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**Do Polish High School Students Prefer Speaking in Person,
Listening, Reading or Writing During EFL Classes? A Brief
Commentary**

Norman L. Butler

Doctor of Humanities Degree in Pedagogy
Lecturer in English
Foreign Languages Department
AGH University of Science and Technology
Cracow, Poland

Barry S. Davidson, PhD

Assistant Professor
College of Education
Troy University
Alabama, USA

Liliana Mroz, MA

Lecturer in English
Vocational State College
School of Economics and Engineering
Nowy Sacz, Poland

Veda E. Brown, PhD

Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
College of Juvenile Justice and Psychology
Prairie View A&M University

Kimberly Grantham Griffith, PhD

Associate Professor and Faculty Mentor
Lamar University
Department of Professional Pedagogy
College of Education and Human Development

William Allan Kritsonis, PhD
Professor and Faculty Mentor
PhD Program in Educational Leadership
Prairie View A&M University
Member of the Texas A&M University System
Visiting Lecturer (2005)
Oxford Round Table
University of Oxford, Oxford, England
Distinguished Alumnus (2004)
Central Washington University
College of Education and Professional Studies
Ellensburg, Washington

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this brief commentary is to determine which language skill Polish higher school learners think ought to be practiced most frequently during EFL classes. Twenty-seven male and female undergraduate students who study at AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland were surveyed, and the authors found that most learners (70%) want to practice speaking in person in English classes .The theoretical framework for this article is provided by the general idea of the school as an organization and social institution.

(A special note of appreciation to Dr. Kimberly Grantham Griffith and Dr. William Allan Kritsonis for their assistance in getting this manuscript published in the United States of America)

Introduction

Foreign languages have been part of the Polish school curriculum for some time. Starting in the late 1940's, the Russian language was adopted as the primary foreign language to be instructed to all students from the age of 11 and upwards, regardless of the kind of institution (Janowski, 1992, 43). A "West European language" was offered as a "second foreign language" only to pupils attending full secondary school, in other words, institutions leading to a school leaving certificate (Janowski, 1992, 43). From the 1989-90 academic year onward the learning of Russian ceased to be compulsory, and, at about the same time, the Polish government began to encourage the widespread teaching of West European languages in schools (Janowski, 1992, 50).

Fifty-five new teacher training colleges have been opened throughout Poland in support of the government's policy (Janowski,1992, 51) and by 1992 two foreign organizations had endorsed this new training initiative by sending volunteers to Poland: 1) Solidarity Eastern Europe, a Canadian company and 2) the American Peace Corps. Dr. Butler has first-hand knowledge about the activities of these organizations. In 1991, he was recruited by Solidarity Eastern Europe to teach English at Rzeszow University of Technology, and while he was there had the pleasure to interface academically with a Peace Corps worker.

Motivation for the Study

The motivation for this work is Ireland and Great Britain's current "open door" policies towards Polish workers. Citizens of Poland have the same right to be employed in these countries as Irish and British nationals.¹ Therefore, it is now more important than ever for Polish students to learn English.

The theoretical framework for this article is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

Research Question

Which of the following language skills do Polish higher school learners think should be practiced most often in EFL classes: speaking in person, listening, reading or writing? The predicted choice was "speaking in person" because students have fewer opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom than to listen to, read or write it.

Student Choices and Results

On 19-20 March 2007 twenty-seven male and female undergraduate students who study at AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland were asked to indicate on small sheets of paper the language skill they thought ought to be practiced most often in EFL classes. The results are as follows : 70% (speaking in person), 22% (writing) and 8 % (listening)..That means that most learners want to practice speaking when they are in English classes. Therefore, the predicted answer to our research question was confirmed.

Concluding Remarks

Our findings have implications for English language teaching at Polish higher schools.² Nevertheless, it is recommended that more research be carried out, in the future, involving additional institutions.

Notes

1. According to the Irish Examiner, thirty three thousand Polish workers have arrived in Ireland since Poland's accession to the EU in May, 2004.
2. It should be noted that English language texts do not provide enough speaking activities limiting opportunities for learners to practice speaking in person.
3. A special note of appreciation to **Dr. Kimberly Grantham Griffith** and **Dr. William Allan Kritsonis** for their assistance in getting this manuscript published in the United States of America.

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2. Janowski A. (1992), Polish Education: Changes and Prospects. Oxford Studies in Comparative Education 2 (1), 41-55.
3. For other articles by the authors, please see: www.nationalforum.com