles, and, finally, to determine their priorities in order to attain the desired objective or to fulfil the tasks imposed on them (2011, p. 14729).

Resolutions on qualifications required from teachers

When Resolutions determining the qualifications required from teachers in Poland are to be scrutinized, four main documents should be taken into consideration: “Resolution of the Minister of Education of 12 March 2009 concerning specific qualifications required from teachers and the types of schools and cases in which it is possible to employ a teacher without tertiary education or completed course in a teacher training center”, “Resolution of the Minister of Education of 6 August 2014 concerning the qualifications required from teachers and amending Resolution of the Minister of Education of 12 March 2009”, “Resolution of 30 May 2014 amending Resolution concerning the core curriculum of preschool and general education in particular types of schools”, and, finally, “Resolution no. 33 of the Minister of Education of 30 August 1990 concerning state exams in foreign languages”. In accordance with the first document, a few possible

education paths exist for those who apply for the position of a foreign language teacher at school or preschool. First of all, potential candidates are obliged to hold the master or bachelor degree in philology in the specialty of a particular language and they are expected to have a teaching certificate. Another option is graduating from BA studies in the specialty of a particular language or applied linguistics and holding a teaching certificate. Moreover, graduates of the Foreign Languages Teaching Training Colleges in the specialty of a particular language can also be employed as teachers. Last but not least, Resolution states that those who have not completed the aforementioned courses, but have finished tertiary education or a course in a teacher training center, have a teaching certificate and a certificate confirming their knowledge of a given language at a specific level or the state language examination certificate can become teachers as well. (2009, p. 6)

Furthermore, a separate point in Resolution is devoted exclusively to qualifications required from language teachers in pre- and early school education. In accordance with it, besides the candidates with competences described above, those holding appropriate qualifications in pre- or early school education, having one of language certificates mentioned in the document and finishing a qualification course in early school language teaching are allowed to work as language teachers (2009, p. 6; 2014, p. 7). Yet, because of passing Resolution of 30 May 2014, the Ministry of Education has decided to derogate from the guidelines to a certain extent. Namely, due to the fact that since 1st September 2017 foreign language education will be compulsory in all preschools, and the whole process has been implemented in practice since 1st September 2015, the authorities allow preschool teachers to teach a foreign language if they have proper pedagogical qualifications as well as, at least basic, language certificate enlisted in Resolution. What is significant is that currently they are not required to hold a diploma certifying the completion of a course in early school language teaching as they have time to obtain it until 31st August 2020 (2014, p. 7).

Importantly, as it has already been mentioned in the present paper, Resolution of 12 March 2009 determines specifically language certificates that are valid in the case of teachers who did not graduate from studies in the specialty of a particular language or applied linguistics. They are divided into three main categories – that is, certificates attesting basic, intermediate, and fluent language competency (2009, p. 13–15). It is vital as different types of schools and working with particular learners require from teachers certificates at specific levels. Thus, the first group includes FCE, the second CAE, and the last CPE (2009, p. 13–15). Moreover, all categories contain, for instance, certificates like TOE-

FL, IELTS, or University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2009, p. 13–15). Yet, a precise number of points is required in order to rate a potential teacher as a language user at a particular level. Significantly, the same guidelines are repeated in “Resolution of the Minister of Education of 17 April 2012 amending Resolution concerning specific qualifications required from teachers and the types of schools and cases in which it is possible to employ a teacher without tertiary education or completed course in a teacher training center” (2012, p. 3–5). Furthermore, both “Resolution of 12 March 2009” and “Resolution no. 33 of the Minister of Education of 30 August 1990” demonstrate the state language examination certificates that are sufficient to teach learners at a specific level (2009, p. 16; <http://www.oswiata.abc.com.pl>). In addition, not only does the latter present the conditions that one has to fulfil in order to take the exam, but it also emphasises that the test checks a candidate’s linguistic knowledge as well as pedagogical and methodological competences (<http://www.oswiata.abc.com.pl>).

“Resolution of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 January 2012 concerning the standards of education preparing to perform teaching profession”

Having familiarized with the requirements necessary to occupy the position of a teacher in Polish public schools, it is worth analyzing the manner in which the Polish Resolutions regulate the standards of teacher training that are determined in “Resolution of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 January 2012 concerning the standards of education preparing to perform teaching profession”. Initially, the document enlists seven general learning outcomes that potential teachers are supposed to achieve at the point of completing a teacher training. Significantly, they refer to students’ appropriate pedagogical and psychological knowledge, methodology acquired during the course in both a theoretical and practical manner, or the abilities to accomplish tasks imposed on schools in terms of educating and taking care of learners and, especially, adjusting the content of lessons to their capabilities (2012, p. 1). Moreover, according to Resolution, students prepared to occupy the position of a teacher are expected to demonstrate particular personal qualities, such as good communication skills, the willingness to improve their teaching skills, or candour and sensitivity towards learners’ problems (2012, p. 1). Importantly, the last distinguished factor relates to teaching practice (2012, p. 1).

What is worth noticing is that subsequently, Resolution presents the detailed learning outcomes falling within the aforementioned ones, for instance, with regard to skills, graduates ought to be able to use the gained psychological and pedagogical knowledge to “analyse and interpret particular situations and incidents as well as participants’ both motives and behavioural patterns”¹ (2012, p. 2). Furthermore, pedagogical, psychological, and methodological knowledge acquired during the studies should allow students to apply relevant procedures and techniques of working with learners at specific levels of education (2012, p. 2). Significantly, graduates are supposed to demonstrate also the basic knowledge of information technology in order to be able to apply it during the lessons and, moreover, they ought to be cognizant of the basics of workplace health and safety (2012, p. 4). Another vital aspect concerns voice emission as teacher training should prepare candidates for this profession to use their voice in a conscious and ripe manner (2012, p. 4). In the case of foreign language teachers, it is worth emphasizing that in accordance with Resolution, at the point of completing the training, they are expected to use the language they specialize in at C1 Level in compliance with the *CEFR* (2012, p. 3).

As it has already been mentioned in this paper, teacher education is provided in Poland at Levels 6, 7, and 8 with regard to the EQF. It can be noticed that the same point is stressed in Resolution in question as it mentions that teacher training is offered in the form of studies at universities as well as post-graduate courses and it consists of specifically determined modules (2012, p. 4). What is especially important in the case of studies is that graduating from the first cycle enables students to work as teachers only in pre- and primary schools, whereas obtaining MA degree in a particular field allows graduates to work in all types of schools and education institutions (2012, p. 4). Noticeably, it is a general statement and it can be misleading since in the case of certain subjects, for instance English, finishing only MA studies in English does not provide sufficient qualifications for teaching this subject in preschools and in years 1–3 of primary schools. Hence, it can be advanced that this provision needs clarification.

As mentioned above, teacher education at tertiary level is divided into modules and they refer respectively to preparing students in terms of subject matter, pedagogy and psychology, and methodology (2012, p. 4). Aside from those, two additional modules are available for students who wish to teach another subject or work in the field of special education (2012, p. 4). Significantly, Resolution meticulously describes all the modules and provides the minimum number of

¹ The Author’s own translation from Polish into English.

classes, ECTS credits and teaching practice within each of them. What is also important is that the characteristics of the first module includes the information that preparation for teaching at the level of preschool and early school education with regard to subject matter is completed during pedagogical studies or other that guarantee obtaining appropriate qualifications (2012, p. 6), which transparently juxtaposes the aforementioned information provided earlier in Resolution.

Furthermore, what is worth noticing is that the document presents thoroughly the content of the modules, which can be illustrated, for example, with the description of the second part concerning general psychological and pedagogical education. According to the regulation, this module ought to cover, among others, the following areas: “the basic psychological terminology”, “theories and the structure of personality”, “upbringing vs. development”, “teaching profession”, or “communication” (2012, p. 8). In addition, each of those areas is divided into specific topics that are expected to be discussed during the course, for example, in the case of the basic psychological terminology, “learning and memory”, “attention”, “emotions and motivation”, or “abilities and talents” can be distinguished, whereas social cognition and perception includes the topics devoted to “attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices”, “empathy”, or “the principles of cooperation”² (2012, p. 8).

By contrast, preparation for teaching at the level of pre- and early school education with regard to psychology and pedagogy tackles the areas such as “fun”, “the development of a child”, “a child’s adaptation”, “school maturity”, “children’s safety” and “childcare” (2012, p. 9–10). Similarly to the general training, also the aforementioned fields of studies are narrowed down in Resolution to specific issues, which can be exemplified with childcare that is subdivided into “health education and preventive programmes”, “co-existence and integration”, “shaping children’s independence as well as hygienic and eating habits”, or “shaping emotive immunity”, while fun involves “the types of games” and “the role of an adult in children’s fun activities” (2012, p. 9–10). Moreover, the module devoted to methodology at this level appears to be more extended than the general teacher training and it contains concepts, like “the core curriculum”, “a teacher’s methods, principles and forms of work with children at pre- and early school age”, or “equalizing the educational opportunities of children” (2012, p. 15). Moreover, certain parts of the module aim at increasing both teachers’ abilities to “adjust pedagogical activities to children’s needs

² All quotations in this paragraph constitute the Author’s own translation from Polish into English.

and capabilities”, and “methodology of teaching language, including Polish” (2012, p. 15).

At this point, special attention should be paid to the topics falling within the last category as it is of particular interest to the Author of the present paper. Hence, it ought to be pointed out that methodology concerns issues such as “developing listening skills”, “supporting the improvement of speaking and the ability to express opinions”, “increasing the maturity to learning reading and writing”, “the methodology of teaching reading and writing”, or “developing the basic abilities to expressing opinions in a written form” (2012, p. 15). It can be put forward that the quoted topics are essential also in the case of English lessons and, thus, they should be integrated into English teachers training. What can be noted is that the aforementioned examples demonstrate the comprehensiveness of teacher training at the level of pre- and early school education that is vital owing to the fact that the groups of children and classes in the first years of primary school are usually entrusted to one teacher who is liable for educating them on all the subjects, sometimes with the exception of foreign languages and physical education. Therefore, such teachers ought to be well-prepared to working with children since it can be argued that it is the very beginning of education that shapes children’s future attitude towards school and learning, which is indicated, for example, by Magdalena Szpotowicz in her article entitled „Nowa podstawa programowa dla języka obcego nowożytnego w klasach I–III” (Szpotowicz, <http://www.bc.ore.edu.pl/>, 4)³.

The final significant module described in Resolution concerns teaching practice and it presents both the tasks that students are expected to fulfil during the apprenticeship and the obligations of the institutions that offer teacher training courses. With regard to the former issue, the document distinguishes five main duties that candidates for teachers are bound to perform. Namely, they are required to familiarize with the characteristics of a particular school, including the adopted principles, for instance in terms of maintaining documentation, and the organization of work (2012, p. 12). Furthermore, they are supposed to observe specific problems, such as learners’ activity, the manner of communication, relations between teachers and students as well as between peers, or measures undertaken by the practical placement supervisor in order to, for instance, maintain discipline in the classroom (2012, p. 12). Aside from that, students are obliged to support their supervisors in taking care of learners,

³ All quotations in this paragraph constitute the Author’s own translation from Polish into English.

giving lessons, also those devoted to the general education, and working with learners with special needs (2012, p. 12). During teaching practice, prospective teachers ought to occupy the role of a tutor as well and, importantly, all their measures and observations are expected to be noted and analysed in practice documentation (2012, p. 13). By contrast, the institutions organizing teaching trainings are obliged, among others, to determine clear guidelines for completing practice, prepare students for it, and communicate on a regular basis with their placements (2012, p. 31). Significantly, Resolution stresses the fact that “the major part of teaching practice is supposed to be conducted by students simultaneously with their participation in regular classes”⁴ (2012, p. 31).

University curricula⁵

According to the publication entitled *European-style qualifications*, thanks to the modifications of the Higher Education Law of 18 March 2011, Polish universities have been allowed to determine the content of the courses they offer in a more flexible manner as “[t]hey are no longer required to refer to a specific list of educational content, i.e. the central list of course names with an allocated framework of educational content that must be included in the curricula. Now they are able to plan fields of study independently, taking into consideration the skills and competences a graduate will have upon graduation” (2011, p. 8), which are described in the standards and regulations analysed in the previous sections. Significantly, as the report published by Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä entitled *Education and Training 2010: Three studies to support School Policy Development Lot 2: Teacher Education Curricula in the EU* (2009) highlights, for this reason, certain discrepancies in terms of the content and the organization of the courses devoted to training English teachers who wish to work with children attending preschool or the first three years of primary school can be noticed (2009, p. 108).

In order to distinguish possible similarities and differences between teacher trainings offered by Polish tertiary institutions, the following section of the pa-

⁴ All quotations in this paragraph constitute the Author’s own translation from Polish into English.

⁵ All the data provided in the following part of the paper can be found in both the curricula of the courses in question and their descriptions of learning outcomes : <http://www.ia.uw.edu.pl>; <http://pracownicy.amu.edu.pl>; <http://www.ifa.filg.uj.edu.pl>; <http://wa.amu.edu.pl/studia-przedszkola/program.html>. All of them were valid at the time when the present paper was written, that is in February/March 2016.

per scrutinizes the curricula of the courses prepared by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (hereafter AMU), Jagiellonian University (JU) in Cracow, and the University of Warsaw (the UW). The selection of these particular institutions can be justified with the fact that they are located in various regions of Poland and all of them are of good repute according to the latest rankings, for example the one published by “Perspektywy” in 2015 (<http://www.perspektywy.pl>). Owing to the fact that potential candidates for occupying the position of an English teacher are required to gain at least BA in English and complete a pedagogical pre-training, graduate from pedagogy and obtain a relevant language certificate, or complete a post-graduate course devoted to this issue, the curricula of the first and the last type of these courses are examined in the following sections.

AMU in Poznań – BA course

Initially, it can be observed that among the investigated institutions, only AMU in Poznań offers both BA and MA studies in English with a specialization in teaching and, apart from that, post-graduate studies devoted specifically to teaching children at the level of pre- and early school education, whereas the remaining institutions qualify teacher training as an additional module that can be selected by students beside the main ones.

Noticeably, the curriculum of teacher training at the BA level prepared by AMU includes fifteen hours of a lecture on pedagogy and as many as fifty-five hours of classes in the same subject. What is worth mentioning is that out of these fifty-five hours, twenty-five concern pedagogy in general and thirty are dedicated specifically to the second stage of education. Significantly, the curriculum lacks classes devoted to general psychology, yet it provides students with thirty hours of a lecture on this subject and thirty hours of classes dedicated particularly to the second stage of education.

Another transparent feature of the course organized by AMU is that it introduces the third module of teacher training in the third term as it is the time when the lecture on the basics of methodology is delivered that is subsequently followed by sixty hours of classes in this area narrowed to the second stage of education only, which constitutes the matter worth considering as the whole course is supposed to prepare students to teach English in preschools and in years 1–3 of primary schools. What can also be indicated is that teaching practice starts in the third term, most probably owing to the fact that it is the time when students commence to be taught methodology, and lasts until the completion of the course. Moreover, it is divided quite equally; namely, in both the third and the fourth term, the students are obliged to participate in thirty hours of

practice, whereas in the fifth and the sixth, the number is increased to forty five. It seems to be a beneficial solution for two main reasons: firstly, it complies with the above-scrutinized Resolution concerning the standards of teaching training since it states that practice is expected to be conducted along the classes at the university, and, secondly, the students are allowed to get familiarized with the reality of the Polish education gradually, as they are developing their theoretical background that enables them to compare theory and reality and adopt a critical approach towards them.

Furthermore, as already mentioned in the present paper, teacher training is supposed to cover voice emission and the basics of Information Technology. Importantly, BA English course offered by AMU provides the students with twenty hours of classes dedicated to the former subject that is delivered in the fourth term, and thirty hours of the latter, which is taught in both the first and the second term.

Significantly, what distinguishes the course organized by AMU among other selected programmes is that it makes it possible for students to take part in the classes concerning first aid, Health and Safety specifically for teachers, and, what apparently is the most attractive, the legal basics of teaching profession. However little may it seem to be, since the last subject consists of only five contact hours, it makes students capable of familiarizing with the topic and draw their attention to this aspect that may, in turn, stimulate them to examine the matter on their own.

JU in Cracow

When the curriculum of teacher training at the BA level prepared by JU is taken into consideration, it can be remarked that in the first term, the seminars on general aspects of pedagogy and psychology are conducted, each of them lasting for forty-five hours, whereas in the second term, thirty hours of both types of those classes, yet devoted specifically to pre- and early school education, are run. Moreover, the realization of the third module is initiated in the third term along with the introduction of a lecture on general methodology that lasts for thirty hours. Importantly, JU provides the students with ninety hours of classes devoted to methodology, which are focused particularly on pre- and early school education. What can be observed is that all the classes in this field are covered only in the fourth term. In addition, teaching practice lasts for 150 hours and it is divided into two stages: the students are expected to fulfil the first thirty hours in the third term and the remaining 120 hours in the fifth term of the course. It can be noted that teaching training at JU seems to be more extended

and condensed with respect to the aforementioned elements and it is possible thanks to both reducing the duration of other classes, which may be illustrated with the workshops dedicated to voice emission that at JU last for fifteen hours, and the lack of the subjects that are typical, for instance, of AMU and that have been presented above.

The UW

Finally, it can be advanced that although the UW offers teaching training in the form of an extra module and not an independent specialization, it stands out from the other courses analysed in this paper owing to its unique structure. Significantly, the second module is commenced in the third term of the studies with the lecture dedicated to psychology that lasts for thirty hours. Aside from that, a lecture on the psycho-pedagogical basics of linguistic education is provided in the third term, whereas the fourth includes a lecture on psycho-linguistic basics of linguistic education, which arguably are the most specific topics out of those already presented. Noticeably, their time dimension is restricted to thirty hours as well. Furthermore, either in the third or the fourth term, the students are obliged to attend the lecture concerning the pedagogy of early education and children's developmental psychology and, what seems to be vital, between the fourth and the sixth term, the candidates for teachers are allowed to select a course related to psycho-linguistics or psycho-pedagogy, for instance the psychology of communication, the basic terminology of language learning and acquisition, or challenges that English teachers encounter at work.

In terms of the third module of teacher training, it is initiated with a lecture on methodology in the fourth term and it lasts for thirty hours. However, interestingly, instead of making the students attend ninety hours of strictly determined classes connected with this field as in the case of other courses examined in this paper, the UW enables its students to choose three subjects concerning methodology, each lasting for thirty hours, including, for example, the introduction to the methodology of teaching a foreign language, the methods and techniques of teaching a foreign language – the development of language competences, the analysis of coursebooks, learning and acquiring a foreign language at primary school, or teaching language and culture in the age of globalization.

Finally, in terms of teaching practice, in accordance with the programme, the students are obliged to set it up in the fourth term and it ought to last for thirty hours. The remaining 120 hours are supposed to be completed between the fourth and the sixth term, which constitutes another flexible aspect of teacher training offered by the UW. Nevertheless, it can be observed that, surprisingly,

the curriculum lacks the information concerning the classes in voice emission, which requires further investigation from the Author of the present paper.

AMU in Poznań – post-graduate studies

What is worth being taken into consideration apart from BA English studies in order to perform a more thorough analysis of the curricula of courses preparing students for teaching English at the level of pre- and early school education are the curricula of post-graduate studies. This point can be illustrated, for instance, with the curriculum of post-graduate studies “English in pre- an early school education” offered by AMU in Poznań. Initially, it ought to be mentioned that the course lasts for three terms and contains 530 hours of classes and sixty hours of teaching practice. Transparently, its learning outcomes are focused on describing skills that the graduates are supposed to demonstrate at the point of completing it, for example, they are expected to be able to create coherent and correct utterances both in a verbal and a written form, develop their language competences on their own, or use the gained knowledge of lexis, grammar or methodology in practice. What is also worth highlighting is the fact that in accordance with the learning outcomes determined for this course, the graduates are supposed to demonstrate English competences at B2 Level, which is sufficient for English teachers in pre- and early school education with regard to the Polish education law⁶. Yet, concurrently, the organizers underline that completing the course does not provide the graduates with the entire qualifications to teach learners at this level since it is essential for them to obtain a language certificate at B2 Level as well. Nevertheless, they claim that the studies in question prepare its participants for such exams.

It can be noted that the programme consists of two main modules: linguistic and methodological, with the former part dominating the other since as many as 370 hours of classes are dedicated to practical English, including pronunciation, reading, listening, vocabulary, writing, and speaking, so, arguably, the most essential skills and competences that an English teacher is expected to master and that are necessary for passing a language certificate. Interestingly, the most considerable emphasis is put on practicing pronunciation as in each term, the students are obliged to attend forty hours of these classes, whereas the lowest number of hours in this field is devoted to developing listening, reading

⁶ See Resolution of the Minister of Education of 12 March 2009 concerning specific qualifications required from teachers and the types of schools and cases in which it is possible to employ a teacher without tertiary education or completed course in a teacher training center

and writing skills for only ten hours in each term are anticipated. According to the information provided by the organizers of the course, the importance of improving pronunciation is highlighted during the studies for it is vital to provide young learners with the appropriate model that influences their future speaking competence (<http://wa.amu.edu.pl>).

Furthermore, the representatives of AMU claim that while preparing the curriculum of the course, they paid attention to the subjects that enable the participants to broaden their skills at integrating teaching English with other areas taught in pre- and early school education, which transparently complies with the provisions of the core curriculum for this level of education. Aside from that, the organizers seem to assume that the course participants are mostly qualified teachers who wish to extend their competences. Hence, the studies offer only sixty hours of teaching practice and methodological subjects are specific; instead of concerning general issues, such as psychology or pedagogy, a methodological module incorporates, for example, the classes dedicated to activation strategies, designing lessons across the curriculum, or multimedia in early school education. Moreover, it offers workshops on working with the groups of learners, or using songs, poetry and games in educating children.

The analysis

Having presented the characteristic features of the analysed courses, it is worth comparing them to indicate potential differences and similarities. When learning outcomes are taken into consideration, it is noticeable that among the institutions in question, only the UW determines them specifically with regard to a teacher training (<http://www.ia.uw.edu.pl>), while AMU and JU demonstrate the learning outcomes for the whole course in English (pracownicy.amu.edu.pl; <http://www.ifa.filg.uj.edu.pl>). Yet, the latter one highlights that the graduates achieve learning outcomes delineated in the appendix to “Resolution of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 January 2012 concerning the standards of education preparing to perform teaching profession” (<http://www.ifa.filg.uj.edu.pl>). Significantly, both institutions locate language competence of their graduates at Level C1 in accordance with the *CEFR* (pracownicy.amu.edu.pl, p. 2; <http://www.ifa.filg.uj.edu.pl>, p. 2). Moreover, due to the fact that both documents are based on the already described in this paper “Resolution of the Minister of Education of 2 November 2011 on the National Qualification Framework for the Higher Education”, they appear to be quite similar, although the Framework prepared by AMU can be viewed as more extended. Neverthe-

less, learning outcomes indicated by the UW visibly corroborate not only with the above-mentioned Resolution, but also with the EHEA. It can be pointed out that they refer to all the most important areas of teacher education, including relevant knowledge, methodology, voice emission, basic familiarity with Information Technology, the necessity for self-development, or communicating in an effective manner with specialists in the same field (<http://www.ia.uw.edu.pl>, p. 1–4).

Importantly, all the scrutinized curricula contain the information on the number of hours included in the course as well as ECTS credits. Thus, it can be noted that the most extended is the training offered by JU as it consists of 285 hours of classes. Yet, AMU and the UW do not offer much less since the former provides 280, whereas the latter 270 contact hours with lecturers. What ought to be emphasised is that the unified standards described in official regulations concerning teacher training are reflected in the examined curricula with respect to particular elements. Noticeably, the courses prepared by AMU and JU appear to be rather similar in the majority of aspects. Yet, the programme run by the UW is seemingly the most outstanding and significantly closer to the content of post-graduate studies in the case of the methodological module, although it has some common elements with the other examined courses as well, for example, the second module of the course is commenced in the third term with the lecture dedicated to psychology that, likewise in the case of AMU, lasts for thirty hours. In addition, it is worth pointing out that all the selected curricula involve 150 hours of teaching practice.

However, when the schedules of the courses are taken into consideration, it can also be observed that the distribution and focus of particular subjects as well as their time units vary in certain cases, for instance:

- JU offers more hours of pedagogy and psychology than AMU and, as it has already been mentioned, they are more specified in the second term,
- arguably, JU offers more specified module devoted to methodology and it is more condensed than in the case of, for example, BA teaching course at AMU,
- AMU offers a few subjects that have already been mentioned in this paper that the remaining courses lack,
- the UW introduces the third module of teacher training slightly later than the remaining institutions – in the fourth term,
- the topics of the classes within the third module of the course prepared by the UW are very specific and diverse and the whole course is seemingly flexible in this respect, which distinguishes this particular teacher

training from the others analysed in this article. Hence, it should meet the expectations and interests of students engrossed in various aspects of methodology.

Having examined all the aforementioned acts and documents concerning the standards of teacher training in Poland as well as the selected curricula of programmes devoted to educating English teachers at the level of pre- and early school education, it can be noticed that post-graduate courses pay more attention to specific issues related to teaching children at this age and, thus, they appear to be more practical, even though they do not offer as many hours of teaching practice as BA programmes. As it has already been indicated in this paper, the organizers of post-graduate courses assume that potential participants are qualified teachers whose main aim is to develop their language skills and extend their knowledge of methodology (<http://wa.amu.edu.pl>). Hence, it may not be essential to include in such courses classes devoted to the basic concepts. However, it may be put forward that BA studies develop students' language competences to a greater extent since, in accordance with the learning outcomes of the examined courses, having completed them, students are supposed to demonstrate linguistic knowledge and skills at C1 Level as determined in the *CEFR*, whereas the post-graduate course offered by AMU prepares learners to use English at B2 Level.

Conclusions

Significantly, on the basis of the analysis of legal regulations and curricula conducted in the present paper a few conclusions can be drawn. First of all, with regard to the Polish resolutions, it has been remarked that obtaining a language certificate confirming one's language competence at B2 Level is sufficient to occupy the position of an English teacher in preschools and early years of primary schools. Therefore, on the one hand, it can be advanced that linguistic training at C1 Level does not seem to be the most vital aspect of teacher education in Poland. Yet, on the other hand, as already mentioned in this article, "Resolution of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 January 2012 concerning the standards of education preparing to perform teaching profession" states that it is C1 Level of foreign language skills that is the target of teacher training if a particular language constitutes its specialty. Owing to the transparent discrepancy between the resolutions in question, it can be pointed out that the issue ought to be clarified. Moreover, it could be argued that the levels determined in the *CEFR* may be interpreted by education institutions in various manners and

indicating whether the aforementioned BA programmes really provide students with the opportunity to develop their English skills at C1 Level requires further research.

Next, what needs to be clarified is that the common elements and divergences between the analysed curricula enlisted in the previous section are not the only ones that can be found. Yet, the present paper does not aim at selecting the best teaching training course, but indicating whether certain discrepancies between the manner of organizing the studies in question still exist, despite the fact that they are supposed to follow the same legal guidelines. Hence, the examples provided above are sufficient to conclude that this hypothesis is true.

Importantly, according to Krystyna Drożdżał-Szelest, the author of the article entitled “Language teacher education in Poland in the context of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*” (2007) [“Kształcenie nauczycieli języka angielskiego w kontekście założeń *Europejskiego systemu opisu kształcenia językowego*”], it is necessary to “create a coherent system of teacher training”⁷ (2007, p. 252) in order to provide modern students with possibly the highest standard of knowledge and skills that they can acquire at school. However, as the analysis conducted above demonstrates, despite the same guidelines on both European and national level that the curricula of teacher training courses are supposed to follow, certain differences between them still emerge, which may possibly influence the quality of the gained qualifications, even though they are expected to be equally supreme.

What is worth considering is the potential source of the noticed divergences between the courses since it may be hypothesised that they are provoked by learning outcomes that, as the very name suggests, are focused on the effects that students are supposed to achieve and not so much on the process of producing them, which may have a real impact on the quality of the programmes. In order to guarantee possibly the most uniform standard in teacher education in Poland, the descriptors included in the PQF could be either reviewed and specified or developed on the next levels. It seems to be important to emphasize that according to the authors of the “Report” on the document in question, such possibility exists and it may be considered in the future. Yet, the question arises whether the entire unification of teacher training courses is an effective solution indeed. On the one hand, if it complied with the official regulations on both European and national levels, it could help to maintain a high quality of those programmes, regardless of the institution organizing it. However, on the

⁷ The Author’s own translation from Polish into English.

other hand, it can be put forward that diversification to a certain degree may be advantageous as well, but only when it serves a particular purpose, for instance in the case of teacher education, it may be argued that the students could benefit from the divergences between the courses if they were adjusted to the needs of the local labour market, that is the situation of schools in a specific region, which would require close cooperation between them and tertiary institutions that is also recommended.

Finally, it can be advanced that having scrutinized the theoretical aspect of teacher training, it is worth studying its relevance to the reality that teachers encounter in Polish schools, which is going to be the subject of the Author's subsequent research.

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