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Title: **Approaches towards English language teaching to young learners with specific learning disorders. A comparative study**

Abstract

For over the past twenty years learners with specific learning disorders (SLDs) have been educated at the public schools on the basis of integration, and more recently inclusion. Adopted by all European Union member states approach assumes common education of all learners regardless of their abilities which warrants them equal opportunities for well-balanced development. In order to achieve this goal several steps have been undertaken by national governments, concerning the changes in the organisation of the system of schooling, reforms of teacher education, a development of diagnosing and support services.

Despite the governmental efforts to popularise the inclusive approach in Polish education, encompassing an introduction of obligatory foreign language education for all learners, the situation of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Polish schools is reported to be still uncomfortable. In the specialist literature, it can be found that foreign language teachers focus explicitly on cognitive strategies, lacking commitment to practical aspects of knowledge. Children with SEN are said to be often overlooked in the implementation of particular language tasks, and the principle of individualization of the educational process is not in fact respected. Instead of adjustment of the applied methods of teaching to learners SEN, only certain remedial steps are implemented, including a general care about the appropriate atmosphere at lessons, aid in self-service activities, or replacement of their seating in the classroom. The reported problems indicate that instead of inclusion, Polish education is still deeply rooted in integration. Before initiation of the present work, a pilot study was conducted, the results of which confirmed the reported information.

In view of the above, the principal aim of the present dissertation was formed to analyse the presently applied approaches towards English language teaching to learners with SLDs. In order to notice the advantages and disadvantages of the educational situation of children with SLDs in the country, a comparative study was developed. It concerned eight aspects of foreign

language teaching to learners with SLDs in Austria, Czechia and Poland, including the following issues: the historically developed scientific interest in SLDs; systemic solutions that have been introduced to the national systems of education with the view to inclusion; legal basis for educating learners with SLDs in each of the compared countries; diagnostic procedures of SLDs; the organisation of educational institutions and support services for learners with SLDs; education of early education teachers and their (self) development; the use of language teaching methods; and the application of various teaching materials.

As the comparative study was based on the analysis of formal documents and specialist literature and missed an empirical insight into the problem, a supplementary study was developed, concerning the educational situation of learners with SLDs in Poland. Narrowing the research scope only to one country was caused by the occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic. In the supplementary study, responses to six out of eight research questions set for the comparative study were sought via the use of various research procedures which included: an analysis of tertiary education programmes in Poland, a self-assessment survey for English language teachers, direct observations of foreign language lessons, semi-structured interviews with parents of learners with SLDs and with specialists in the field of education.

The dissertation is a response to a question about the present shape of foreign language education in the country. The results of the study show the good educational practices, as well as allow to notice the weakness of the applied solutions. The findings can be considered by education authorities in projecting educational reforms with the view to further implementation of inclusion into Polish schools. They can also be applied by academic centres and foreign language teachers as practical hints for developing inclusive practices and improving the quality of foreign language teaching to learners with SLDs.