Teaching L1 and L2 reading skills to primary school students. Polish and Spanish educational systems - a comparison.

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of reading in primary schools is a subject of great concern in many educational studies since reading literacy is among the most important abilities that students acquire in schools. Although considerable research has been devoted to the analysis of outcomes of teaching reading in European Countries, less attention has been paid to the reasons behind these differences. Therefore, this study has two major purposes: (1) to investigate the differences in educational systems of Poland and Spain and approaches to teaching reading skills in primary schools; (2) to find an explanation as to why Spanish students tend to score lower on standardised tests. The study was conducted based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from statistical centres, OECD, Eurydice, and questionnaires with teachers of the native language and English as a Foreign Language in Polish and Spanish primary schools. The results suggest that both educational systems contain some weak and strong elements that may affect the results of education. Moreover, mean years of schooling, the age of students, class size and teacher-pupil ratio, the structure of the educational system, the timetables, the methods, strategies, and approaches used by the teachers as well as the type of assessment are the most influential in terms of outcomes of teaching reading in both native and foreign (English) languages.

Key words: Education System, Teaching Reading, Polish Education, Spanish Education

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

ABBREVATION	EXPLANATION
CORI	Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction
CSR	Collaborative Strategic Reading
DR-TA	Direct Reading and Thinking Activities
ES	Spain
ETR	Experience-Text-Relate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPA	Grade Point Average
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KWL	Know, Want to know, Learned
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language (Target Language)
MEFP	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PL	Poland
PPS	Purchasing Power Standard
QAR	Question - Answer - Response
R&D	Research and Development
TSI	Transactional Strategies Instruction
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
YEL	Young English Learners

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of reading in primary schools is a subject of great concern in many educational studies. Reading literacy is among the most important abilities that students acquire in schools. It is necessary for learning across the subjects, and it is basic competence in society. Past studies have shown that there are numerous factors that affect the effects of education, among which the educational system, curriculum, methods and approaches, and variables influencing education can be distinguished. Polish and Spanish cultures differ greatly. Moreover, educational systems in both countries are diverse. There are significant differences in terms of teaching literacy skills, specifically reading. Crucial aspects that influence education tend to be in favour of Spain. Yet, when comparing the English and native language proficiency test results, Polish students get higher scores. Although considerable research has been devoted to the analysis of outcomes of teaching reading in European Countries, less attention has been paid to the reasons behind these differences. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find a rational explanation for such a phenomenon.

This thesis opens with an explanation of education and primary education. Further, key elements affecting education, such as expenditures on education, teacher-pupil ratio, and class size, expected years of schooling and dropout percentage, age of students, and classroom climate, are presented. The presentation is based on literature published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as articles by researchers such as Kirabo C. Jackson et al. (2015), and Rachel Kamb (2012). In the next part, the education system is defined with an emphasis on the ambiguity of this term in the literature. The subsequent section focuses on teaching reading based on the instructional implications presented by Elizabeth S. Pang, Angaluki Muaka, Elizabeth B. Bernhardt and Michael L. Kamil (2003) and William Grabe (2004; 2015).

The next chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the research aims and methodology. The first part is based on the analysis of quantitative data from statistical centres on elements affecting education. Further, Polish, and Spanish educational systems are compared and evaluated. Moreover, the outcomes of teaching reading are compared based on the PISA, PIRLS, and YEL tests. The fourth

part is based on the questionnaires with teachers of the native language and English as a Foreign Language in Polish and Spanish schools on matters such as class size and class environment, but most importantly on the methods and approaches to teaching reading.

The closing chapter is devoted to the discussion. The data gathered in the methodological part is evaluated and further compared to the literature. The outcomes provide answers to the research questions and draw some conclusions. Moreover, some resolutions and ideas for improvement are stated. Suggestions for further research will be explored in relation to the significance of the elements of education on other language skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Education

Education is defined by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011, p. 79) as, "the processes by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies, and behaviours across generations. It involves communication designed to bring about learning". This is a fundamental definition of education; however, it points only to its main characteristics rather than all the elements and variables that form education nowadays.

Three types of education can be distinguished - formal, non-formal, and informal. Informal education is not institutionalised, which means that learning is deliberate but less structured than formal and non-formal education. This may include learning through activities that occur in the family or local community (ISCED 2011, p. 80). Non-formal education is institutionalised and planned by a provider of education; however, it is additional and can be complementary to formal education (ISCED 2011, p. 81). Formal education is of the main interest in this paper and will be further called 'education'. According to ISCDE (2011, p. 80), formal education can be defined as, "education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognised private

bodies and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognised as such by the relevant national education authorities or equivalent authorities".

Among the levels of education, ISCED distinguishes (see Figure 1): (1) Early childhood education; (2) Primary education; (3) Lower Secondary education; (4) Post-secondary non-tertiary education; (5) Short-cycle tertiary education; (6) Bachelor's or equivalent level; (7) Master's or equivalent level; (8) Doctoral or equivalent level; (9) Not elsewhere classified.

Figure 1

Levels of Education

ISCED-Programmes (ISCED-P)		ISCED-Attainment (ISCED-A)	
0	Early childhood education	0	Less than primary education
1	Primary education	1	Primary education
2	Lower secondary education	2	Lower secondary education
3	Upper secondary education	3	Upper secondary education
4	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	4	Post-secondary non-tertiary education
5	Short-cycle tertiary education	5	Short-cycle tertiary education
6	Bachelor's or equivalent level	6	Bachelor's or equivalent level
7	Master's or equivalent level	7	Master's or equivalent level
8	Doctoral or equivalent level	8	Doctoral or equivalent level
9	Not elsewhere classified	9	Not elsewhere classified

Note. Adapted from ISCED, 2011, p. 21

This study focuses on primary school students; therefore, solely a definition and classification of primary (ISCED 1) education is provided. Programmes for primary education are designed to develop students' fundamental skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as form a solid base for learning and understanding core knowledge (ISCED 2011, p. 30). Generally speaking, the aim of primary education is for students to learn a basic level of complexity and to prepare them for further education.

The students aged five to seven enter primary school (ISCED 2011, p. 30). According to ISCED, "the beginning of primary education often coincides with the beginning of compulsory education" (2011, p. 31). It typically lasts six years; however, that may vary from country to country.

Usually, one teacher is responsible for the whole class, although classes may have other teachers who are specialised to teach certain subjects (ISCED, 2011, p. 31).

2.2 Elements Affecting Education

The most influential variable that differentiates education around the world is the education system of the country. However, there are several endogenous (internal) and exogenous (external) factors that affect the outcomes and quality of education (Kremen et al., 2022, p. 29). United Nations Development Program provides data on human development indicators and components which can be found in the Human Development Report 2020 (cited in Kremen et al., 2022, p. 30). The share of expenditure for research and development (R&D) in GDP, income per capita, and life expectancy are exogenous since they "form the context of the operation and development of education" (Kremen et al., 2022, p. 31). The following six are endogenous as they are "immanent to the educational sphere" (Kremen et al., 2022, p. 31).

Data on the topic of education is analysed by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) analysis. Following Scheerens and Bosker (1997, cited in OECD, 2005, p. 15), school factors identified as important in educational effectiveness research are presented in Figure 2. There are three main categories, resource input variables, school organisational factors, and instructional conditions, which are relevant for the formation of indicators of policy-amenable school factors, namely, education production functions, school effectiveness, and effective teaching and instruction (OECD, 2005, p. 15). Resource input variables indicating education production functions are pupil-teacher ratio, teacher training, teacher experience, and teachers' salaries. School organisational factors affecting school effectiveness are productive climate culture, achievement pressure for basic subjects, educational leadership, monitoring and evaluation, cooperation and consensus, parental involvement, and staff development. School organisational factors influencing effective teaching and instruction are high expectations and an orderly climate. Instructional conditions affecting effective teaching and instruction are an opportunity to learn, time on

task/homework, monitoring at the classroom level, aspects of structured teaching (co-operative learning, feedback, reinforcement), as well as differentiation/adaptive instruction (OECD, 2005, p. 15).

Figure 2

School Factors Identified as Important in Educational Effectiveness Research

School factors identified as important in educational effectiveness research	
Education production functions	***Resource input variables:*** *Pupil-teacher ratio* *Teacher training* *Teacher experience* *Teachers' salaries*
School effectiveness	***School organisational factors:*** *Productive climate culture* *Achievement pressure for basic subjects* *Educational leadership* *Monitoring/evaluation* *Co-operation/consensus* *Parental involvement* *Staff development*
Effective teaching and instruction	*High expectations* *Orderly climate* ***Instructional conditions:*** *Opportunity to learn* *Time on task/homework* *Monitoring at classroom level* *Aspects of structured teaching:* *- cooperative learning* *- feedback* *- reinforcement* *Differentiation/adaptive instruction*

Note. Adapted from Scheerens and Bosker, 1997; in OECD, 2005, p. 15

Governmental expenditures on education, teacher-pupil ratio, expected years of schooling, dropout percentage, age of students, and the classroom environment are of interest to this study.

2.2.1 **Expenditures**

Expenditures on education can be divided into public and private. According to OECD (2013, cited in Jackson et al., 2015, p. 157), "public K–12 education is one of the largest single components

of government spending". Spendings include core educational goods and services, such as teaching costs, books and materials provided by institutions, training of teaching personnel, administration, and rent as well as peripheral goods and services, for instance, research and development, ancillary services, student transportation, housing, health services, and meals (OECD, 2018a, p. 58-59, 62).

In 1966 the US Government published Coleman's Report under the title *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. James Coleman argued that student success on standardized tests was unrelated to differences in per-pupil spending (Jackson et al., 2015, p. 158). Since then, researchers have started to extensively study the influence of expenditures on students' performance. Kirabo C. Jackson et al. (2015) present new evidence on this persistent question. Their study improves and builds on previous research since it uses nationally representative level panel data from infancy to adulthood, as well as quasi-experimental methods aimed at determining the validity of causal relationships (Jackson et al., 2015, p. 212). They investigate the effects of increased spending on educational attainment. By conducting the extent study and analysing instrumental variable models their study revealed that a 10% rise in spending per-pupil yearly for 12 years leads to 0.31 more completed years of education, 7% higher wages, and a reduction in the annual adult poverty rates by 3.2 percentage points (Jackson et al., 2015, p. 157). These findings suggest that increased per-pupil spending improved student teaching outcomes.

2.2.2 **Teacher-pupil Ratio and Class Size**

Teacher-pupil ratio, class size, and the number of students is strongly correlated factors affecting the results of education. All these elements relate to the number of students and teachers in an educational institution; however, they are not equivalent.

A student can be defined as "any individual participating in formal educational programmes" (OECD, 2017, cited in OECD, 2018a, p. 34). This term applies also to pupils. Students can be distinguished into part-time and full-time students. This distinction is often based on the level of an educational programme. According to OECD (2018, p. 40), "For primary and secondary education,

the most frequent measure is student attendance at the institution or time in the classroom, whereas at tertiary level study load is more likely to be measured in terms of instructional hours and credit accumulation".

Educational personnel refer to all people employed within educational institutions. These are teachers and people engaged in student instruction, professional student support, management and administration, maintenance of the educational institution, and provision of services as subcontractors (OECD, 2018a, p. 41). Personnel staff can be divided into part-time and full-time. A full-time teacher is "employed for at least 90% of the normal or statutory working hours" (OECD, 2018a, p. 46).

According to PISA (cited in OECD, 2005, p. 105), the student-teaching staff ratio can be defined as, "the number of full-time equivalent teachers divided by the number of students in the school". The significance of the teacher-pupil ratio increases in the higher grades since in the beginning years students usually have just one headteacher (Kremen et al., 2022, p. 36). Students' achievements in education correlate with the student-teacher ratio. This is because the lower the number of students that each teacher works with, the more the teacher knows their pupils and can adapt teaching to their specific needs (*Student-Teacher Ratios: Everything You Need to Know | The Hun, School*, n.d.) Moreover, a lower ratio decreases the workload for teachers. This enables them to focus on the quality rather than quantity of the teaching (*Student-Teacher Ratios: Everything You Need to Know | The Hun School*, n.d.).

Class size is highly related to the pupil-teacher ratio but is calculated differently. A class is defined by OECD (2018, p. 54) as "a group of students who receive tuition together". Therefore, the class size is the number of pupils grouped in the classroom. The average class size is calculated by dividing the total number of students by the total number of classes (OECD, 2018a, p. 54). This factor is an estimated proxy based on the ratio of students to teachers and the number of teaching and instruction hours (OECD, 2018a, p. 128).

It is believed that student learning can be improved by lowering the number of pupils participating in learning activities since managing a large group can be very demanding (OECD,

2018a, p. 139). There are several advantages of working with smaller groups. Students tend to be more comfortable asking questions, voicing their opinions, and conducting discussions in a smaller forum (*Student-Teacher Ratios: Everything You Need to Know | The Hun School*, n.d.). STAR research proved that a lower ratio leads to quicker complementation of basic instruction and results in increased use of supplements and enrichment materials (Pate-Bain et al., 1992, p. 254). Furthermore, teachers prefer to work with small classes since it allows them to better identify and meet student needs, as well as provide individual attention and more in-depth teaching (Pate-Bain et al., 1992, p. 254).

Following conceptual differences, the fact that countries have similar student-teacher ratios does not mean there cannot be differences in class sizes (OECD, 2012). Several aspects impact the relationship between these two factors, such as the length of the school year, the annual number of student attendance, the annual amount of teaching time, and the grouping of students (OECD, 2018a, p. 140). Due to these differences, the problem of constructing direct measures of quality of education arises. Since the ratios of students per class and students per teacher tend to be used as proxies for the quality, it is believed that a lower ratio indicates better education. However, this assumption is not always true and may just be a symptom of ineffective management of human resources. On the other hand, an extremely high ratio clearly suggests insufficient learning support for students (OECD, 2018a, p. 140).

2.2.3 **Expected Years of Schooling and Dropout Percentage**

Years of schooling can be analysed following two generalizations, expected and average (mean) years of schooling. Expected years of schooling are measured by summing the number of years a student is expected to receive since the beginning of education (IGI Global, n.d-b.). Mean years of schooling is the average number of years that the population older than twenty-five actually completed (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2017).

Extending years of compulsory education is fundamental to economic growth, global health, climate change action, and the development of society (Stone, 2015). Lack of opportunity to learn can lead to the poorer economic performance of the country, health problems associated with lower income and nescience, as well as reduced ability to coexist in the society (Stone, 2015).

A factor strongly correlated with years of schooling is the dropout percentage. The terms 'dropout' and 'early school leaving' can be used interchangeably to refer to the non-completion of upper secondary education (OECD, 2012, p. 39). School dropout is a problem in many countries. In 2020, an average of 9.9% of people aged 18-24 in the European Union withdrew early from education (Eurostat, 2021). The overall proportion of early leavers fell by 3.9 percentage points between 2010 and 2020. However, the numbers are still extremely high (Eurostat, 2021). Additionally, the term 'educational failure' refers to students leaving education before acquiring a compulsory degree. (Fernández-Macías et al., 2013, p. 150-151). By definition, educational failure is included within early school leaving.

There are several potential predictors of early school leaving. Among them, student-related, family-related, school-related, and community-related factors can be identified (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 19). Student factors are academic ability and achievements, grade retention or repetition, personal aspirations for education or occupation, motivation, and demographic factors, such as gender or ethnicity (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 18-21). Socioeconomic status, family structure, and social capital are considered family-related factors (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 21). School factors are school type, resources, structural characteristics, as well as policies and practices. (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 21-22) Among community factors, the neighbourhood, type of friends, employment opportunities, and social discrimination or injustice can be listed (De Witte et al., 2013, p. 22-23).

The problem of school dropouts relates to individual, social, economic, and political aspects. The economic and social costs of school failure are high. Therefore, reducing school failure is profitable and efficient (OECD, 2012, p. 10). Education can provide stability in life, financial security, self-dependency, protection, and safety, as well as confidence. Moreover, it reduces the gaps between

social classes which leads to social equality and acceptance. It also positively influences economic growth on the national level (University of the People, 2020).

2.2.4 **Age of Students**

The age of students is another element influencing education. The standard age of entry and graduation vary by country (OECD, 2018a, p. 38). Expanding years of schooling has a positive impact on student's future life and the economy. However, the case is not the same when it comes to the age of school entry (Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018, p. 265).

The results of previous studies on the short-term and long-term effects of entry age point to mixed results. Most of the positive effects are seen in the early school outcomes, namely with higher scores on standardised tests (McEwan and Shapiro, 2006, cited in Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018, p. 250). However, this seems to have obscure and rather negative long-term effects. Early entry is associated with lower IQ and mental health issues (Black et al. 2011, cited in Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018, p. 250). Moreover, it also lowers the years of completed education (Angrist and Kruger 1991, cited in Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018, p. 250), and negatively influences earnings in young adults (Angrist and Kruger 1991; Black et al. 2011, cited in Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018, p. 250). In accordance with Cáceres-Delpiano and Giolito's study (2018, p. 265-266) delayed entry has a positive effect on GPA and attendance, which leads to an increased probability of passing a grade and following an academic track in and after high school.

2.2.5 **Classroom Environment**

Several elements affect the climate and environment in which learning and teaching take place. Students spend most of their time in classrooms. Providing a supportive and relaxed environment can positively influence the outcomes of education. According to Susan Ambrose et al. (2010, p. 79), "the complex dynamics of the classroom, its tone, the interpersonal forces at play, and the nature and structure of communication patterns all combine to either support or inhibit the

students' motivation to pursue a goal". Therefore, the classroom environment is a mixture of social, emotional, and instructional factors that affect the motivation of students.

Another definition states that "classroom climate refers to the prevailing mood, attitudes, standards, and tone that you and your students feel when they are in your classroom" (Kamb, 2012). The climate can be described as positive or negative. A negative climate is chaotic, hostile, chilly, and marginalising and should be avoided. A positive climate is respectful, supportive, safe, inclusive, productive, and relaxed (Kamb, 2012). The climate is created and shaped by teachers and students. A positive classroom climate can be obtained by developing and reinforcing classroom rules and norms, promoting positive peer relationships, and nurturing teachers' positive relationships with all students (Kamb, 2012).

The factors influencing the climate interact with each other and can be seen inside and outside the classroom. Among them, interactions between faculty and students as well as between students can be distinguished. The tone of instruction, the range of material, course demographics, and stereotypes can also influence the climate (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 170).

2.2.5.1 Factors Affecting Classroom Climate

Stereotypes can have a profound impact on the classroom environment. They are defined as "set ideas that people have about what someone or something is like" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Stereotypes might be harmful and offensive and can cause alienation and a toxic classroom climate. They may hinder not only socialising of students but also their learning (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 174). Students, who have experienced stereotypes or expect to be viewed in a certain way can be more responsive and sensitive to stereotyping which does not always have to be intentional (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 174-176).

Communication in the classroom is one of the most vital factors affecting the atmosphere. The way in which the instructor communicates with students, the type and manner of instruction, and student-student interaction all influence the climate (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 176-178).

A positive and encouraging tone of instruction increases the outcomes of learning. Ishiyama and Hartkaub (2002, cited in Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 176) found that the tone used to present the syllabus affects students' opinions on it. The more encouraging the tone, the more approachable the subject seems. The tone is also perceived in the classroom language and is especially visible in the way corrective feedback is given. Constructive feedback is focused on tasks rather than a person and is exempted from sarcasm, and unfair criticism, it positively affects classroom climate (Seymour and Hewitt 1997, cited in Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 177). Tone influences learning, students' performance, motivation, and socioemotional factors.

Faculty-student interaction is proven to influence learning and the atmosphere in the classroom. According to Astin (1993, cited in Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 177-178), the way students perceive teaching staff affects the outcomes of their education, the level of motivation, and more. If the staff is seen as engaged, carrying, and approachable, the motivation of students increases and positively affects learning (Astin, 1993, cited in Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 177-178). Teacher-student interactions are seen in the way both students and teachers communicate and interact with each other. Positive interaction decreases the possibility of skipping classes and dropping out of school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004, cited in UKEssays, 2018). It also influences classroom management, students' growth, their mental well-being, self-esteem, and skills (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000, cited in UKEssays, 2018).

Student-student interactions are important because they affect educational ambitions and achievement, as well as influence attitudes towards school. They also influence the world perception and socialisation of values, norms, and attitudes, and teach social skills. Moreover, they may impact current and future mental health (Johnson, 1981, p. 5-6). However, it is not enough to just place students next to each other and expect them to interact. Interactions need to be valuable and promote positive feelings, such as acceptance, support, a sense of belonging, and tolerance (Johnson, 1981, p. 6). Teachers should control the student-student interactions to ensure that their qualitative nature is present. To do this, learning goals need to be structured clearly and conflicts need to be managed

appropriately (Johnson, 1981, p. 6). There are three main goals among students, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic. They all should be appropriately used in the classroom since they all promote several ways of interaction among students (Johnson, 1981, p. 6-7). Aiming to achieve all these goals in the classroom leads to students' achievements, development, relationship formation, tutoring and sharing, cooperation, effective communication, emotional involvement, acceptance, and support, risk-taking, as well as critical thinking (Johnson, 1981, p. 7).

The classroom climate is not only influenced by process variables, such as tone and interactions. The content of the course, which is what is being taught, is another factor that affects the climate (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 178). The curriculum, its diversity, types of additional materials, quality of readings, and the syllabus, all influence the outcomes of education and motivation of students (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 178-179). Therefore, the quality and type of content can determine what is being learned and how meaningful the materials are for the students (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 179).

2.2.5.2 Strategies That Promote Productive Climate

Several strategies that can be used to promote a positive classroom climate are listed by Ambrose et al. (2010, p. 180-186). These connected with performance are incorporating evidence into action and giving constructive feedback (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 180-186). These concerned with rules are providing clear grading criteria, modelling expected language, behaviours, and attitudes, using examples, establishing rules for interactions, using the syllabus, and establishing course climate (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 180-186). Moreover, some connected with students' well-being and comfort are not asking individuals to speak for the whole group, reducing anonymity by promoting individuality, anticipating sensitive issues, and addressing tensions early, fairly, and adequately (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 180-186).

These strategies respect students' individuality. They focus on not seeing class as just a group but as a set of individuals. They point to cooperation, effective communication, and development.

They take into account the aspect of clear instruction, criteria, and guidance. Moreover, they emphasise the importance of communication and interactions in a classroom.

2.3 Education System

The term education system can be difficult to define without a wider context. In the Public Administration, the education system is "responsible for the definition of levels, curricula, infrastructures construction (...)" (IGI Global, n.d.-a). This definition relates the system to solely administrative functions which aim at describing the structure of education. Another definition states that the education system is "a frame of the learning experience by which specific information preferable for authority is imposed on learners" (IGI Global, n.d.-a). Following this explanation, education is seen as the type and amount of material that students are expected to learn. The preceding definitions are not incorrect. They define some elements of the systems, but they focus only on one aspect, which narrows the term extensively.

Understanding this term requires a wider definition. The education system can be defined as a "policy formulation and implementation framework, including resources and facilities, as well as the organization and administrative arrangements for (public) schooling at all levels of education: from kindergarten to higher education" (IGI Global, n.d.-a). This explanation points to the fact that the system is not only the administrative procedures and organisation but also resources, frameworks, and policies. The education system can also be seen as

> a combination of both a set of interrelated activities, practices, norms and beliefs and a body of knowledge, including ways of conceptualisations, sharing, expanding, proving, accepting, and disapproving certain claims and beliefs in a specific community. Education is considered to mean how a community generates, acquires, imparts, shares, and validates its knowledge (IGI Global, n.d.-a).

This is one of the most extensive definitions since it emphasizes the multi-facility and complexity of the term. The system is not only the law, policies, and regulations. Funding, resources, human resources, contracts, school facilities, curricula, syllabi, books, teaching resources, and way more all contribute to this definition. Moreover, it focuses that the aim of education is knowledge sharing and expanding, learning to accept, agree, disagree, prove, and disprove theories and opinions. It also emphasises that the education system is about community and learning its norms and values.

Fabian T. Pfeffer (2015, p. 351) claims that there are two vital dimensions an education system in modern society needs to fulfil. The first is to "equip individuals with knowledge that allows them to take part in social, economic, and political life" (Durkheim, 1922, cited in Pfeffer, 2015, p. 351). The second is to "provide opportunities for social mobility" (Coleman, 1968; Labaree, 1997, cited in Pfeffer, 2015, p. 351). Both the quality and equality of education need to be judged when comparing the systems of countries.

2.4 Teaching Reading

Reading is one of the basic skills in native and foreign language learning. To read, one must understand written text in terms of symbols and sense. Therefore, reading is "a complex activity that involves both, perception and thought" (Pang et al., 2003, p. 6). It consists of recognition and comprehension. Recognition is perceiving and understanding symbols of the languages. Comprehension is about making sense of these symbols by combining them into words and sentences (Pang et al., 2003, p.6). Reading requires some background knowledge, as well as grammar, vocabulary, linguistic, systematic, and schematic knowledge (Pang et al., 2003, p. 6). Elizabeth S. Pang, Angaluki Muaka, Elizabeth B. Bernhardt and Michael L. Kamil (2003) and William Grabe (2004; 2015) present a set of instructional implications for first and second language reading.

1. **Oral Language**

Learning to read is strongly connected with the development of speech and oral production. The knowledge of the oral system of the language, as well as phonological and phonemic awareness,

are strongly associated with the ability to read. (Pang et al., 2003, p. 8). Among the practical applications that can be used in the classroom, encouraging students by storytelling and show-and-tell activities, reading books aloud for the pupils, or shared book reading can be distinguished (Pang et al., 2003, p. 8).

2. Language Knowledge and Awareness

As mentioned before, being aware of phonology and phonemes of the language is highly associated with reading. Such knowledge allows children to recognize printed words quickly and with accuracy (Pang et al., 2003, p. 9). Teaching phonics is especially important for young children as it may increase the chances of learning to read in the early school years. This can be done through activities such as rhymes, alliteration, poetry, and book reading (Pang et al., 2003, p. 9). Language knowledge is vital for reading comprehension. It consists of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax awareness (Grabe, 2004, p. 50). Being aware of language structure both in written and spoken language can facilitate the reading process.

3. Fluency

Fluency is related to comprehension since fluent readers can read quickly, accurately, easily, and with understanding (Pang et al., 2003, p. 11). Being able to read fluently is the result of well-developed word recognition skills. However, word recognition is not enough, fluency depends also on the ability to appropriately group words, knowing where to put stress, and when to stop. Moreover, meaning needs to be constructed while reading (Pang et al., 2003, p. 11). To increase fluency, guided practice in reading needs to be introduced. After teaching word recognition, it is vital to give students opportunities to develop speed. Fluency can be assessed only by letting students read aloud. Therefore, activities such as repeated reading or paired reading may be useful (Pang et al., 2003, p. 11). Grabe (2004, p. 47-48, 55-56) recognises the importance of fluency, both in the context of word recognition and reading fluently. Among the practices that can be implemented to teach word recognition are timed word recognition, phonological and morphological awareness training, and assisted or extended reading activities (Grabe, 2004, p. 49). Another aspect of fluency is rate.

Introducing reading activities that involve the pressure of time increases reading efficiency (Breznitz, 1997, cited in Grabe 2004, p, 56).

4. Vocabulary

Having a wide vocabulary range results in better recognition and understanding of the text which are fundamental for fluent reading (Pang et al., 2003, p. 12). Vocabulary learning should be emphasised, and a vocabulary rich environment should be created (Grabe, 2004, p. 49). Grabe presents numerous studies that confirm this thesis and show a correlation between extended vocabulary training and results in reading comprehension tasks (Qian, 2002; Droop and Verhoeven, 2003; Laufer, 1997, cited in Grabe 2004, p. 49). Vocabulary should be taught with the use of an electric approach, both directly and indirectly (Pang et al., 2003, p. 12).

5. Prior Knowledge

Possessing prior knowledge about the world, aspects such as culture, linguistics, and subject matter facilitate comprehension of the text (Pang et al., 2003, p. 13). Providing students with texts that consider their prior knowledge, developmental stage, and interests can positively influence their reading skills (Pang et al., 2003, p. 13). Results of Chen and Graves' study (1995, cited in Grabe, 2004, p. 50) confirm that providing students with background knowledge activation tasks leads to better comprehension. Also, introducing students to the topic of the text by asking them concept questions allows for a better and easier understanding of it (Pang et al., 2003, p. 13).

6. Comprehension

Reading comprehension is understanding and constructing the meaning of the text. It requires background knowledge, vocabulary, thinking, and reasoning (Pang et al., 2003, p. 14). There are some practices that can improve comprehension, for instance, providing instruction that focuses on concepts and vocabulary, or building students' background knowledge (Pang et al., 2003, p. 14). Modelling actions, such as asking questions, identifying the main ideas, and using prior knowledge can also be used (Pang et al., 2003, p. 14). It is advisable to use a combination of different methods to practice comprehension, among them prior knowledge activation, cooperative group learning,

graphic visuals and organizers, questions, and summarizing can be listed (Pang et al., 2003, p. 14; Grabe, 2004, p. 51).

7. Motivation and Purpose

Motivation is a key element in all teaching, and in the context of reading it is connected not only with intrinsic and extrinsic motives but also with the purpose of the text (Pang et al., 2003, p. 15). Grabe (2004, p. 57-58) emphasises the importance of intrinsic (long-term personal interest) motivation as opposed to temporary interest. Schiefele (1999, cited in Grabe 2004, p. 58) found that intrinsic motivation is a predictor of comprehension. Motivation can be achieved by explaining the purpose of the reading, using a variety of types of texts, using authentic materials, choosing texts that are relevant and interesting for the students, and encouraging reading for pleasure (Pang et al., 2003, p. 15).

8. Integration of Reading and Writing

There is a strong connection between reading and writing. Therefore, reading skills should be developed through writing (Pang et al., 2003, p. 16). Writing helps to develop an awareness of letters and print conventions. It also allows the creation of a connection between oral and written language, as well as spelling (Pang et al., 2003, p. 16). There are several methods that can be used to develop writing skills, for instance, writing down oral texts. This can be done either by writing down a student's words and letting them read that or by asking them to write short oral stories (Pang et al., 2003, p. 16).

9. Texts

The adequate choice of the reading text is also particularly important. It should be of the appropriate reading level in the context of grammar, vocabulary, length, and complexity (Pang et al., 2003, p. 17). It should reflect the developmental stage of the child to match their perception of the world and prior knowledge (Pang et al., 2003, p. 17). The topic of the book should also be age and culture appropriate. It should also utilize the interests of the students since it affects motivation in a

positive manner (Pang et al., 2003, p. 17). Moreover, the use of authentic materials is highly advisable (Pang et al., 2003, p. 17).

10. Text Structure

Text structure awareness is proven to increase the comprehension of the text for all levels of learners (Grabe, 2004, p. 52). Text structure can be taught via direct instruction, for instance, by explaining topic sentences, references, sentence-linking phrases, and raising grammar awareness (Grabe, 2004, p. 52). Another practice that can be implemented is using graphic visuals, such as semantic maps, diagrams, graphic organizers, or hierarchical summaries (Grabe, 2004, p. 53). Instruction training can be also realised through providing instruction in reading strategies, such as main idea identification, summarising, and forming questions (Grabe, 2004, p. 53).

11. Assessment

Assessment can be a useful tool when teaching reading. It can provide feedback and measure the progress of the students (Pang et al., 2003, p. 18). The method of assessment should be developmentally appropriate for the level, age, and type of students. The primary practice is listening to students reading aloud to estimate their recognition and fluency (Pang et al., 2003, p. 18). Further, the comprehension of the students should be evaluated. It can be done through questions, which students can answer in writing and orally. In writing it can be checked via extended pieces of writing such as essays, short answers to open-ended questions, or multiple-choice questions (Pang et al., 2003, p. 18).

12. Practice

Students should be given numerous opportunities to practice their reading skills and to progress. The more children read the more their recognition, vocabulary, knowledge, comprehension, and fluency are developed and acquired (Pang et al., 2003, p. 20). Students should have access to various reading materials and should be encouraged to read several types of texts (Pang et al., 2003, p. 20). It is also worth teaching how to choose appropriate materials (Pang et al., 2003, p. 20). Moreover, students should be encouraged to read for pleasure, independently, and extensively, which

can be done by sustained silent reading (Pang et al., 2003, p. 20). Motivating students to read by connecting texts to their hobbies, interests, and goals, can develop their interest in reading and increase the chances for practice (Pang et al., 2003, p. 20).

13. Strategic Reader

To comprehend the text students, need to be instructed on multiple strategies rather than individual ones (Grabe, 2004, p. 53). Learning a range of strategies is more effective than using a single one while reading (Grabe, 2004, p. 53). There are several approaches that combine multiple strategies to improve reading comprehension. Among them those that have "a narrow focus based on a well-specified instructional technique or template" can be distinguished, namely Know, Want to know, Learned (KWL), Experience-Text-Relate (ETR), Question - Answer - Response (QAR), and Direct Reading and Thinking Activities (DR-TA) (Grabe, 2004, p. 54). The second set of approaches "presents a more open framework for instruction in which multiple types of tasks and activities are included" (Grabe, 2004, p. 54). Reciprocal Teaching, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), Direct Explanation, and Questioning of the Author belong there (Grabe, 2004, p. 54). The last set of strategies "provide yet larger curricular frameworks for strategic comprehension instruction, but they also incorporate comprehension instruction activities that go beyond strategy development" (Grabe, 2004, p. 54). There are Transactional Strategies Instruction (TSI) and Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) (Grabe, 2004, p. 54).

14. Curriculum

Effective and coherent curricula that improve reading skills should combine content and comprehension instruction (Grabe, 2004, p. 58). For teaching reading in the L1 context, two curricular approaches have been proven to improve reading skills, Transactional Strategies Instruction (TSI) and Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) (Grabe, 2004, p. 58). TSI provides strategies for content and reading learning in grades I to VI. CORI aims at developing content and reading comprehension through thematic units in grades III to VI (Grabe, 2004, p. 58). Gabe (2014) presents the set of curriculum developmental principles for teaching reading in an L2 setting, which is in

agreement with those used in the L1 setting. The goal of the instruction is the same, to combine content and comprehension instruction (Grabe, 2014, p. 13). Moreover, it is extended to incorporate key component skills and knowledge (Grabe, 2014, p. 13).

2.5 **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors affecting the differences in results of teaching reading in Polish and Spanish primary schools?
2. Which differences in Polish and Spanish educational systems are the most influential in terms of results of teaching reading in both native and foreign (English) languages?
3. What are the strong and weak elements of Polish and Spanish educational systems?
4. Do Polish or Spanish students achieve better results in the standardised native language and English reading tests?

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to compare Polish and Spanish educational systems in terms of teaching reading skills in primary schools. This approach is a positivist position by collecting primary quantitative data from statistical centres on the variables affecting education, educational systems, and students' performance. Then, comparing the data to the information gathered through interviews with teachers, parents, and students of Polish and Spanish primary schools. The observed results are then compared to previous research and literature to obtain conclusions regarding the effectiveness of teaching reading in primary schools.

3.1 Analysis of Data from Statistical Centres on Elements Affecting Education

The data was collected by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, as well as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which is an intergovernmental

economic organisation, along with data collected from the Global Data Lab is analysed. It allows for data collection and comparison with previous research. Such statistical data analysis allows for a collection of quantitative data for further evaluation.

The data gathered on expenditure on education, teacher-pupil ratio, and class size, expected years of schooling and dropout percentage, and age of students in Spain and Poland will be analysed and compared to draw conclusions that interpret these two school systems.

3.1.1 **Detailed Description**

To provide a coherent and reliable analysis of governmental expenditure on education in Spain and Poland, several aspects need to be taken into consideration. First, it is not enough to compare the public expenditure on education as per cent of Gross Domestic Product. These need to be evaluated in the context of the number of students and therefore of spending per student, as well as the total GDP and GDP per capita, as these are also vital elements affecting the results. The public expenditure on education and primary education will be compared, as well as governmental expenditure on educational institutions and primary and lower secondary education institutions, along with public expenditure on education and primary education per pupil/student. Moreover, the value needs to be compared to Euro and purchasing power standard (PPS), since Poland and Spain have different currencies.

The number of students and pupils enrolled in primary education in Spain and Poland is compared based on data from Eurostat. Further, the number of classroom teachers and academic staff in primary education in both countries is presented. Then, the student-teacher ratio is compared. The data providing estimation of class size is also presented.

Expected years of schooling in Poland and Spain need to be compared along with mean years of schooling. Further, an evaluation of children out of school in primary education as well as of the percentage of early leavers from education and training is conducted. Along with that, the structure

of Polish and Spanish Education Systems is conducted to examine the age of students attending certain levels of education.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 **Expenditures**

The expenditures on education in Poland and Spain are compared in the form of tables which present spending on education in general and on primary education. Tables 1 and 2 present expenditures on education as per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In general, there is a decreasing tendency in spending for both Poland and Spain. In 2012 public expenditure on education in Spain was at 4.34% compared to 4.03% in 2018. In Poland, the spending appears higher as it fell from 4.91% in 2012 to 4.62% in 2018. Expenditures on primary education constitute about one-fourth of the public expenditure on education in both countries. These numbers also saw a decreasing tendency. In Spain, they dropped from 1.12% in 2012 to 1.12% in 2018, and in Poland from 1.50% to 1.46% in the same years.

Table 1

Public Expenditure on Education as % of GDP

GEO/TIME	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Spain	4,34	4,18	4,15	4,16	4,10	4,07	4,03
Poland	4,91	4,94	4,91	4,81	4,63	4,56	4,62

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022b

Table 2

Public Expenditure on Primary Education as % of GDP

GEO/TIME	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Spain	1,15	1,13	1,13	1,14	1,14	1,13	1,12
Poland	1,50	1,50	1,54	1,49	1,47	1,44	1,46

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022b

Tables 3 and 4 show public expenditure on education and primary education per pupil/student. The data is presented in Euros, purchasing power standard (PPS), an artificial currency unit, that theoretically "can buy the same amount of goods and services in each country" (Eurostat, 2014), and as a percentage of GDP per capita. From 2013 to 2018 the amount of spending was generally increasing in Spain from €4,779 to €5,271.6. The numbers are much higher in Spain than in Poland, but the tendency is similar. The expenditure increased from €2,570.9 to €3,129.4. The numbers equalize more when compared in terms of PPS. Nonetheless, the growing trend remains. In Spain, the expenditure rose from 5,202.6 PPS in 2013 to 5,763.1 PSS in 2018, and in Poland from 4,499.1 PPS to 5,273.6 PPS in the same years. When compared in terms of percentage of GDP per capita, the numbers steadily decreased in both countries. Between the years 2013 and 2018 they fell from 21.7% to 20.5% in Spain, and from 25.1% to 24.1% in Poland.

The amount of money spent per primary school pupil is lower than the average spending per-pupil in Spain but generally higher in Poland. In Spain, the amount of expenditure was lower than the average by around €763 in the years 2013-2018 and increased from €4,011.4 to €4,509.8. The difference in Poland has a decreasing tendency. In 2013 the expenditure on primary education per pupil/student was higher by €204 than the average and declined to €43 in 2018. In 2013 the expenditure stood at €2,744.9 and in 2018 at €3,172.9. In terms of PPS, the gap between the countries is minimalised. The public expenditure on education per pupil/student in Spain stood at 5,202.6 PPS and increased to 5,763.1 PPS, which is lower by around 850 PPS than the average expenditure per student. In Poland, the same expenditure stood at 4,803.6 PPS in 2013 and 5,345.9 PPS in 2018. In 2013 the expenditure on primary education per pupil/student was higher by 305 PPS than the average and declined to 73 PPS in 2018. When compared in terms of percentage of GDP per capita the numbers steadily decreased in both countries but were higher than the average spending. Between the years 2013 and 2018, they fell from 18.2% to 17.5% in Spain and from 26.8% to 24.5% in Poland.

Table 3

Public Expenditure on Education Per Pupil/Student

VALUE	GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Euro	Spain	4 779,0	4 756,9	4 916,7	5 009,7	5 181,4	5 271,6
	Poland	2 570,9	2 680,3	2 749,4	2 659,9	2 895,0	3 129,4
PPS (Purchasing power standard)	Spain	5 202,6	5 293,9	5 559,0	5 570,6	5 726,4	5 763,1
	Poland	4 499,1	4 678,2	4 898,3	4 786,0	4 939,9	5 273,6
% of GDP per capita	Spain	21,7	21,3	21,1	20,9	20,8	20,5
	Poland	25,1	25,1	24,6	23,9	23,8	24,1

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022c

Table 4

Public Expenditure on Primary Education Per Pupil/Student

VALUE	GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Euro	Spain	4 011,4	3 996,3	4 149,1	4 250,7	4 390,7	4 509,8
	Poland	2 744,9	2 812,0	2 832,4	2 593,1	2 937,2	3 172,3
PPS (Purchasing power standard)	Spain	4 367,0	4 447,4	4 691,1	4 726,6	4 852,6	4 930,2
	Poland	4 803,6	4 908,1	5 046,2	4 665,7	5 011,7	5 345,9
% of GDP per capita	Spain	18,2	17,9	17,8	17,7	17,6	17,5
	Poland	26,8	26,3	25,3	23,3	24,1	24,5

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022c

Governmental expenditures on educational institutions (see Table 5) and on primary and lower secondary educational institutions (see Table 6) in Spain and Poland are compared as a per cent of GDP and as per cent of total public expenditure. These numbers have a decreasing tendency in the years 2012-2018. In Spain, 4.2% of GDP was spent on educational institutions in 2012, whereas in Poland it was 4.7%. The numbers fell to 3.9% in Spain in 2018 and 4.4% in Poland in the same year. Governmental expenditure on educational institutions consisted of 8.7% of total public expenditures

in Spain in 2012 and steadily increased to 9.3% in 2018. In Poland, the tendency was not identical, as the numbers were firmly decreasing from 11.2% in 2012 to 10.7% in 2018.

The situation is similar in the context of primary and lower secondary educational institutions, which consist of around half of the total governmental spending on educational institutions. The expenditure as a per cent of GDP steadily declined from 2% in 2012 in Spain to 1.8% in 2018, and from 2.3% to 2.1% in Poland. The spending as a per cent of total public expenditure firmly increased in Spain from 2012 to 2018 from 4.1% to 4.4% and decreased in Poland from 5.4% to 5% in the same years.

Table 5

Governmental Expenditure on Educational Institutions

VALUE	GEO/TIME	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
as % of GDP	Spain	4,2	4,0	4,0	4,0	3,9	3,9	3,9
	Poland	4,7	4,8	4,7	4,6	4,5	4,4	4,4
as % of total public expenditure	Spain	8,7	9,0	8,8	9,1	9,3	9,5	9,3
	Poland	11,2	11,4	11,1	11,1	10,8	10,6	10,7

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022a

Table 6

Governmental Expenditure on Primary and Lower Secondary Educational Institutions

VALUE	GEO/TIME	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
as % of GDP	Spain	2,0	1,9	1,9	1,9	1,9	1,8	1,8
	Poland	2,3	2,2	2,2	2,1	2,1	2,0	2,1
as % of total public expenditure	Spain	4,1	4,2	4,1	4,3	4,4	4,5	4,4
	Poland	5,4	5,4	5,3	5,2	5,2	4,9	5,0

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022a

3.2.2 **Teacher-pupil Ratio and Class Size**

In the years 2013 to 2019 Spain saw an increase in the number of students enrolled in primary education (see Table 7). The numbers steadily grow from 2,934,648 in 2013 to 3,038,332 in 2019.

During the same period, the numbers were fluctuating in Poland. The lowest number of students enrolled was 2,152,655 in 2014 and the highest was 2,480,793 in 2016. The mean difference in the number of students enrolled in Spain and Poland is around 724,374. The highest difference was 807,971 in 2014, and the lowest is 546,958 in 2016.

Table 7

Pupils and Students Enrolled in Primary Education

GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spain	2 934 648	2 960 626	3 010 404	3 027 751	3 042 396	3 043 396	3 038 332
Poland	2 160 861	2 152 655	2 306 102	2 480 793	2 296 529	2 277 483	2 312 509

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2019c

Table 8 presents the number of classroom teachers and academic staff in primary education in the years 2013 to 2019. The number of teachers steadily increased in Spain from 220,323 in 2013 to 235,723 in 2019. In Poland, the numbers fluctuated through the years. The lowest number of teachers stood at 211,201 in 2014 and the highest number stood at 283,469 in 2018. Since 2018, there have been more teachers in Polish primary schools than in Spanish; even though the number of enrolled students is lower.

Table 8

Classroom Teachers and Academic Staff in Primary Education

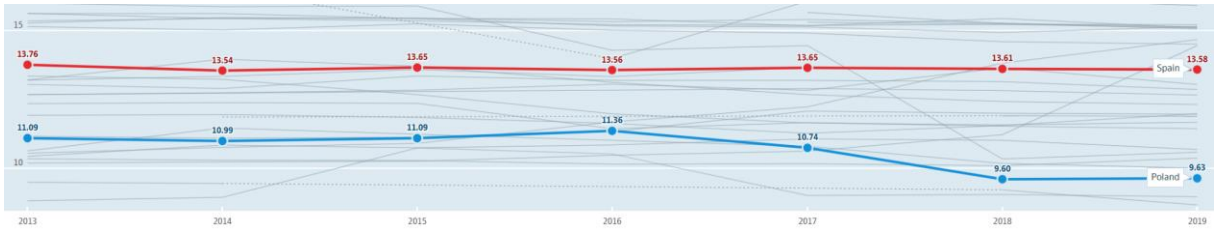
GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spain	220 323	226 066	228 299	233 065	231 683	233 424	235 723
Poland	211 238	211 201	219 826	229 490	225 581	283 469	253 077

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2019a

Figure 3 shows the students per teaching staff ratio in primary education in accordance with OECD data. The ratio remains similar in Spain and stands at about 13.6 in the years 2013 to 2019. In Poland, the ratio fluctuates more in the same years and was the highest in 2016 and stood at 11.36, and the lowest in 2018 at 9.6. The ratio is higher in Spain which goes along with the analysis of students enrolled and teachers working in primary school settings.

Figure 3

Students per Teaching Staff Ratio in Primary Education



Note. Adapted from OECD, 2022

Table 9 presents the data on average class size in primary schools in Poland and Spain in the years 2003 to 2012. The class size in Spain did not change much between these years, as it fluctuated between 20.7 and 21.4 students, and the highest number was noted in 2012. In Poland, the class size steadily decreased during the years, from 20.6 to 18.4. The lack of more accurate data is a limitation. However, it seems that there is an increasing tendency in Spain and decreasing in Poland.

Table 9

Average Class Size in Primary Schools, ISCED 1

GEO/TIME	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Spain	20,8	20,7	20,8	20,7	20,8	21,0	21,1	21,2	21,3	21,4
Poland	20,6	20,4	20,4	20,1	19,6	19,0	18,7	18,6	18,3	18,4

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2022d

3.2.3 **Expected Years of Schooling and Dropout Percentage**

The tables below present the expected (see Table 10) and mean (see Table 11) years of schooling in Poland and Spain in years 2013 to 2019. Expected years of schooling are higher in Spain than in Poland by around 1.5 years. The mean years in Spain are 17.8 and 16.5 in Poland. Nevertheless, the mean years of schooling are lower in Spain than in Poland. The numbers in both countries saw steady growth. They increased from 9.5 to 10.3 in Spain, and from 12.1 to 12.5 in Poland in years 2013 to 2019.

Table 10

Expected Years of Schooling

GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spain	17.60	17.60	17.80	17.80	17.90	17.90	17.60
Poland	16.30	16.00	16.10	16.40	16.40	16.40	16.30

Note. Adapted from Global Data Lab, 2022

Table 11

Mean Years of Schooling

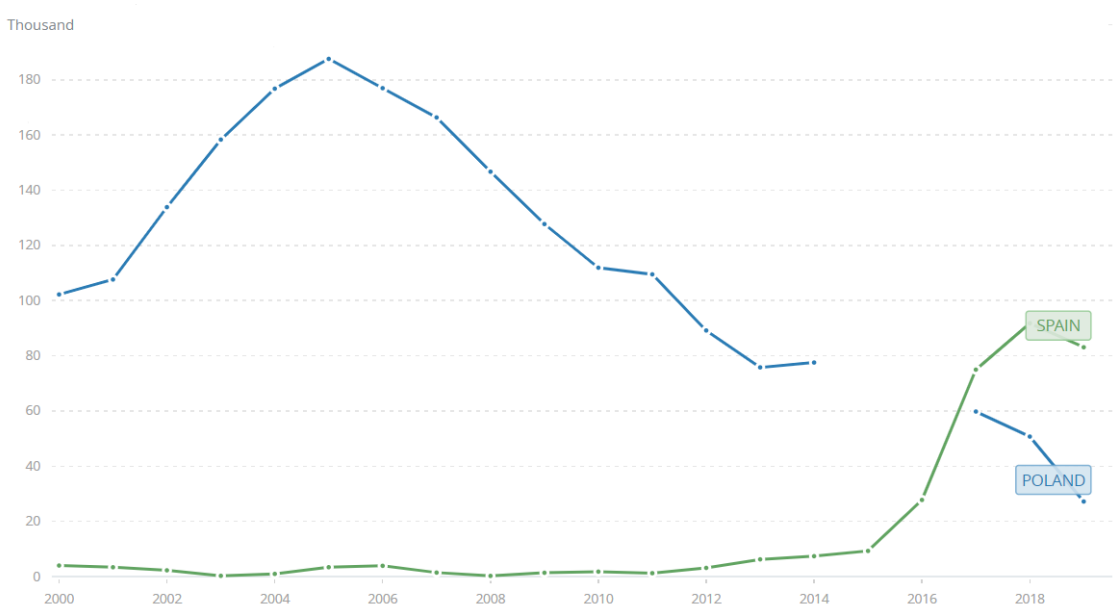
GEO/TIME	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Spain	9.500	9.800	10.00	10.10	10.20	10.30	10.30
Poland	12.10	12.10	12.20	12.30	12.30	12.30	12.50

Note. Adapted from Global Data Lab, 2022

Figure 4 presents the number of children out of school in Poland and Spain from 2000 to 2019. Poland saw an increase in the number of children out of school from the year 2000 to 2005. The peak was in the year 2005 when the number stood at 187,585. Since then, the numbers drastically decreased to 27,189 in 2019. The situation is different in Spain. From the year 2000 to 2012, the numbers remained steady. From the year 2012 to 2019 they increased suddenly and reached a peak in the year 2018, with 91,786 children out of primary education.

Figure 4

Children out of School in Primary Education



Note. Adapted from The World Bank, 2021

Table 12 shows the percentage of early leavers of education and training in the years 2011-2020 in Spain and Poland. The gap between the countries is considerable and stands at around 15%. The numbers in Poland remain steady at around 5.3%. Spain saw a decrease in the percentage of early leavers of school from 26.3% in 2011 to 16% in the year 2020.

Table 12

Percentage of Early Leavers from Education and Training

GEO/TIME	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Spain	26,3	24,7	23,6	21,9	20,0	19,0	18,3	17,9	17,3	16,0
Poland	5,6	5,7	5,6	5,4	5,3	5,2	5,0	4,8	5,2	5,4

Note. Adapted from Eurostat, 2019b

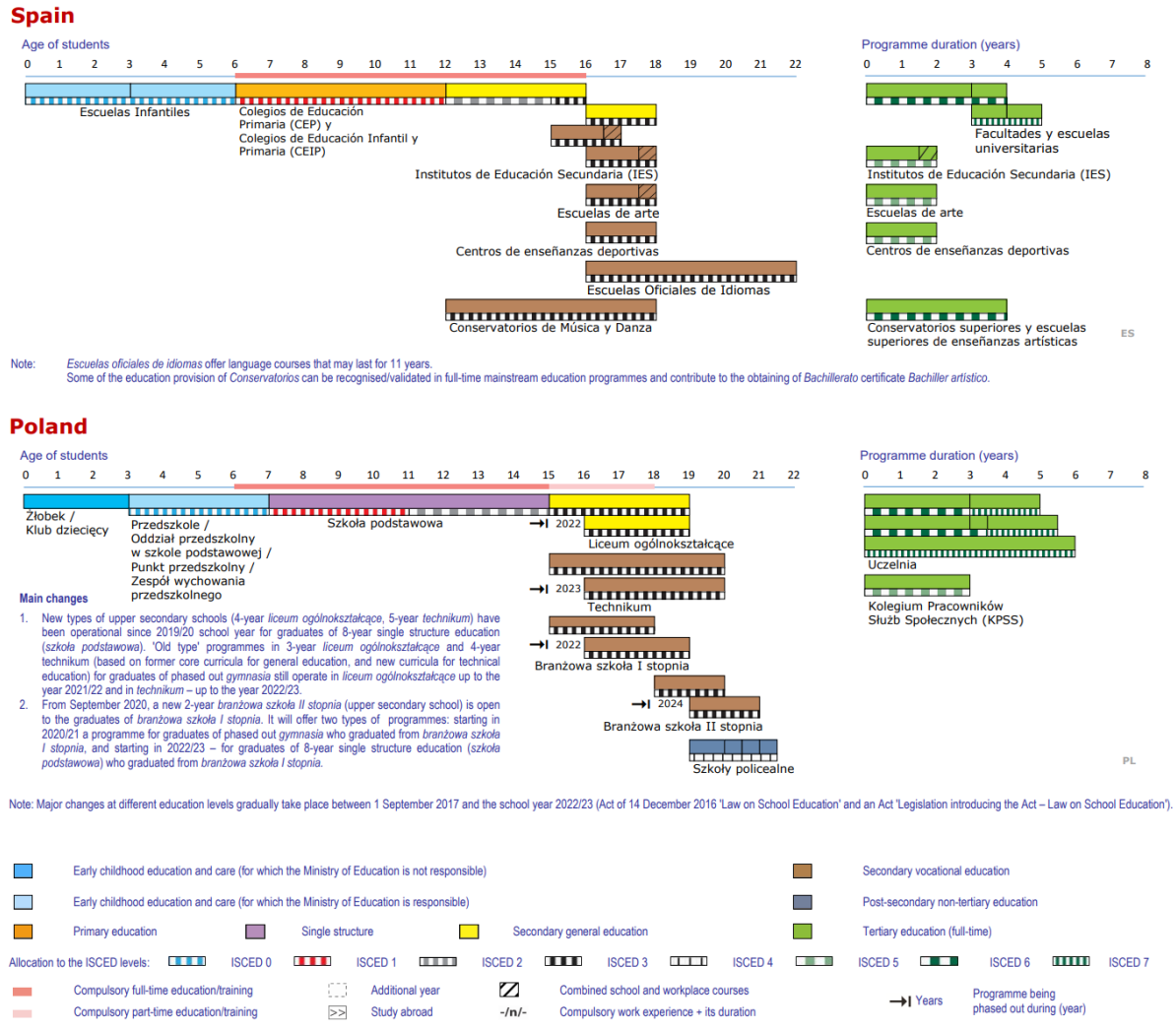
3.2.4 **Age of Students**

As seen in Figure 5 the expected age of students at certain educational levels differs in Spain and Poland. In Spain, compulsory education begins in primary school at the age of six and ends at the age of sixteen. Children finish primary school at the age of twelve and begin secondary general

education (ISCED 2 and 3) followed by secondary vocational training. In Poland, students begin compulsory full-time education at the age of six and finish at 15. Then, they complete compulsory part-time education till the age of eighteen. Compulsory education starts as one year of pre-primary education (ISCED 0). Then, children enter a single structured primary school that lasts eight-year, from the age of seven to the age of fifteen (ISCED 1 and 2). Afterwards, students choose between secondary general or vocational education.

Figure 5

The Structure of the Polish and Spanish Education Systems



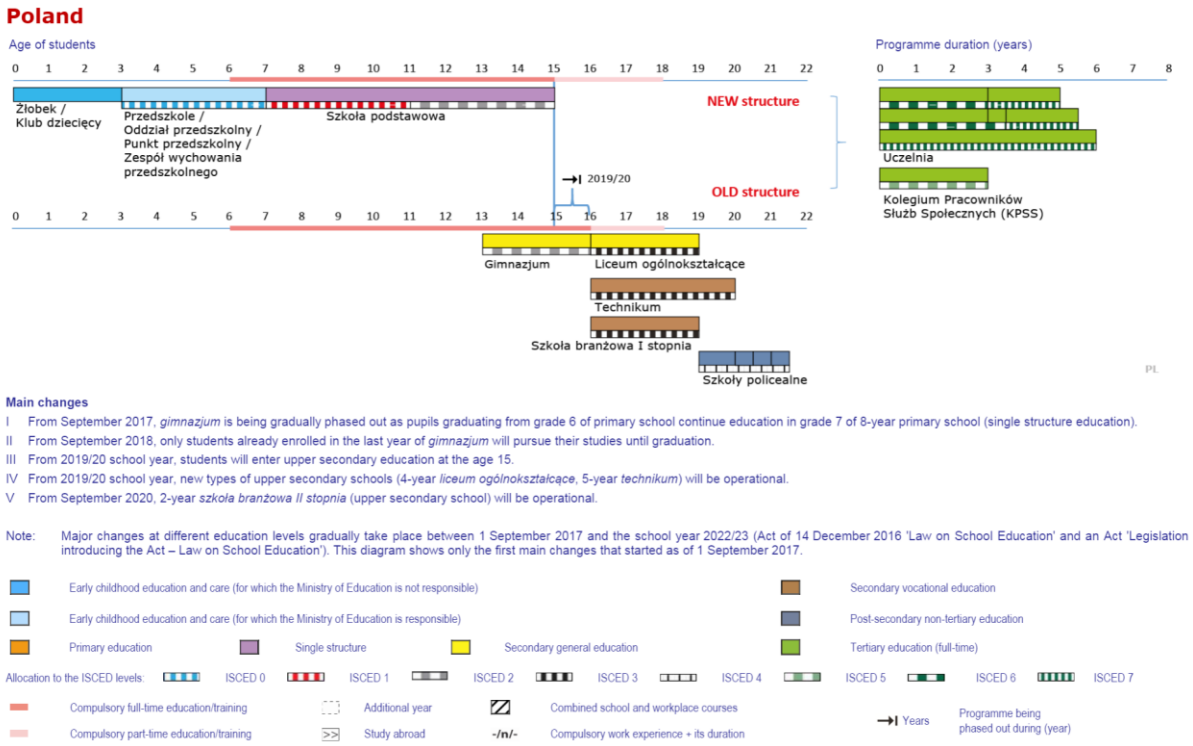
Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2020, p. 26

This structure of the Polish education system has been in force since the 2019/2020 school year. Figure 6 presents the changes in the Polish education system. In 2013 a reform was introduced,

meant to gradually lower the compulsory age of schooling. In 2015 all six-year-olds began compulsory schooling (Eurydice, 2015, p. 22). As of September 2016, compulsory education in primary schools again began at the age of seven and admission of 6-year-olds has been left for parents to decide (Eurydice, 2016, p. 23). In 2017 the school reform affecting the age of students at certain levels of education began. The current single structure primary school consisting of ISCED 1 and 2 was previously divided into primary school (ISCED 1) and *gymnasium* (secondary general education, ISCED 2). Students entered primary school at the age of six or seven, following changes in the years 2013-2016, and finished it at the age of thirteen. Then, they entered the *gymnasium* and ended it at the age of sixteen, which led to entering either secondary general or secondary vocational education.

Figure 6

Changes in the Polish Education System



Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2018, p. 23

3.3 Analysis of Education Systems

By analysing the data collected by Eurydice, a network that publishes raptors and articles related to the field of education, as well as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) quantitative and qualitative data on education systems in Spain and Poland can be collected.

The data gathered on elements building education systems, such as their structure, key features, organisation of school time, instruction time, curriculum, teaching methods and materials, as well as assessment and evaluation will be analysed and compared to present the main differences in the approach to teaching in both countries.

3.3.1 **Detailed Description**

To analyse and compare the Polish and Spanish education systems several elements need to be considered. The structure of the systems is to be evaluated with a focus on compulsory education. Further key features of Polish and Spanish education systems will be compared. The organisation of the school time will be evaluated with an emphasis on the duration of the school year, the number of school days, the distribution and length of holidays, and the length of summer holidays. Moreover, the minimum instruction time for compulsory education based on grades, subjects, and skills will be compared. Additionally, the typical timetables will be presented. The curriculum of both countries will be presented and evaluated. The focus is to be placed on the competencies, aspects of the curriculum and educational provision. Further, the teaching methods and materials will be evaluated. The overview of techniques of assessment and evaluation is to be presented. The analysis is based on the data gathered by Eurydice and OECD.

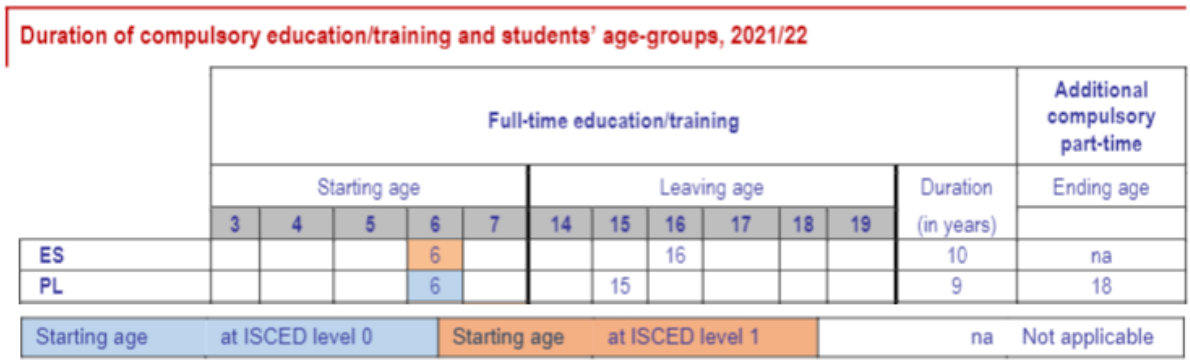
3.4 Results

3.4.1 **Structure of Polish and Spanish Education Systems**

Structure of the education system consists of compulsory and additional years of schooling. Figure 7 focuses on the duration of compulsory education in both countries and emphasises the beginning and end of that period. In both countries, full-time compulsory education starts at the age of six. In Spain, it is at ISCED level 1 and in Poland at ISCED level 0. Leaving age of this type of schooling is sixteen in Spain and fifteen in Poland. However, after that, Polish students need to attend additional compulsory part-time education until the age of eighteen.

Figure 7

Duration of Compulsory Education



Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2021c, p. 4

Figure 5 presents the current structure of education systems in Poland and Spain. From the age of zero until six, children in Spain can attend Escuelas Infantiles (ISCED 0), and then the compulsory education (ISCED 1) begins at the age of six. At the age of twelve children start secondary general education which is obligatory till the age of sixteen and consists of ISCED 2 (12-15 years old) and ISCED 3 (15-16). At the end of this stage of schooling, students receive *Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*, which is an official qualification that gives them access to upper secondary education or to the labour market (Eurydice, 2019). Students in secondary education high schools (aged 15 to 17) are offered basic level training cycles, which allow them to receive the previously mentioned diploma and the qualification of Basic Technician in the corresponding

specialisation (Eurydice, 2019). Upper secondary education (ISCED 3) consists of two choices *bachillerato* (general education) and intermediate vocational training (vocational education). It is attended by students aged 16 to 18 and lasts two years (Eurydice, 2019). Higher education compromises university and vocational studies. There are four levels of qualifications for higher education, *Técnico Superior* (Advanced Technician, ISCED 5), *Grado* (Bachelor, ISCED 6), *Máster* (Master's, ISCED 7), and *Doctor* (PhD, level 8) (Eurydice, 2017e; BOE, 2011). Adult education (EPA) "comprises different types of education offered by the educational, labour and local administrations in very different types of institutions" and is addressed to people over 18 years (Eurydice 2019). Additionally, the Spanish education system offers specialised language, artistic, and sports education (Eurydice, 2019)

In Poland (see Figure 5) children aged zero to three can attend *żłobek* (crèche) or *klub dziecięcy* (kids club) which is a type of early childhood education and care for which the Ministry of Education is not responsible. Children aged three to six may attend a nursery school (*przedszkole)* or pre-school. Pre-school education is optional until the age of six when it becomes obligatory. Primary schools are organised as single structure education (ISCED 1 and 2) and last 8 years, from the age of seven till the age of fifteen. It consists of two stages, early school education in grades I-III (ISCED 1) and teaching by subject in grades IV-VIII (ISCED 2) (Eurydice, 2017a). At the end of the last grade, students take an obligatory external examination, which together with end school achievements influence admission to secondary education (Eurydice, 2017a). Secondary education (ISCED 3) is part-time compulsory up to the age of eighteen. There are four types of institutions that students can attend. They differ in the terms of length of instruction and examination type. *Liceum ogólnokształcące* is a 4-year general secondary school, which ends with an external secondary school leaving examination (*egzamin maturalny*), that gives access to higher education (Eurydice, 2017a). *Technikum* is a 5-year technical secondary school. Students may the *Matura* exam and exams confirming vocational qualifications in each occupation (Eurydice, 2017a). There are two types of vocational schools *szkoła branżowa I stopnia* - 3-year Stage I sectoral vocational school and *szkoła*

branżowa II stopnia - 2-year Stage II sectoral vocational school (Eurydice, 2017a). Both schools end with vocational examinations (they can be conducted either during the course or at the end of it) to receive a diploma confirming the qualifications (Eurydice, 2017a). Moreover, graduates of the new Stage II sectoral vocational school are also allowed to take the *Matura* exam (Eurydice, 2017a). *Szkoła policealna* is a post-secondary education that is considered a part of secondary education and is intended for graduates of general secondary schools who want to obtain vocational qualifications (Eurydice, 2017a). There are two types of Higher Education Institutions, *uczelnia akademicka* (university-type) and *uczelnia zawodowa* (non-university type). They both offer first-cycle, second-cycle, and long-cycle programmes; however, only *uczelnia akademicka* offers third-cycle programmes (Eurydice, 2017a). First-cycle programmes lead to two types of degrees, *licencjat* and *inżynier* (both are equivalent to Bachelor). To enter second-cycle programmes that lead to the *magister* (Master's degree), one needs to be a holder of the Bachelor's degree (Eurydice, 2017a). Some fields offer long-term Master's programmes. Holders of Master's degrees can access third-cycle (doctoral) studies which end with a doctoral degree (Eurydice, 2017a). Moreover, adult education is open to people over 18 years of age who wish to complete any level of education or acquire new skills or qualifications (Eurydice, 2017a).

3.4.2 **Key Features**

3.4.2.1 Key Features of the Spanish Education System

Spanish education system is based on The Organic Law on Education 2/2006 (LOE), which was modified in 2020 (LOMLOE). This reform aims for the best interest of children and their rights, promotes gender equality and individualisation of learning, as well as sustainable development and continuous improvement of schools (Eurydice, 2019). Spanish educational system is a complex structure that compromises "the education authorities, education professionals and other public and private actors who perform regulatory, financing or service provision functions for the exercise of the right to education included in the 1978 Spanish Constitution; those entitled to the right to education;

and the set of relations, structures, measures and actions being implemented to ensure it" (Eurydice 2019). The Spanish system can be characterised by decentralisation since the General State Administration and the Departments of Education (authorities of the autonomous communities) share the competencies. Moreover, schools are autonomous of their organisational, managerial, and pedagogical resources (Eurydice, 2019). Another characteristic of this system is the fact that the education community is engaged in the organisation, governance, and evaluation of schools.

3.4.2.1 Key Features of the Polish Education System

In the past 30 years the Polish education system has undergone extensive changes. Due to the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 a reform has begun. The changes can be seen in all aspects, such as structure, organisation and management, and curriculum (Eurydice, 2017a). The latest reform (2017/18-2022/23) introduced a lot of modifications, especially in terms of the school structure. As a result of these transformations introduced throughout the years, the system has developed some specific features. The Polish Education System is a "combination of centralised governance and decentralised school administration" (Eurydice, 2017a). External examinations are conducted at the end of compulsory education (grade VIII of single-structure primary school) and at the end of upper secondary schools. The results of the examination influence the choice of the educational and vocational path (Eurydice, 2017a). The teaching profession is defined in the separate legislation, which "defines rules of admission, duties, remuneration and dismissal of teachers and their career path" (Eurydice, 2017a). Both in school and university education the public sector dominates over the private one (Eurydice, 2017a).

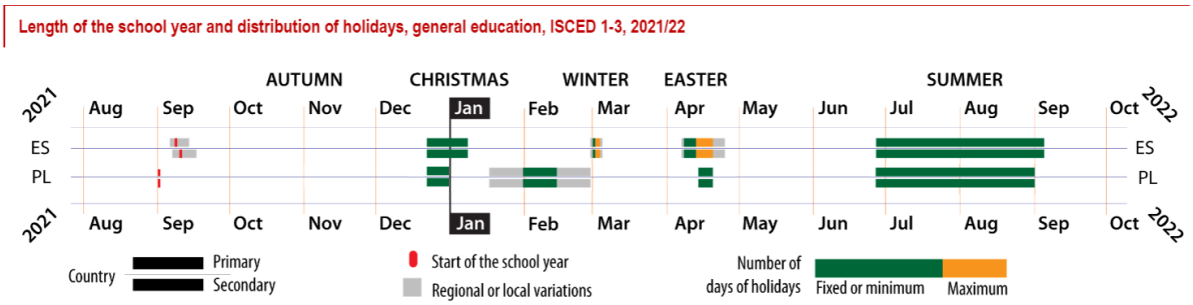
3.4.3 **The Organisation of School Time**

Organisation and length of the school year, distribution of holidays, and the number of school days affect the curriculum. These are regulated by the governments and may vary in certain regions of the country. Figure 20 presents the length of the school year along with the distribution of holidays in Spain (ES) and Poland (PL). As can be seen, the school year starts in both countries in September.

It occurs a bit earlier in Poland and is the same in all regions, which is the 1st of September. In Spain, this date is regionally regulated and oscillates from the 5th and 13th of September (Eurydice, 2021b, p. 53). The school year ends in both countries at the end of June. In Spain, it varies from the 21st to the 29th and in Poland, it is always the 24th. Therefore, summer holidays tend to last longer in Spain than in Poland. Christmas break in Poland starts on the 23rd and ends on the 31st. In Spain, it lasts at least 2 weeks between the 22nd of December and the 7th of January (Eurydice, 2021b, p. 53). Easter break is dependent on the date of the holiday. In the 2021/22 school year, it lasts between 5 and 12 days in the period between the 7th and 24th of April (Eurydice, 2021b, p. 53). In Poland, it occurs from the 14th to the 19th of April (Eurydice, 2021b, p. 46).

Figure 8

Length of the School Year and Distribution of Holidays

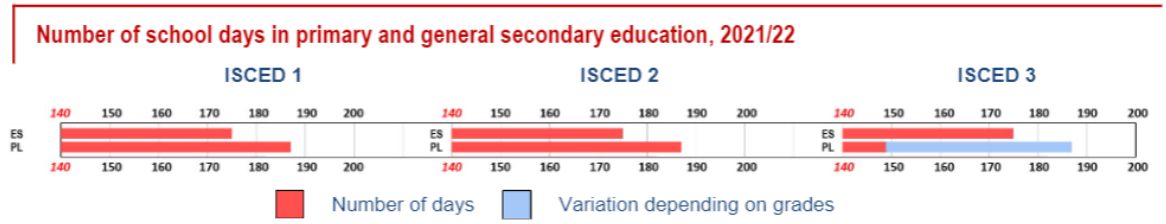


Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2021b, p. 6-7

As seen in Figure 21, the number of school days in primary and general secondary education in the 2021/22 school year is different between Spain and Poland. Spanish students in all three ISCED levels attend school for a total number of 175 days. In Poland, the numbers are higher. In ISCED 1 and 2 students attend school for 187 days. For the final grade of ISCED 3, there are 149 school days since they end the school year on the 29th of April (Eurydice, 2021b, p. 7, 46).

Figure 9

A Number of School Days in Primary and General Secondary Education



Note. Adapted from Eurydice 2021b, p. 7

3.4.4 **Instruction Time**

Table 13 presents the minimum instruction time in hours for the compulsory curriculum for ISCED 1 in Poland and Spain. In Spain, the number stands at 4,750, which is higher than in Poland which stands at 2,268.

Table 13

Minimum Instruction Time in Hours for the Compulsory Curriculum for ISCED 1

	Spain (ES)	Poland (PL)
ISCED 1	4 750	2 268

Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2021a, p. 10

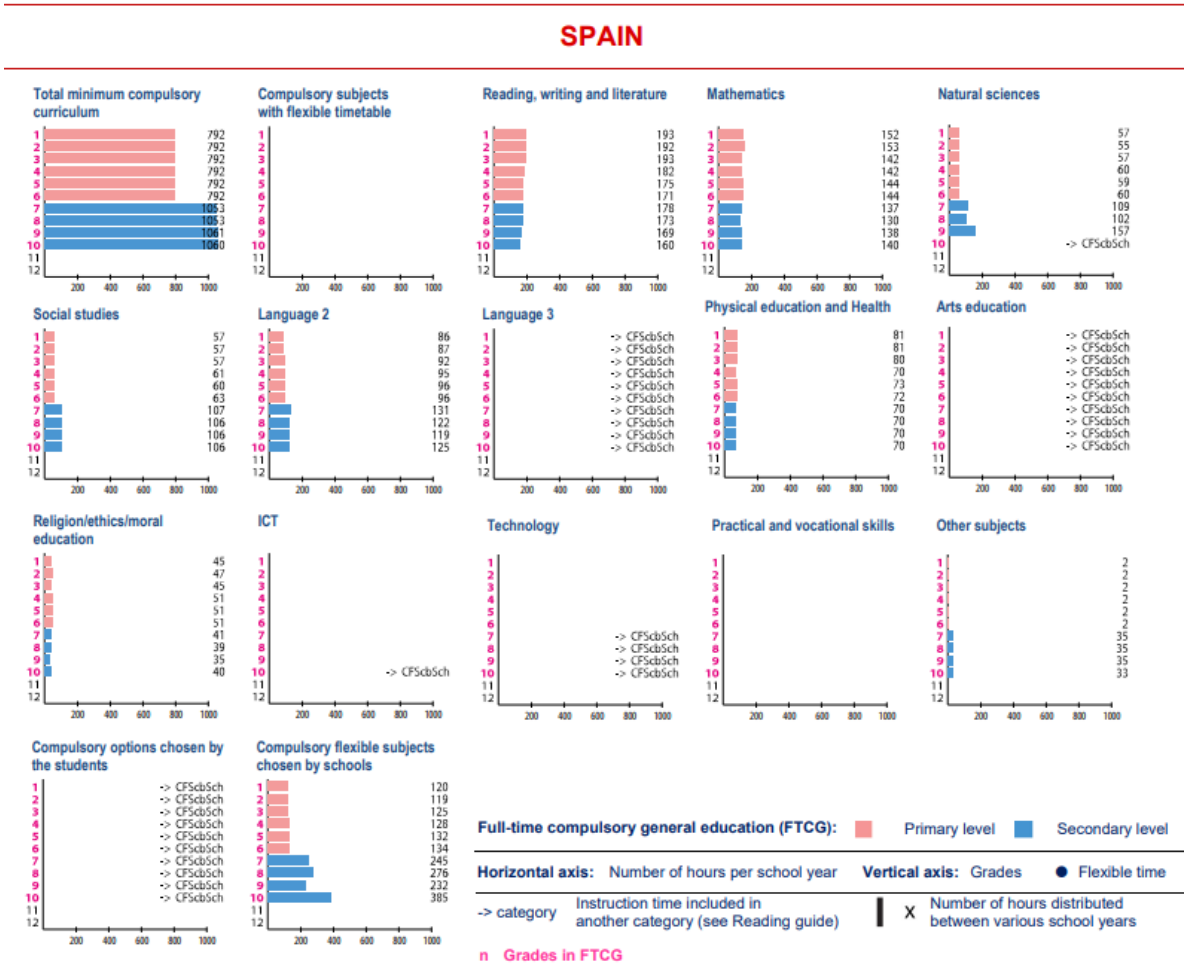
Figure 10 presents several diagrams regarding instruction time in Spain for each grade in ISCED 1 and 2. The total minimum instruction time for compulsory education stands at 792 hours for grades I-VI and increases to 1,053 for grades VII-X. The biggest amount of time is spent on teaching reading, writing, and literature. In grades I-III it is at around 193 hours and unevenly decreases in further grades, from 182 in grade IV to 160 in grade X. In ISCED 1 students spend from 142 to 153 hours studying mathematics. The number of hours distributed for natural sciences is at around 55 to 60 in ISCED 1 and increases almost twice in ISCED 2. An analogous situation occurs in the context of social studies. However, the devoted time in grades VII-X is at around 106 hours. The number of hours spent on teaching a second language increases from eighty-six in grade I to ninety-six in grade VI. Then, in ISCED 2 the lowest time is spend on L2 is 119 hours in grade IX and

the highest in grade VII at 131 hours. Time devoted to physical education and health drops from eighty-one in grades I and II to ten in grades VII-X. Students spend between 35 to 51 hours on religion, ethics, or moral education. Moreover, there are 2 hours devoted to other subjects in ISCED 1 and 35 hours in ISCED 2. Additionally, there is a considerable number of hours devoted to compulsory flexible subjects chosen by the school among which third language, arts education, ICT, technology, or compulsory options chosen by the students can be distinguished. For grades I-VI the hours increase from around 120 to 134. Further, in grades VII-X they are the lowest in grade IX and stand at 232, and the highest in grade X, at 385.

In accordance with the division of Spain, the timetables may vary in different regions. This is due to local government laws and regulations (Eurydice, 2019). Moreover, the provided instruction time will be changing due to the LOMLOE (Organic Law Amending the Organic Law of Education) that came into force on January 19, 2021 (Rodrigues, 2021).

Figure 10

Instruction Time in Spain, Diagrams



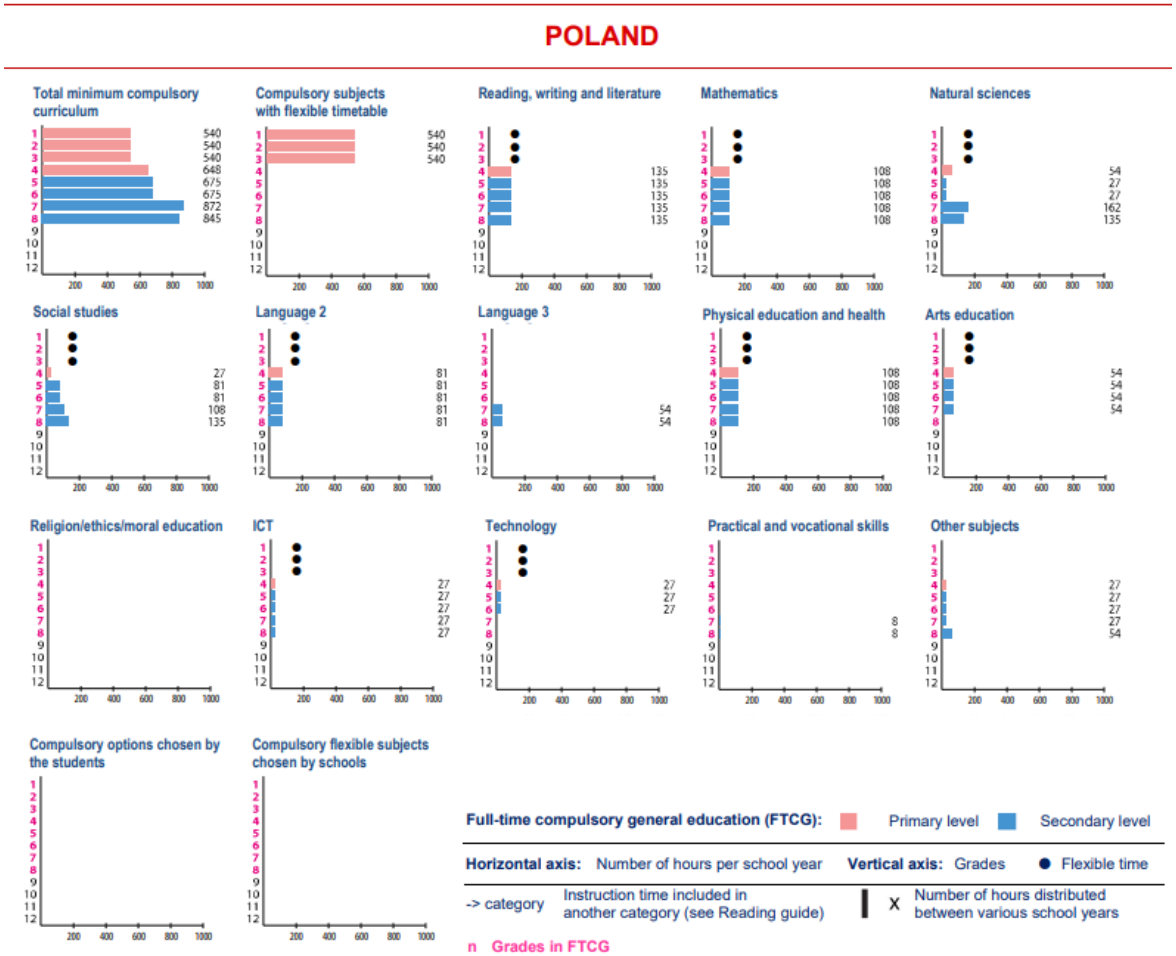
Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2021a, p. 44

Figure 11 shows several diagrams presenting instruction time in Poland for each grade in ISCED 1 and 2. The total minimum instruction time for compulsory education stands at 540 hours for grades I-III, at 648 in grade IV, which further increases to 675 in grades V-VI, then it again grows to 872 in grade VII, and decreases to 845 for grade VIII. In grades I-III students are taught only compulsory subjects with a flexible timetable. Similarly, to Spain, the largest amount of time is spent on teaching reading, writing, and literature. In grades IV-VIII it is at 135 hours. In grades, IV-VIII students spend 108 hours studying mathematics. The number of hours distributed for natural sciences is fifty-four in grade IV, then it decreases to twenty-seven in grades V-VI. Then, it increases to 162 in grade VII and drops to 135 in grade VIII. The time devoted to social studies in grades IV-VIII

grows from 27 to 135. The number of hours spent on teaching a second language is eighty-one in grades IV-VIII. Also, in grades VII-VIII students spend 54 hours studying a third language. Time devoted to physical education is at 108 in grades IV-VIII. Students in grades IV-VII spend 54 hours on arts education. Moreover, there are 27 hours devoted to ICT in grades IV-VII, and for technology in grades IV-VI. Students in grades VII and VIII have 8 hours of practical and vocational skills. Additionally, there are 27 hours devoted to other subjects in grades IV-VII and fifty-four in grade VIII.

Figure 11

Instruction Time in Poland, Diagrams



Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2021a, p. 59

3.4.5 **Curriculum**

3.3.5.1 Spain

Spanish curriculum is based on the European Union's recommendations for incorporating basic competencies into education. There are eight key competencies: (1) literacy competence; (2) multilingual competence; (3) mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, and engineering; (4) digital competence; (5) personal, social, and learning to learn competence; (6) citizenship competence; (7) entrepreneurship competence; (8) cultural awareness and expression competence (Eurydice, 2017f). Basic aspects of the curriculum are set out by the Government. It is done through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP), after consulting the autonomous communities (Eurydice, 2017f). This compulsory minimum teaching makes up 60 per cent of school timetables, and 50 per cent in schools located in autonomous communities with co-official language (Eurydice, 2017f). The contents of the curriculum are organised into subjects and further divided into three blocks - core subjects, specific subjects, and subjects of autonomous configuration (Educagob, n.d.). Among the core subjects Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Spanish Language and Literature, Math and Spanish can be distinguished (Educagob, n.d.). Specific subjects, such as Physical Education, Religion or Social and Civic Values, Artistic education, and Second Foreign Language, allow greater autonomy of timetables and contents of the subjects (Educagob, n.d.). The last block of subjects allows for a higher level of autonomy since educational institutions can offer individually designed subjects, among which are the extensions of core or specific subjects. The Co-official Language and Literature classes belong to this category (Educagob, n.d.). Due to this organisation schools actively participate in developing, completing, and adapting the curriculum to the needs of their students. It also influences the flexibility and uniqueness of timetables. The timetables need to be following the laws as described in the "Instruction Time" part (see Figure 18).

There are two kinds of timetables in Spanish schools (Spainwise, 2016). In one of them, classes being at 9 AM and finish at 5 PM, with a two-hour break at around 1 PM (*jornada partida*).

In the second one, classes begin at 9 AM and last till 3 PM, without the break in the middle of the day (*jornada continua*).

3.4.5.2 Poland

According to Eurydice (2017c) the score of single-structured primary education "is determined by two elements regulated by the national legislation: the core curriculum and outline timetables". The core curriculum establishes a list of teaching and learning aims, as well as knowledge, skills, and competencies that pupils are expected to require at certain levels of education (Eurydice, 2017c). Schools must follow the national core curriculum which is implemented through school curricula. School curricula aim to define how the imposed aims and contents are implemented as a part of lessons. A curriculum can be developed by the teachers, chosen by the teacher from the set of curricula already available, or developed by other authors and adjusted by the teacher (Eurydice, 2017c). The learning outcomes of the curriculum are assessed based on the external eighth-grader exam at the end of primary school

The outline timetable establishes the weekly number of hours for each grade (or semester) in particular classes (Eurydice, 2017c). As seen before, the primary education system in Poland is divided into two stages. The aim of stage one is to provide students with a smooth transition from preschool to school. In this stage, the lessons are based on compulsory integrated teaching, which combines the Polish language, social education, natural sciences, mathematics, technology, modern foreign language, music education, art education, and ICT education. The timetable is prepared by the teacher and is tailored to match pupils' needs and the total time is 60 hours per week in the 3 years. Additionally, 3 hours per week are given to physical education. In accordance with that, students spend around 21 hours weekly in schools, which equals to around 4 hours daily.

The minimum weekly number of teaching/class hours is different for each subject and varies throughout grades (see Table 14). There are 5 hours per week spent on the Polish language in grades IV to VIII. 3 hours in the same grades spend on modern foreign language classes. Plus, additionally,

2 hours per week in grades VII to VIII for a foreign language which is the second language of tuition in bilingual primary schools. For music and art - 1 hour per week is assigned in grades IV to VII. For history, there is 1 hour devoted to IV grade and two in grades V-VIII. Civic education is taught for 2 hours per week in grade VIII. Similarly, natural sciences are taught for 2 hours per week in grade IV. In grades, V, VI, and VII geography is taught for 1 hour, and 2 hours in grade VII. It is the same for biology classes. 2 hours per week are devoted to each chemistry and physics in grades VII and VIII. 4 hours per week are spent on mathematics in grades IV to VIII. 1 hour weekly is devoted to computer science / ICT in the same grades. Technology is taught for 1 hour per week in grades IV to VI. 4 hours per week are spent on physical education in grades IV to VIII. In grade VIII students take a safety education class once a week. Moreover, class hours or hours with the class tutor take place once a week in grades IV to VIII. In total students spend 24 hours weekly in school in grade IV, twenty-five in grades V and VI, thirty-two in grade VII (plus two additional foreign language classes), and thirty-one in grade VII (plus two additional foreign language classes). In grades IV-VI students spend around 5 hours daily in school, in grades VII-VIII around 6.5.

Table 14

Minimum Weekly Number of Teaching/Class Hours in Grades IV To VIII

Minimum weekly number of teaching/class hours in grades IV to VIII						
No.	Compulsory classes	Weekly number of hours by grade				
		IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
1	Polish language	5	5	5	5	5
2	Modern foreign language	3	3	3	3	3
3	Second modern foreign language	-	-	-	2(+2)*	2(+2)*
4	Music	1	1	1	1	-
5	Art education	1	1	1	1	-
6	History	1	2	2	2	2
7	Civic education	-	-	-	-	2
8	Natural sciences	2	-	-	-	-
9	Geography	-	1	1	2	1
10	Biology	-	1	1	2	1
11	Chemistry	-	-	-	2	2
12	Physics	-	-	-	2	2
13	Mathematics	4	4	4	4	4
14	Computer science / ICT	1	1	1	1	1

15	Technology	1	1	1	-	-
16	Physical education	4	4	4	4	4
17	Safety education	-	-	-	-	1
18	Hours with the class tutor	1	1	1	1	1
Total for compulsory classes and hours with the class tutor		24	25	25	32(+2)*	31(+2)*
Hours to be allocated by the school head		4				
Total		141 (+4)*				

Note. Adapted from Eurydice, 2017c

When comparing timetables from several Polish primary schools (Sp2Dobczyce, 2022, Spnr1Dobczyce, 2021, Sp76Warszawa, 2021) classes in grades I-III generally start at 8 AM, and end between 12 PM and 2 PM. In higher grades, classes usually start at 8 AM and finish between 2 PM and 4 PM.

3.4.6 **Teaching Methods and Materials**

3.4.6.1 Spain

Methodological principles established by MEFP guide teaching practices in Spanish primary schools (Eurydice, 2017f). They focus on developing not only knowledge but also social, personal, and emotional skills. The principles emphasize the importance of educational inclusion, and personalisation of teaching and learning to prevent learning difficulties and allow for participation (Eurydice, 2017f). Another characteristic is the significance of developing all learning skills - reading, oral and vocal expressions, communication, and digital competence. To add to that, reading is promoted by devoting daily time to reading in class (Eurydice, 2017f). Moreover, social problems such as gender equality, peace, responsible consumption, sustainable development, and health are being taught in all subjects (Eurydice, 2017f). The principles also promote creativity, reflective thinking, scientific and entrepreneurial spirit, problem-solving, autonomy, responsibility, reinforcing self-esteem, as well as emotions and values (Eurydice, 2017f). Also, teaching time includes meaningful projects that incorporate group work (Eurydice, 2017f). The role of Spanish or relevant co-official language in foreign language learning is also stated as it should be used only as support (Eurydice, 2017f).

Based on these rules, schools decide on teaching methods, curricular matters, and didactic resources. Moreover, each teacher can make their own methodological decisions. However, they need to respect rules established by schools and educational authorities (Eurydice, 2017f). Textbooks and other teaching materials do not need to be authorised by the education authorities. However, their content needs to be in line with the laws and need to be appropriate for the students (Eurydice, 2017f). Families pay for textbooks and school materials; however, there are grants, loans, and local aids which support these purchases. (Eurydice, 2017f). MEFP and education authorities emphasise the use of information and communication technologies in the classroom. Through various tools and networks, ICT is promoted as a valuable and accurate medium of teaching and learning (Eurydice, 2017f).

3.4.6.2 Poland

Teachers in Polish primary schools are free to choose methods of teaching. They should depend on classroom variables, such as the size of the class and the equipment available (Eurydice, 2017c). The choice of a textbook is optional, which means that teachers do not need to use a textbook. However, if they do, they need to choose from among the books approved by the Minister of Education (Eurydice, 2017c). Moreover, pupils use publicly funded textbooks. Educational materials and exercise materials can be used as supplements or in replace of the textbook. Materials can be in various forms, such as presentations, additional literature, and notes. Not all primary schools have access to the Internet, which enables the use of some educational resources (Eurydice, 2017c).

3.4.7 **Assessment and Evaluation**

3.4.7.1 Spain

The aim of pupil assessment is to "verify the degree of acquisition of the skills and the achievement of the objectives of primary education" (Eurydice, 2017d). Evaluation criteria are stated in the core curriculum, and they specify what needs to be achieved in each subject (Eurydice, 2017d). The assessable learning standards specify what students need to know and which skills they need to

develop to achieve learning objectives. Moreover, “they must be observable, measurable and assessable, as well as allow for the adjustment of the achievement accomplished” (Eurydice, 2017d). To add to that, they must be designed to “contribute and facilitate the elaboration of comparable and standardized tests” (Eurydice, 2017d). Pupil assessment consists of formative and summative assessments.

Formative assessment is continuous as it takes place throughout the whole learning process. It evaluates students’ learning processes in an individualised manner in order to early notice and diagnose negative mechanisms that with support may be reinforced (Eurydice, 2017d). The Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (MEFP) together with other educational authorities created the basic assessment documents and formal assessment requirements. The communication of assessment results should be provided in writing to the families. It also has no academic value, and the tutor of the class is responsible for forming an objective assessment of each pupil (Eurydice, 2017d). It is advised that diverse assessment instruments are used to adapt to various teaching situations and allow for objective assessment (Eurydice, 2017d).

The summative assessment aims at assessing the level of knowledge and possessed skills in certain subjects. It consists of a diagnostic evaluation at the end of the fourth year and an evaluation at the end of primary education (Eurydice, 2017d). Individualised assessment at the end of the fourth year of primary education is an informative, instructional, and illustrative form of evaluation, which aims at providing the school, teachers, pupils, and their families, as well as the educational community with the progress of education (Eurydice, 2017d). Schools conduct diagnostic assessments which evaluate skills and knowledge acquired by students (Eurydice, 2017d). At the end of primary education, the skills and knowledge of pupils are assessed based on the sample and multi-annual basis (Eurydice, 2017d).

3.4.7.2 Poland

The Polish assessment system is internal and external. The legislative framework is based on the provision of the School Education Art and the regulations of the minister of Education (Eurydice, 2017b).

Internal assessment is conducted separately in each subject by the teacher of this subject. This type of assessment aims to inform students on their progress and level of achievements of new skills and knowledge, provide feedback on their performance, motivate students to study, provide parents with the information on their children's achievements in education, as well as enable teachers to evaluate and improve their methodology (Eurydice, 2017b). Moreover, the results of the assessment collected throughout the school year are considered for the end-of-the-semester and end-of-year assessments. The assessment is based on the requirements, objectives of teaching, and criteria stated by the laws in the core curriculum or by teachers and schools in their own curricula (Eurydice, 2017b). There is a distinction between the requirements of assessing based on the grade in which pupils are. Pupils in grades I to III are assessed at the end of the year only and the marking is descriptive (Eurydice, 2017b). Since grade IV students begin to be graded by the teachers. However, teachers can also provide additional descriptive assessments. Pupils achieving a positive mark (higher than 1) at the end of the school year are promoted to the next grade (Eurydice, 2017b).

External assessment is conducted at the end of primary education in grade VIII. It is a compulsory written exam that assesses the knowledge of students in Polish language, Mathematics, Modern foreign language, and one chosen subject from among Biology, Chemistry, Geography, History, or Physics based on the requirements of the core curriculum (Eurydice, 2017b). The results of the eighth-grader exam do not have any impact on the completion of primary education. However, they influence the administration process for post-primary schools (Eurydice, 2017b).

The promotion of pupils to the next grade is based on the end-of-year assessment. In grades I to III, students are promoted based on the yearly descriptive assessment. The decision on repeating the grade at this stage should be justified by the psychologist and accepted by parents (Eurydice,

2017b). In grades IV to VIII students are promoted if their grade for each subject is higher than ‘unsatisfactory’ (1). In the case of just one ‘unsatisfactory’ grade, students are allowed to take a resit exam. If passed, they are promoted to the next grade. There is also an option to promote the pupil with one ‘unsatisfactory’ grade which is based on the decision of the teaching council (Eurydice, 2017b). Pupils who have not attended more than 50% of compulsory classes and there is no basis for their assessment are allowed to take a qualification exam (Eurydice, 2017b). Pupils with an average end-of-year mark for all subjects higher than 4.75 and a behaviour mark, of very good or higher, complete the grade with a ‘distinction’. Students who complete each grade are awarded standardised certificates. The document’s layout and rules for filling are defined by the Minister of Education (Eurydice, 2017b).

3.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires with teachers of Polish and Spanish primary schools are an additional source of data. By conducting the questionnaires, any gaps in the data regarding teaching reading can be filled. The aim is to provide information on aspects that have not been previously investigated, namely, current class size and classroom environment. Moreover, the other goal of the questionnaires is to examine how teaching reading in both countries is approached by educators.

3.5.1 **Participants**

Questionnaires were conducted among fifteen teachers, ten teachers at primary schools in Poland and five in Spain. They are intended for teachers of a native language (Polish in Poland, and Spanish in Spain) as well as teachers of English as a Foreign Language. Among Polish teachers, half of them teach English, and the other half teach Polish. Two of the teachers teach more than one subject. One teaches English and IT and the other Polish, history, and social studies. In terms of Spanish teachers, 20% teach Spanish and English, 20% English and Science, 20% English, Literacy,

and Science, 20% English, and 20% Spanish and Religion. English is taught by 80% of respondents, and Spanish by 40%.

3.5.2 **Instruments**

The tool chosen to conduct this part of the research is a questionnaire. The two surveys were made electronically via the Google Forms platform in May 2022 and were fully anonymous. One of the questionnaires was aimed at Polish teachers and was written in Polish and English. The other was aimed at Spanish teachers and written in Spanish and English. The questionnaires contain thirty-six open-ended questions and contained the same prompts translated into the appropriate languages.

The topics covered among the questions are the class size, teacher-pupil ratios, and teachers' opinions on class size. Moreover, questions considering the classroom environment are asked, regarding the classroom climate, and any actions taken to ensure a positive climate. The rest of the questions examine the methods and approaches used by the teachers. Among these, the ones used to provide feedback to the students can be named. Further, teachers are asked about teaching reading. The questionnaire aims at checking if their strategies are in accordance with Elizabeth S. Pang, Angaluki Muaka, Elizabeth B. Bernhardt and Michael L. Kamil (2003) and William Grabe's (2004; 2015) set of instructional implications for first and second language reading. Additionally, their views on the curricula are investigated.

3.5.3 **Data Analysis**

The platform used to conduct the questionnaires, which is Google Forms, allows for the analysis of the results. Therefore, no other supporting software was used. The data is qualitative and is to be described in the section below.

3.6 Results

3.6.1 **Class Size**

Out of 10 Polish teachers, one works in two educational institutions, and the rest is employed in one. Generally, teachers teach between two to seven classes. Around 20% of teachers teach in two classes, 10% in three, 20% in 4, another 20% in 5, and 20% in six, 10% teach in seven. The size of the classes varies from 9 to 29. The mean size of the class is around eighteen students, which is the same as the median. Teachers' opinions on the size of the class vary. Some of them claim that classes are optimal, and others claim that they could be less numerous. Four participants reported a number of the perfect class, which varies from 13 to 25. Three respondents highlighted that the size of the class influences the teaching outcomes. They claim that teaching and learning are more effective in smaller classes.

All Spanish participants work in one educational institution. Twenty per cent of participants teach four classes, and 40% teach seven. Another 40% provided the number of working hours, instead of the number of classes. The size of the class varies from 18 to 32. The mean size of the class is twenty-three. Sixty per cent of the respondents declare that the number of students per class is too high. One of the respondents (20%) claims that unless classes are smaller than twenty students, the size is appropriate. A higher number can cause difficulties in conducting certain activities. Another participant says that the size is “normal”.

3.6.2 **Classroom Climate**

When asked about the classroom climate, all the Polish respondents claimed that the climate is positive. Two of them mentioned that sometimes, depending on a class, it can be also neutral. Participants pointed out that a positive climate can be achieved by maintaining a healthy, friendly, and respectful relationship between the students and teachers. They claim that this relationship should be based on fair, friendly, and individual treatment, and partnership. Additionally, they highlight the

importance of the rules, which should be clearly stated, discussed with the students, and implemented during the lessons. Moreover, the vitality of student-student interactions was pointed out. Teachers claim that by integrating students through additional activities, such as projects with shared goals, school trips, and class celebrations positive classroom climate can be maintained. They also point to the importance of reacting to misbehaviours tensions and unfair or improper treatment. By observing the class and the interactions between students, quick and appropriate reaction to hate, bullying, and aggression can be assured. Some participants also mentioned the importance of using interesting methods, and materials while teaching. The respondents emphasise the significance of communication. In terms of communication between students and teaching staff, teachers claim that it can be hard and challenging. However, it is possible to build stable, concrete, calm, and satisfactory communication. None of the participants mentioned constructive feedback as a way of promoting a positive classroom climate. However, all the respondents provide students with this type of feedback in a form of oral or written comments. Feedback is also given individually or to groups. Some use grading, others conduct short individual conversations with students. They also compare the learning outcomes with the lesson objectives.

All Spanish participants claim that in most cases the classroom climate is positive. One of them said that it can be sometimes neutral. Two other respondents highlighted that although the climate is generally positive there are sometimes problems with students or between students and with their behaviour. To assure a positive climate teachers promote work habits, implement effective classroom management, and remind students of the rules and expectations. Additionally, teachers make sure that each student has the possibility to speak and express themselves, and that the other students respect taking turns in speaking. Solving doubts and conflicts has also been mentioned as a way of maintaining a positive climate. The importance of the tone of instruction has been emphasised by one of the respondents. This person claims that “speaking respectfully to the students is very helpful. It is good to model the behaviour for them”. Letting students express their emotions, giving them confidence, and maintaining a happy atmosphere have also been listed. Sixty per cent of

respondents claim that the communication between students and communication between teaching staff students is satisfactory. Forty per cent perceive it as respectful. Among the responses the importance of speaking kindly and providing students with a trustworthy environment have been mentioned. None of the Spanish participants mentioned constructive feedback as a way of promoting a positive classroom climate. However, all the respondents provide students with this type of feedback. They use positive reinforcing feedback, as well as informal and formal feedback. Informal feedback is provided during the lessons with prompts and responses, whereas formal is given on assignments. Teachers highlight those errors are not penalised as they help students learn; however, they are discussed and explained, often on the forum.

3.6.3 **Teaching Reading**

3.6.3.1 Poland

When asked about the most vital skill expected from students 50% of respondents claimed that it was speaking. Twenty per cent pointed to reading. The remaining 30% named more than one activity, namely reading and writing (10%), speaking and reading (10%), and listening and reading (10%). In total 60% mentioned speaking as the most important skill, 50% reading, and 10% each writing and listening.

Polish children are introduced to reading at the age of 6-7, which equals the grade I of school or pre-school called *zerówka*, in accordance with 80% of respondents. The remaining 20% did not provide an answer to that question. The same 80% claim that it is the appropriate age to start teaching reading. Thirty per cent of all the respondents claim that children can and even should be familiarised with reading even earlier in life. One respondent (10%) answered specifically in the context of teaching EFL. This person claims that “When it comes to English - after they have learned how to read in Polish”.

Thirty per cent of respondents spend around 30% of teaching time on developing reading skills. Ten per cent spend 33-40% of the time, and another 10% around 20% of the time. One person

(10%) devotes sometime during each lesson to reading. Forty per cent of respondents do not spend any time teaching reading. They claim that in grades IV-VIII children are expected to be able to read fluently and with comprehension.

Fifty per cent of respondents claim to put the most emphasis on developing oral production in order to influence the reading in all the grades. Ten per cent do it in grades I and II, 10% in grade IV, 10% in grades IV and V, and 10% in grade VII, which is correlated with teaching EFL. One person (10%) did not provide the answer. In order to influence the reading by developing oral production teachers ask students to prepare their own oral expressions or presentations on various topics. They also make them recite, react to scenes, and do role-play. Some pointed to using translations in this process. Respondents also emphasize the importance of making sure that students answer the questions in full sentences and build oral utterances appropriately.

In order to increase language awareness, teachers use practical exercises, quizzes, vocabulary exercises, dictations, and syntactic exercises. Some use games such as dominoes or puns. Two of the teachers use some Montessori materials. Different two respondents claim that they use "all strategies and methods included in the curriculum". Two respondents did not answer the question.

According to 40% of respondents, most of the students in grades VII and VIII read fluently. These responses are regarding both English and Polish. Ten per cent claim that it is in grade V, another 10% in grade IV, and 20% in grade III. Twenty per cent did not respond to the question. In order to develop reading fluency, teachers emphasise the importance of everyday reading training. This is done by keeping a daily reading diary at home, spending 10-15 daily on reading practice, and cooperating with parents. Some teachers organise so-called "beautiful reading class contests", others use techniques such as Jolly Phonics or materials like picture books.

Seventy per cent of respondents provide students with background knowledge activation tasks. This is done by a general conversation about the topic before reading, explaining new or difficult vocabulary and phrases. Some teachers use pre-reading examination tasks and language warm-ups. Thirty per cent of participants did not answer the question.

Most commonly implemented techniques used to practice comprehension of the text are questions, tests and exercises checking the understanding. Students are also asked to find some information or highlight some parts of the text. Fill-in-the-gaps is another frequently used activity. Some teachers ask students to write summaries, notes, or schedules of the events, others implement sequential reading.

In order to motivate students to read, most of the teachers organise various contests. Some of them are even with awards in a form of grades or prizes. Schools organise actions such as “reading break” which allows students to read their own books during the lessons. One of the participants gives students a series of books at various levels and asks them to complete them from the lowest to the highest. This works since “they have to be able to read the particular level well to be able to go on the higher one”. Teachers also search for interesting and modern texts, dealing with contemporary problems of young people. They also propose various genres to intrigue students. One of the respondents claims that motivation is highly dependent on the role of parents or guardians. This person states that “If parents do not care about their child’s reading skills, and they do not read to their child every day, reading becomes a problem”.

Among the activities integrating reading and writing teachers mentioned open-ended questions to the text. Commonly mentioned practice is writing a continuation or end of the story. Additionally, writing a narrative from a point of view of a contrasting character or inventing dialogues that can be used in a story are also implemented. Techniques used to practice comprehension can be also mentioned in this section, for instance, writing summaries or notes. Creating readers or lapbooks is another practice used to integrate reading and writing.

When asked about the types of literary texts they would choose for their students, teachers named stories, children’s literature, graded readers, as well as tales, fantasy, and adventure books. Some teachers mentioned texts from the textbooks and readings required by the curriculum. Two of the respondents highlighted that books should be based on students' interests, likings, and topics

related to their lives. Among the titles, *Harry Potter, Biff, Chip and Kipper*, *Winnie the Witch*, and *Horrible Henry* were listed. When it comes to authors David Walliams, and Roald Dahl were named.

Forty per cent of the teachers claim that providing beginner and intermediate learners with instruction on the structure of the text is appropriate. According to them, it can be done by analysing the text and information provided in individual paragraphs, or chapters. Another method is to isolate dialogues, the narrator's comments, and the narrative itself. One of the respondents provided an example of an exercise that can be used, which is the text restoration plan. These teachers find it useful to discuss and analyse the text being currently read. Ten per cent of the respondents claim that it depends on a student. The remaining 30% did not answer the question.

The most commonly used method to assess and evaluate the progress of students' reading skills is grading, it was mentioned by 30% of respondents. Grading can be done based on quizzes, tests, or exercises. Some teachers check the retention of the learning by giving students similar texts to read in some time period. Another means of assessment is listening to students reading individually and asking them questions afterwards. Others provide comments after reading and verify their use of them the next time. Another respondent conducts reading logs for every student.

Sixty per cent of respondents provide oral feedback on the progress of students. Thirty per cent of participants do it individually. One of them states that "I usually find time to read individually with each of the students at least once a month and each receives individual feedback". Respondents also highlighted the importance of positive feedback, praising and motivating the students. Some teachers provide feedback by grading and writing comments.

Fifty per cent of respondents claim that students have enough opportunities to practice reading in a school. Ten per cent claim that they do in grades I to III; however, the case is not true in higher grades. Similarly, 10% agree that in higher grades there is little opportunity to practice reading in school. Thirty per cent did not answer the question.

Half of the respondents teach reading strategies. Thirty per cent do not teach any strategies and 20% did not provide an answer to the question. Ten per cent of participants teach approaches that

combine multiple strategies. Ten per cent teacher individual strategies. Another 10% claim that it depends on the exercise. The rest of the respondents did not provide a clear response to the question. Among the strategies used they named skimming and scanning, reading a magnifying glass, searching keywords, and text visualisation, making graphic notes. Some teachers give riddles that students have to find in the text and interpret accordingly. Another participant mentioned that he or she emphasises the importance of reading the instruction to the task with understanding and only then proceeding to read a text. This person also highlighted that the text should be read twice. Similarly, respondents advised students to read the questions before reading the text.

Forty per cent of respondents agree that teaching reading is contained in the curriculum. Is seen as one of the five required skills and an integral part of the core curriculum for each of the classes. One participant mentions that "there [in a curriculum] is a reading program, consisting of a number of stories and dialogues prepared for students with follow-up activities". According to 10% of the respondents, reading is not included in a curriculum in higher grades. Half of the respondents did not provide a response to this question. The next question was also skipped by half of the respondents. The other half claims that the core curriculum allows the personalisation of teaching techniques.

When asked about the ideas for the improvement of teaching reading in schools 60% of respondents provided some. Twenty per cent mentioned that libraries should be better equipped and could contain more English written literature. Others would appreciate greater freedom in the choice of required reading materials. The idea of establishing a School Book Discussion Club, which would allow students to reach for books beyond the reading canon has also been mentioned. Twenty per cent of respondents highlighted the vital role of fostering reading at home. They claim that parents need to be made more aware of their role in the process. Another teacher proposed keeping daily reading diaries at home to practice systematically.

3.6.3.2 Spain

When asked about the most vital skill expected from students 20% claim it is speaking, another 20% that it is writing, and another 20% that it is listening. Two respondents named more than one skill. Twenty per cent listening and speaking, and 20% speaking, reading, comprehension, and writing.

Spanish children are introduced to reading around the age of 4-5. According to one of the respondents, students are exposed to reading at 3 or 4 years old, but they learn to read at the age of five. According to another respondent it is at 4 years when children are introduced to reading. Another person claims it is at the age of 4-5. To someone else, it is at the age of five or in I grade, which is in accordance with another participant who claims that "they [students] start [reading] when they are 5 or 6 years old".

Forty per cent of respondents claim that during each lesson the reading is practised. Of them additionally organises special reading aloud activities during the course. Twenty per cent spend around an hour daily practising reading, another 20% spend around 2 hours. One respondent spends around 30% of the teaching time on reading.

Twenty per cent of respondents claim to put the most emphasis on developing oral production in order to influence the reading in all the grades. Forty per cent claim that it is done in lower grades. The remaining 40% did not answer the question accordingly. In order to influence the reading by developing oral production teachers use modelling, sons, and word drills. Others do that by reading to students first, some use activities that implement various strategies. Another respondent uses short and fun reading with simple questions.

In order to increase language awareness, teachers use reading, singing, and speaking exercises. Others follow the book with grammar, vocabulary, and syntax activities. Also, students are asked to evaluate their own classmates and then together with a teacher they analyse those performances and what could be done better.

All respondents believe that students read fluently in primary school. In accordance with 40% of the respondents, it is in grade II, and according to 20%, it is at the age of six. In order to develop fluency, teachers practice word recognition and play phonics games. Some of them use playful reading activities. Another respondent uses reading aloud or preparing writings to later read, also dramatized reading is introduced. Reading aloud on a daily basis is also highlighted.

Forty per cent of respondents provide students with background knowledge activation tasks with questioning strategies. Twenty per cent usually do not use any tasks. The remaining 40% did not answer the question at all or answered it not accordingly.

When it comes to techniques used to practice comprehension questioning strategies, summarizing, and retelling activities are used. Moreover, rereading, inferences, and deductions are implemented. One of the respondents asks students to read the text several times before reading the questions during tests. If it is not a test, the text is discussed and then the students can read the questions. One of the participants says that the technique used is “a new one, devised by me”.

When asked about ways to motivate students to read, 40% of respondents suggest finding texts on topics that are of interest of the students. Also, they emphasise that students should be able to relate the readings to the world around them. Teachers talk about different books with students and read them aloud. One of the respondents suggests that “building a literacy community helps students feel enthusiastic about reading”.

Among the activities integrating reading and writing teachers mentioned that all the reading comprehensions used later lead to a written production where the students give their opinion on the topic, they have read about. One of the respondents says that in order to integrate reading and writing they use the reading comprehension activity that they do with their method. Additionally, one of the respondents highlights the importance of giving students access to the literature as it may influence both reading and writing skills. Forty per cent of the participants did not answer the question or answered it accordingly.

Teachers believe that the types of texts used to practice reading should be based on students' interests and age. Some teachers point to tales, legends, and adventure books. Others found that students enjoyed historical fiction about events about which they have learned.

Forty per cent of respondents believe that providing beginning or intermediate level students with text structure guides may help them understand the outline of the text. Twenty per cent of respondents is unsure whether it is useful to do so but tends to provide some hints about the layout while analysing the text. The renaming 40% did not answer the question.

Teachers assess and evaluate students based on the curriculum expectation “using appropriate rubrics”. Others do it by listening to students reading aloud or correcting the reading comprehensions. Moreover, in some cases, there are reading assessments that account for the timing and accuracy of words read. The feedback on the reading progress is mostly given informally. Through praise and recognition, as well as comments on the mistakes.

According to 60% of respondents, students have enough opportunities to practice reading in school. Twenty per cent believe that students do not have time to practice reading since there is a lot of agenda and they have little time. Sometimes they need to ask teachers of other subjects for help. The remaining 20% did not answer the question.

Eighty per cent of respondents teach reading strategies to the students. Twenty per cent did not answer the question. Respondents claim that they mostly teach approaches that combine multiple strategies rather than individual strategies. Among the strategies decoding, summarizing, or retelling. Teachers also listed guidelines, structures, drafts, and reviews as used strategies. Respondents also highlighted the importance of teaching students to read slowly, breathe accordingly while reading, and respect the pauses in form of commas, semicolons, and periods.

Respondents agree that teaching reading is contained in the curriculum. It is seen as a priority that is included in all teaching areas and is evaluated as a dimension. In one of the school’s educational projects, the reading plan is concluded. Generally, teachers believe that the curriculum allows the personalisation of their teaching techniques. However, some of them try to coordinate the strategies

with other teachers. Another respondent claims that it depends on the teacher's will. Personalisation is possible if the teachers decide to adopt it into the curriculum. Another respondent says that it is possible to adapt one's own strategies; however, there is little time to do so.

When asked about the ideas for the improvement of teaching reading in schools, 40% of respondents mentioned that lack of time is the main concern. Twenty per cent suggested encouraging reading for the children at home. For instance, by sending books home with the students. Twenty per cent say that they do not have any ideas for improvement. And another 20% did not respond to the question.

3.7 Analysis of the Results of Education

Outcomes of education can be measured by analysing the results of evaluation tests. The outcomes are compared in both countries based on the results of the PISA, PIRLS, and YEL tests. The variable taken into consideration here is the outcomes of reading comprehension. By analysing and comparing these data sets, quantitative data can be collected. Such statistical analysis allows for further evaluation of the results of teaching reading skills in Poland and Spain.

3.7.1 **Detailed Description**

To provide a coherent and reliable analysis, the results of four tests will be presented and compared. Two of them are conducted globally in schools, and the remaining two are international standardized tests of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the OECD's programme that evaluates the ability of students aged fifteen around the world in reading, mathematics, and science (OECD, 201b). By analysing the data gathered by PISA in the last few years, the results of teaching reading in Spanish and Polish primary schools can be compared. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) sponsors the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) which is "is an international assessment and research project designed to

measure reading achievement at the fourth-grade level, as well as school and teacher practices related to instruction" (Institute of Educational Science, 2016). Evaluation of the results of this global test allows for comparing reading skills in Poland and Spain. Among the data analysed the distribution of reading achievement, performance at the international benchmarks of reading achievement, achievement in reading purposes, and comprehension processes are to be evaluated.

The results of tests organised by Cambridge aimed at assessing the English language proficiency of children will be compared. According to Amy Devine (2018) "Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners are developed specifically for children around 6 – 12 years of age". The tests are organised at three levels, called pre-A1 Starters, A1 Movers, and A2 Flyers (Devine, 2018). Each level comprises three components and tests different language skills, namely listening, reading, and writing, and speaking (Devine, 2018). The outcomes are measured in terms of the number of shields a child got. Getting one shield means that there are a lot of skills that a child can improve. Whereas, getting five indicates a great achievement. The results of reading comprehension in these tests for Polish and Spanish children at various levels of English will be compared.

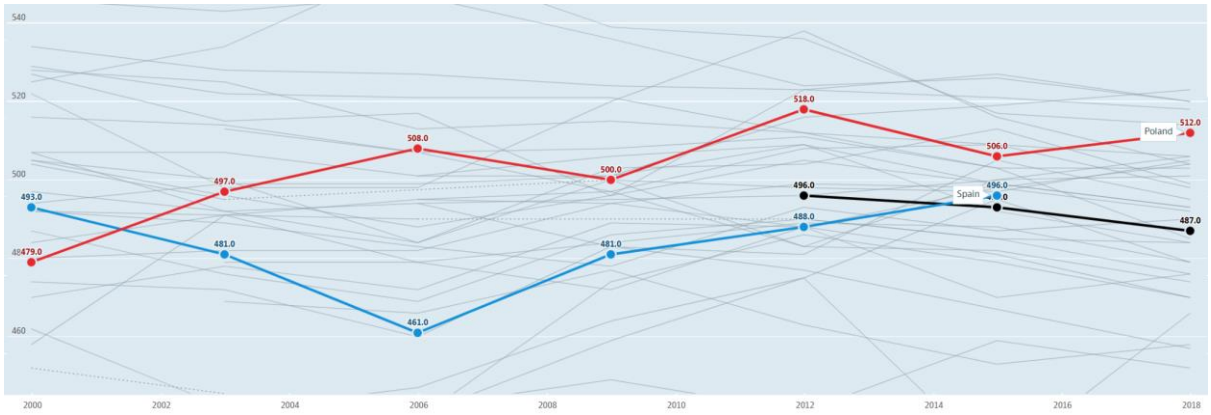
3.8 Results

3.8.1 **Native Language Proficiency**

The graph below (see Figure 26) presents the results of PISA reading performance in Poland and Spain from the years 2000 to 2018. Generally speaking, the results were fluctuating over the years in both countries. However, in Poland, the tendency is rather positive with an increase in results obtained. Whereas, in Spain, the tendency is rather negative with a decrease in results. Overall, Polish students score higher than Spanish. The biggest difference was seen in the year 2006 when Poland scored 508 and Spain 461. In the year 2015, Poland scored 506 and Spain 496. In the most recent year of the test, which was 2018, Poland scored 512 and the results of Spanish students were not published due to "implausible response behaviour amongst students" (OECD, 2019b).

Figure 12

PISA Reading Performance in Poland and Spain in years 2000 to 2018

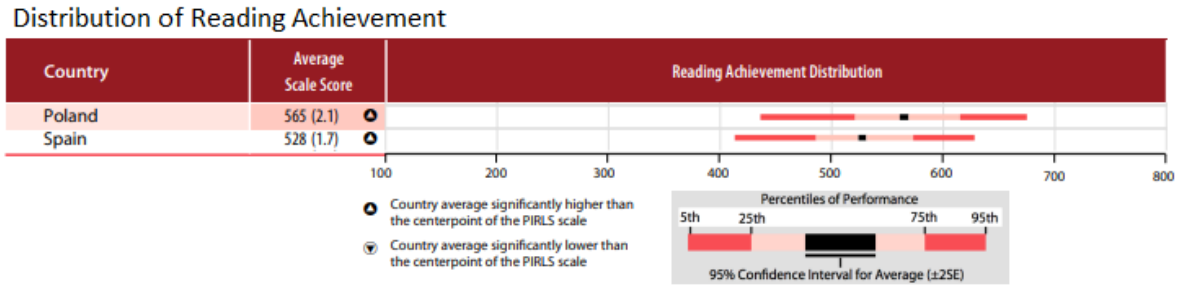


Note. Adapted from OECD, 2019a

Figures 13 to 16 show the outcomes of the PIRLS test. In terms of reading achievement (see Figure 13) Poland scored higher than Spain. The average scale score of Polish students stood at 565 and Spanish at 528.

Figure 13

Distribution of Reading Achievement, PIRLS 2016



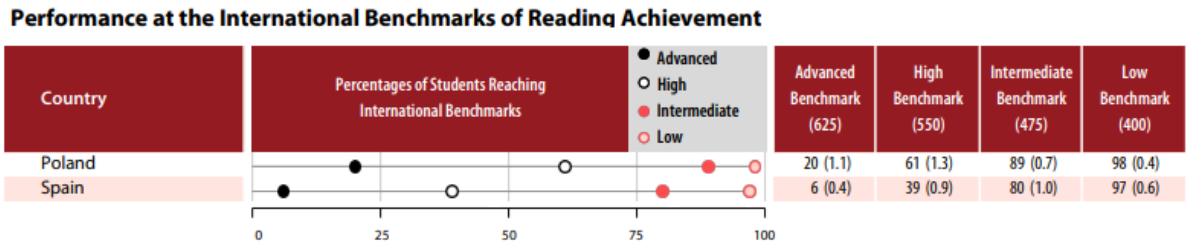
Note. Adapted from Mullis et al., 2017, p. 20

The reading achievements are also measured as International Benchmarks. The benchmarks are presented at four points along the scale as Advanced International Benchmark (625), High International Benchmark (550), Intermediate International Benchmark (475), and Low International Benchmark (400) (Mullis et al., 2017, p. 49). Each benchmark demonstrates different skills. Figure 14 presented the percentage of students reaching each International Benchmark. Two per cent of Polish students and 3% of Spanish students did not reach the Low Benchmark. Eighty-nine per cent

of students in Poland and 80% in Spain reached Intermediate Benchmark. The High Benchmark was reached by 61% of Polish and 39% of Spanish pupils. Twenty per cent of Polish students reached Advanced Benchmark, compared to only 6% in Spain. Generally, Polish students managed to get higher scores in the context of International Benchmarks.

Figure 14

Performance at the International Benchmarks of Reading Achievement, PIRLS 2016

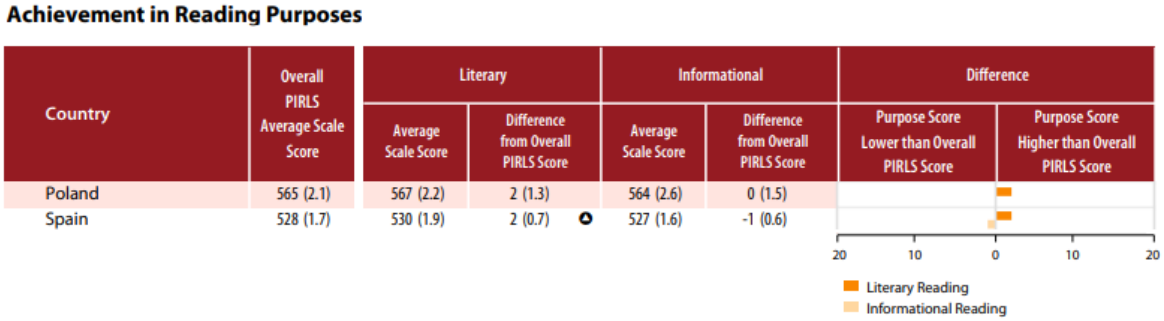


Note. Adapted from Mullis et al., 2017, p. 55

Figure 15 presents reading achievement results for literary and informational reading purposes. In terms of literary reading purposes, Poland scored 567 points on average, compared to 530 scored by Spanish students. Polish pupils also did better with regard to informational reading purposes. The average score for Polish students is 564 and for Spanish 527.

Figure 15

Achievement in Reading Purposes, PIRLS 2016



Note. Adapted from Mullis et al., 2017, p. 113

Comprehension Processes of students are measured within two purposes of reading, retrieving and straightforward influencing as well as interpreting, integrating, and evaluating. Figure 16 shows the results of the achievement in comprehension processes. Polish students scored 560 points and

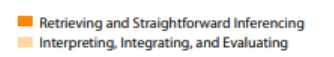
Spanish students 526 in the first process. With regard to the second one, Polish students scored higher than Spanish with an average score of 570 compared to 529.

Figure 16

Achievement in Comprehension Processes, PIRLS 2016

Achievement in Comprehension Processes

Country	Overall PIRLS Average Scale Score	Retrieving and Straightforward Inferencing		Interpreting, Integrating, and Evaluating		Difference	
		Average Scale Score	Difference from Overall PIRLS Score	Average Scale Score	Difference from Overall PIRLS Score	Process Score Lower than Overall PIRLS Score	Process Score Higher than Overall PIRLS Score
Poland	565 (2.1)	560 (2.1)	-5 (1.1) ▼	570 (2.4)	5 (1.7) ▲		
Spain	528 (1.7)	526 (1.7)	-1 (0.6) ▼	529 (1.7)	1 (0.6) ▲		



▲ Scale score significantly higher than overall PIRLS score
▼ Scale score significantly lower than overall PIRLS score

Retrieving and Straightforward Inferencing
Interpreting, Integrating, and Evaluating

Note. Adapted from Mullis et al., 2017, p. 116

3.8.2 **English Language Proficiency**

The results of English language proficiency in reading are evaluated based on the results of Cambridge English tests for Pre-A1, A1, and A2 children aged 6 to 12. The outcomes are measured in terms of the number of shields a child got. Tables 15,16, and seventeen present the results of Polish and Spanish students in these tests as a percentage of participants who scored each of the shields from 2015 to 2019.

Table 15 presents the outcomes of Pre-A1 Starters Cambridge English reading and writing test in years 2015 to 2019 for Polish and Spanish participants. A higher percentage of Polish participants managed to score five shields than Spanish. The highest number reached by Polish students was in 2019 and stood at 63.1%, in the same year it stood at 47.9% for Spanish students. To compare, the biggest percentage of Spanish participants scoring five shields was noted in 2018 and stood at 49.1%. The same year 62.9% of Polish participants scored five shields. Lower numbers of Polish children scored just one shield compared to Spanish. The numbers rose for Spanish participants from 1% in the years 2015-2017 to 5.3% in the year 2019. A similar trend was noted in Poland since

the numbers rose from less than 1% to 2.3% in 2019. Generally, a greater percentage of Polish participants scored higher numbers of shields throughout the years compared to Spanish ones.

Table 15

Cambridge English: Pre-A1 Starters Reading & Writing Results

GEO/TIME		Grade				
		1 Shield	2 Shield	3 Shield	4 Shield	5 Shield
2019	Spain	5.3%	9.5%	16.3%	21.1%	47.9%
	Poland	2.3%	5.1%	12.1%	17.5%	63.1%
2018	Spain	4.7%	9.0%	16.4%	20.7%	49.1%
	Poland	2.2%	4.3%	13.1%	17.5%	62.9%
2017	Spain	1.0%	6.5%	21.5%	35.1%	36.0%
	Poland	0.5%	4.3%	16.1%	31.0%	48.1%
2016	Spain	1.0%	6.2%	21.1%	34.4%	37.2%
	Poland	0.6%	3.3%	14.0%	29.5%	52.6%
2015	Spain	1.0%	6.6%	19.5%	36.0%	36.8%
	Poland	0.9%	4.8%	14.9%	34.8%	44.7%

Note. Adapted from Cambridge English, n.d.

Table 16 presents the outcomes of the A1 Movers Cambridge English reading and writing test in years 2015 to 2019 for Polish and Spanish participants. The results are similar to those of the pre-A1 exam. However, fewer students obtain five shields and more score one shield. Since 2015 the number of students scoring five shields in both countries steadily increased, reaching the peak in 2019 when 46.1% of Polish students and 34.1% of Spanish obtained them. Moreover, similar tendency is present when analysing the scoring of one shield. The numbers also increased throughout the years from 2% of Spanish participants in 2015 to 5.9% in 2019, and from 1% of Polish participants to 3.8% in the same years. Generally, the tendency is similar to that of the Starters test. A higher percentage of Polish participants scored higher numbers of shields throughout the year when compared to results of Spanish students.

Table 16

Cambridge English: A1 Movers Reading & Writing Results

GEO/TIME		Grade				
		1 Shield	2 Shield	3 Shield	4 Shield	5 Shield
2019	Spain	5.9%	13.9%	22.9%	23.2%	34.1%
	Poland	3.8%	9.5%	19.0%	21.6%	46.1%
2018	Spain	5.2%	13.5%	21.2%	23.8%	36.3%
	Poland	4.8%	11.2%	18.4%	22.9%	42.6%
2017	Spain	2.3%	12.9%	29.5%	31.3%	24.0%
	Poland	2.0%	7.3%	24.2%	33.7%	32.7%
2016	Spain	1.9%	11.5%	29.5%	34.3%	22.8%
	Poland	1.5%	8.0%	25.1%	36.4%	29.0%
2015	Spain	2.0%	13.4%	34.9%	31.1%	18.5%
	Poland	1.0%	8.2%	31.1%	34.4%	25.3%

Note. Adapted from Cambridge English, n.d.

For Cambridge English A2 Flyers reading and writing results tendencies again correspond to those of the two previously analysed tests (see Table 17). Again, less students managed to get five shields, the majority of them received only one. This is true both for Poland and Spain. The highest percentage of Polish students that scored five shields was in 2019 and stood at 36.4% and for Spanish students in 2018 and stood at 20.7%. Generally, more Polish than Spanish students manage to get five shields. The number of Polish students getting one shield increased from 0.4% in 2015 to 5.3% in 2019. In the same years, the percentage of Spanish students getting one shield increased from 1.4% to 8.3%. Overall, higher percentage of Polish students scored higher numbers of shields throughout the year when compared to results of Spanish students.

Table 17

Cambridge English: A2 Flyers Reading & Writing Results

GEO/TIME		Grade				
		1 Shield	2 Shield	3 Shield	4 Shield	5 Shield
2019	Spain	8.3%	14.3%	23.6%	34.1%	19.6%
	Poland	5.3%	8.4%	16.4%	33.4%	36.4%
2018	Spain	7.1%	15.4%	23.1%	33.7%	20.7%
	Poland	4.6%	10.1%	16.6%	35.1%	33.6%
2017	Spain	1.4%	16.7%	36.4%	34.0%	11.4%
	Poland	0.9%	10.1%	28.3%	39.3%	21.4%
2016	Spain	1.5%	18.9%	37.3%	30.9%	11.4%
	Poland	0.5%	10.6%	32.9%	37.7%	18.2%
2015	Spain	1.4%	17.1%	37.3%	31.6%	12.5%
	Poland	0.4%	9.9%	31.3%	37.1%	21.3%

Note. Adapted from Cambridge English, n.d.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate the differences in educational systems of Poland and Spain and approaches to teaching reading skills in primary schools. This chapter brings the findings and literature review together and highlights issues related to understanding the differences in education outcomes, especially in teaching reading in both countries.

Findings related to RQ1 show that there are several factors affecting the results of teaching reading in Polish and Spanish primary schools. Factors, such as expenditures on education, teacher-pupil ratio, and class size, expected years of schooling and dropout percentage, age of students, and classroom environment, are influential since they are vital additive components of education systems. The construction of education systems highly affects the outcomes of teaching, especially the structure of the system, its key features, the organisation of school time, instruction time, the curricula,

teaching methods and materials, as well as the assessment and evaluation. Additionally, since education systems in both countries allow for the personalisation of curricula, the approaches and methods that teachers use are of major influence.

Regarding the findings related to RQ2, it seems that expected and mean years of schooling, the age of students, class size and teacher-pupil ratio, the structure of the educational system, the timetables, the methods, strategies, and approaches used by the teachers, and the type of assessment are the most influential in terms of outcomes of teaching reading in both native and foreign (English) languages.

Findings related to RQ3 indicate that both systems contain some strong and weak elements. Among the strong elements of the Spanish educational system are the expenditures on education, expected years of schooling, and the instructional time. The class size, teacher-pupil ratio, mean years of schooling, dropout percentage, age of students, and timetables can be considered the weaker elements. For Poland, the situation is the opposite. The weak elements of the Spanish system are considered strong elements of the Polish system. Therefore, the class size, teacher-pupil ratio, mean years of schooling, dropout percentage, age of students, and timetables are in favour of Poland. On the other hand, the expenditures on education, expected years of schooling, and the instructional time are weak elements of the system. The classroom environment is the only factor that is positive in both countries. The structure of the system methods and strategies used to teach reading, assessment and evaluation, the curricula, and the length of the school year are considered neutral elements. It does not mean they are meaningless, but rather that they are hard to judge without a more extensive study. They do influence the outcomes of teaching reading; however, they may be less influential in terms of the education outcomes as a whole. To confirm, a more thorough study should be performed.

Regarding RQ4, the analysis of the results of PISA and PIRLS revealed that Polish students tend to achieve better results in reading tasks in their native language throughout the years. Moreover, children aged 6-12 scored better in three Cambridge English tests in terms of reading and writing in the years 2015-2019.

4.1 The factors affecting the differences in results of teaching reading in Polish and Spanish primary schools

Kirabo C. Jackson et al. (2015) suggest that increased per-pupil spendings improve student outcomes. Their study revealed that a 10% rise in spending per pupil yearly for 12 years leads to 0.31 more completed years of education, 7% higher wages, as well as a reduction in the annual adult poverty rates by 3.2 percentage points (Jackson et al., 2015, p. 157). This study, on the other hand, does not confirm these results. Even though the government in Poland spends more in terms of a per cent of GDP, due to the differences in the context of currency and level of life, it seems that the public expenditure on education per pupil/student is higher in Spain. When compared in euros, the differences are tremendous. When measured as PPS, they are not as big; however, still notable. Therefore, it seems that the differences in expenditure on education are in favour of Spain and should influence the learning outcomes in a positive manner.

Teacher-pupil ratio is believed to influence the outcomes of education. It is believed that the lower the number of students, the more individualised and effective the teaching (*Student-Teacher Ratios: Everything You Need to Know | The Hun, School*, n.d.). Teacher-pupil radio is used as a proxy for the quality of education; therefore, a low ratio would suggest better educational outcomes. The difference in ratios in Poland and Spain in the past few years is not extreme. In 2013 it stood at 2.67 and increased to 3.95. Since 2018, there have been more teachers in Polish primary schools than in Spanish; even though the number of enrolled students is smaller. The lower ratio in Poland may be one of the causes of better examination results. However, a lower ratio may also be a cause of ineffective human resources management, which should also be borne in mind.

The factor correlated with the teacher-pupil ratio is class size. Similarly, it is believed that reducing the size of the class can positively affect teaching outcomes. Generally, smaller classes allow for a more positive classroom climate and comfort for the students (Pate-Bain et al., 1992). Additionally, teachers prefer to work with smaller groups (Pate-Bain et al., 1992). This has been confirmed by the results of questionnaires conducted with teachers, 4 out of 15 respondents

highlighted that teaching and learning are more effective in smaller classes. From 2003 to 2012 the average class size in primary schools in Spain increased to 21.4 and decreased in Poland to 18.4. The lack of more accurate data in that context is a limitation. However, it seems that there is an increasing tendency in Spain and decreasing in Poland. Questionnaires with the teachers revealed that the average class size in Poland in the school year 2021/2022 is 18. In Spain, the number is higher and stands at 23. The size of the class may be one of the factors influencing the better results of Polish students in standardised examinations.

Expected years of schooling from 2013 to 2019 stood at 17.6 and 17.9 in Spain, and 16.1 and 16.4 in Poland. Extending years of compulsory education is fundamental to economic growth, global health, climate change action, and the development of society (Stone, 2015). That would suggest that the length of the expected education in Spain should result in better learning outcomes and the development of society. However, the mean years of schooling in years 2013 to 2019 increased from 9.5 to 10.3 in Spain, and 12.1 to 12.5 in Poland. This leads to the conclusion that a high number of Spanish students do not successfully complete their education. This hypothesis is confirmed through the analysis of the number of children out of school and the percentage of early leavers from education and training. The numbers are appallingly higher in Spain.

This may be strictly connected to another factor affecting the outcomes of education, the age of students. Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito (2018) claim that early entry age has short-term positive results, for instance, in terms of scores on standardised tests. However, it seems to have rather negative long-term effects as it is associated with lower IQ and mental health issues, GPA and attendance, a decrease in the years of completed education, and a lower probability of passing a grade and following an academic track in and after high school (Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018). Polish students begin compulsory instruction at the age of six in pre-school. Only then do they enter primary school at the age of seven. In Spain, compulsory instruction starts in primary school at the age of six. This may lead to the conclusion that since compulsory education begins earlier, more students leave school early, and therefore, their outcomes in education are less satisfactory.

The classroom environment is seen as a mix of social, emotional, and instructional factors affecting the motivation of students (Ambrose et al., 2010). The goal is to obtain a positive climate to provide students with a safe space for learning. A positive climate is respectful, supportive, safe, inclusive, productive, and relaxed (Kamb, 2012). All Polish and Spanish respondents claim that the classroom climate in the classes they teach are positive. Additionally, twenty per cent both of Polish and Spanish respondents mentioned that in some cases it can also be neutral.

According to Ambrose et al. (2010), climate can be influenced by stereotypes, tone of instruction, faculty-student and student-student interaction, the content of the course, curriculum, and materials. Polish teachers emphasised the importance of teacher-student interactions, tone of instruction, student-student interactions, as well as methods and materials when it comes to assuring a positive climate. Spanish teachers highlighted all the listed above, except the type of methods and materials. Among the strategies used to promote a positive classroom climate, both Polish and Spanish teachers listed these as connected with rules and students' well-being and comfort were listed following Ambrose et. al. (2010). When it comes to rules, Polish respondents mentioned stating clear rules, modelling behaviours, and using the syllabus by comparing lesson objectives to the outcomes. Spanish respondents listed stating clear rules, modelling behaviours, determining rules for interactions, and establishing course climate through promoting work habits. In terms of students' well-being and comfort, Polish teachers highlighted maintaining a healthy, friendly, and respectful relationship between the students and teachers, integrating students, addressing tensions early, fairly, and adequately, and anticipating sensitive issues. Spanish teachers emphasised giving students the possibility to speak and express themselves and their emotions, promoting individuality, addressing tensions early, fairly, and adequately, as well as ensuring kind and respectful teacher-student interactions.

None of the participants in either of the countries listed strategies connected with performance as a way of promoting a positive climate. However, all the respondents do implement them in their

classrooms subconsciously since they all indicated in the questionnaire that they provide students with constructive feedback.

It seems that both Polish and Spanish teachers use several strategies to promote a positive classroom climate. These mentioned by Polish teachers focused more on building solid relationships in the classroom based on respect, rules, common goals, and sympathy. These implemented by Spanish teachers focused more on establishing rules, modelling behaviours, promoting individuality, and letting students express themselves. It is hard to judge which strategies lead to better results since the study lacks the opinions of students on that matter and it would be the only reliable source of information. The climate is perceived as a vital element influencing education (Ambrose, et al., 2010); however, in this case, its influence is not superior.

According to Fabian T. Pfeffer (2015) both the quality and equality of education need to be judged when comparing the educational systems of countries. Moreover, the education system can be seen as

> a combination of both a set of interrelated activities, practices, norms and beliefs and a body of knowledge, including ways of conceptualisations, sharing, expanding, proving, accepting, and disapproving certain claims and beliefs in a specific community. Education is considered to mean how a community generates, acquires, imparts, shares, and validates its knowledge (IGI Global, n.d.-a).

Therefore, the structure of the system, its key features, the length of the school year, number of school days, instructional time, curricula, assessment, teaching methods and material, as well as evaluation techniques need to be compared to conclude the appropriateness of the education systems.

As mentioned before, the structure of the Polish systems seems to be more favourable since it allows for the later obligatory primary education entry. Even though the compulsory full-time education ends earlier, at 15 in Poland, and 16 in Spain, it is followed by compulsory part-time education until the age of 18. Due to this, the total obligatory instruction time is longer. The

advantages of these two elements have been emphasised by Stone (2015) and Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito (2018).

Additionally, the number of school days in primary and general secondary education are longer in Poland (187 days) than in Spain (175 days). However, the minimum instructional time for the compulsory curriculum for ISCED 1 is significantly higher in Spain (4750 hours) than in Poland (2268 hours). This may lead to the conclusion that Spanish students may be overloaded by the amount of material since it is higher and needs to be completed in a shorter period. This can influence the level of dropout percentage and the outcomes of education.

The questionnaires revealed that, according to 60% of Polish respondents, speaking is seen as the most important skill expected from students, 50% mentioned reading, and 10% each writing and listening. For 60% of Spanish respondents speaking is the most vital skill, 40% listed listening, another 40% writing and just 20% mentioned reading. This leads to the conclusion that Spanish teachers may put less emphasis on teaching reading as it is seen as the least important skill among students. Especially, since half of the Polish respondents listed it as the most crucial. On the other hand, 60% of Polish respondents devote an average of 30% of teaching time to reading, which would be around 160 hours in grades I-II, and 65 hours in grades IV-VIII. This equals less than an hour daily. Additionally, 40% of respondents do not spend any time teaching reading. The case is different in Spain as teachers claim to spend from an hour up to two hours teaching reading and to do it daily during each lesson. This would suggest that Spanish teachers actually put more emphasis on teaching reading and do it more frequently. Also, the time spent on reading, writing, literature, and L2 is higher in Spain than in Poland, which could suggest that Spanish students should get better results in terms of reading. However, the case is the opposite.

The core curriculum is an integral part of the education system. Not only does it provide information on the compulsory instruction time and subjects taught, but it also highlights key competencies (Eurydice, 2017c). Generally, teachers in both Spain and Poland agree that the core curriculum allows them to personalise their teaching methods and approaches. However, when

compared to the Polish curriculum, the Spanish system provides more freedom and individuality. This is connected with the division of Spain into autonomous areas. The Polish curriculum is stricter, as the number of hours dedicated to certain subjects throughout all grades is predefined by the government. It may seem as if allowing schools to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the students should lead to better educational outcomes. Yet, Polish students get better results in standardised tests; even though, their system does not allow for much individualisation.

The timetables are also connected with the curriculum. In Poland, there is no timetable that schools are required to follow. However, in many cases classes begin at 8 AM for all grades and finish between 12 PM and 2 PM for grades I-III, and between 2 PM and 4 PM for grades IV-VIII. In Spain, there are two kinds of timetables. *Jornada partida* with classes from 9 AM to 5 PM with a two-hour break in the midday, and *jornada continua* with classes from 9 AM to 3 PM without the break. The classes last longer in Spain for the younger students, which may have a negative effect on the concentration, energy, and motivation of the students. These, on the other hand, may influence the outcomes of education.

Teaching practices in Spanish primary schools are guided by MEFP methodological principles (Eurydice, 2017). They focus on developing knowledge as well as social, personal, and emotional skills. Based on the rules schools decide on teaching methods, curricular matters, and didactic resources, and teachers can make their own methodological decisions (Eurydice, 2017). In Poland, teachers and schools make their own educational decisions based on the core curriculum. Teachers in both countries concur with the data since they tend to claim that the core curriculum allows them to personalise their teaching techniques. Therefore, it may suggest that the choice of teaching methods will influence the outcomes of education.

Textbooks and other teaching materials in Spanish schools need to be in line with the laws but do not need to be authorised by the educational authorities (Eurydice, 2017f). Additionally, families pay for textbooks and school materials. In Poland, the choice of a textbook is optional, but the books need to be chosen from among these approved by the Minister of Education (Eurydice,

2017c). Moreover, educational materials are publicly funded. The accessibility of teaching materials may also influence the results of education, which would be in favour of Poland.

When comparing the results of the questionnaires conducted with Polish and Spanish primary school teachers, it seems that Polish teachers use a wider range of teaching techniques and are slightly more aware of their existence and current research. Polish participants tend to list more activity ideas for practising certain areas of reading development. This may be a highly influential variable when it comes to the outcomes of education.

Assessment in Spanish schools is internal and divided into formative and summative (Eurydice, 2017d). Formative assessment takes place throughout the whole learning process and is based on the basic assessment documents and formal assessment requirements provided by the MEFP and educational authorities (Eurydice, 2017d). The summative assessment aims at assessing the level of knowledge and possessed skills in certain subjects. It consists of a diagnostic evaluation at the end of grade IV and an evaluation at the end of primary school (Eurydice, 2017d). The Polish assessment system is internal and external (Eurydice, 2017b). Internal assessment is conducted by teachers of each subject and aims at informing students and their parents on the level of achievement of skills and knowledge. In grades I-III it is descriptive, and in further grades, it is graded. At the end of each semester, students are graded for each subject (Eurydice, 2017b). External assessment is conducted at the end of primary education in grade VIII and is compulsory (Eurydice, 2017b). The results influence the administration process for post-primary schools (Eurydice, 2017b). The fact that Polish students are introduced to formal examinations in primary schools may influence their ability to pass such tests. This may allow them to achieve higher results in standardised examinations.

4.2 The most influential differences in Polish and Spanish educational systems in terms of outcomes of teaching reading in both native and foreign (English) languages

It seems that among the most influential in terms of outcomes of teaching reading in both native and foreign (English) languages are class size and teacher-pupil ratio, mean years of schooling,

the age of students, the structure of the educational system, the curricula, the timetables, the methods, strategies, and approaches used by the teachers, and the type of assessment.

Teacher-pupil ratios in Spain and Poland do not differ greatly. However, since 2018, there have been more teachers in Polish primary schools than in Spanish; even though the number of enrolled students is smaller. Increasing the number of teaching personnel is generally believed to positively influence the process of education. It not only minimises the teacher-pupil ratio but also allows to lower the size of classes. In the past few years, the size of the classes has been decreasing in Poland and increasing in Spain. Students are more comfortable asking questions, stating their ideas, and holding conversations in a smaller forum; therefore, reducing the size allows for an increased comfort level in the class (Student-Teacher Ratios: Everything You Need to Know | The Hun School, n.d.). Furthermore, teachers prefer to work with small groups because it allows them to better recognise and address the needs of their students, as well as give personalised attention and more in-depth instruction (Pate-Bain et al., 1992, p. 254). According to the STAR study, a lower ratio results in faster completion of fundamental learning and increased usage of supplements and enrichment resources (Pate-Bain et al., 1992, p. 254). Therefore, since the Polish classrooms consist of a lower number of students, teachers may focus more personally on each students' reading abilities. Also, reading aloud is more possible, as it takes less time in smaller groups and decreases the stress related to speaking within a big forum. Teachers also get a chance to supplement the teaching. Therefore, they can use more interesting texts, which affects the motivation of the students. All of these lead to a higher possibility of advancing reading skills.

Expected years of schooling are lower in Poland than in Spain. However, the mean years of schooling are higher in Poland. Additionally, the differences in terms of dropout percentage and percentage of early leavers from education and training are considerable. Among the potential factors affecting early school leaving in Spain may be the entry age of students. Spanish students begin primary school at the age of six. In Poland, it starts at the age of seven; however, is preceded by one year in *przedszkole* (pre-primary school). Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito (2018) claim that early entry

age has rather negative long-term effects as it is associated with lower IQ and mental health issues, GPA and attendance, a decrease in the years of completed education, and a lower probability of passing a grade and following an academic track in and after high school. Since Spanish students begin primary school earlier, it may lead to an increased dropout percentage.

The effects of earlier school entry may also affect the outcomes of teaching reading since Spanish students are expected to read at a younger age. They are introduced to reading at the age of four or five, or even earlier, according to respondents of the questionnaire. Additionally, they are expected to read fluently in the first two grades of primary school, from ages six to eight. In Poland, students are introduced to reading at the age of six or seven and are expected to read fluently in grades VII to VIII, from the age of 13 to 15. It seems that lowering the age of formal instruction results in higher expectations in terms of students' reading abilities. This may cause a lack of interest in reading, higher anxiety, increased probability of dyslexia, and speech problems (Soto, 2019). Additionally, it is not appropriate for the development of eyes and general developmental processes (Soto, 2019). To add to that, Sebastian Suggate et al.'s research (2012) proves that children learning to read later catch up to children reading earlier. Therefore, teaching reading at too young may have the opposite effect than is expected.

The structure of the Polish educational system seems to be more favourable since the primary school entry age is delayed when compared to the Spanish system. Additionally, compulsory education ends at the age of 18, which is later than in Spain. Due to that, students spend more time being surrounded by literary studies, which may enhance their reading skills. Also, the number of school days in Polish schools is longer than in Spanish and the length of holidays is shorter. This may attribute to the better performance of Polish students on examinations due to retention of academics over the summer and its influence on the long-term memory. Moreover, the minimum instruction time for the compulsory curriculum for ISCED 1 is significantly higher in Spain (4750 hours) than in Poland (2268 hours). It seems that Spanish students may be overloaded with the amount of material to be studied. This also does not leave any additional time for teachers to introduce additional

materials, the use of which may affect students' motivation. Polish students are also introduced to formal, external examinations in primary schools and practice examination tasks included in curricula. Therefore, students have a higher ability to pass such tests and achieve higher results.

Both Polish and Spanish core curricula allow teachers the personalisation of their teaching techniques, as mentioned by the participants. Since 50% of Polish respondents, compared to 20% of Spanish, listed reading as the most vital skill that students should obtain, the methods used by the teachers may be more reading oriented. Questionnaires revealed that generally Polish teachers are more aware of the activities, techniques, and strategies that can be used to teach various reading skills.

In terms of increasing language awareness, practising comprehension, assessing, and evaluating reading skills, and providing students with enough opportunities to practice reading in schools teachers in both Polish and Spanish schools provided similar responses to the questionnaires. As iterated in the data analysis, participants named techniques and strategies that can be used to practice the above-mentioned skills. Additionally, they were in accordance with Grabe's (2004) and Pang et al.'s (2003) ideas. Both Polish and Spanish respondents state that teaching reading is an integral part of the curriculum which is in accordance with Grabe's (2004) view.

Polish teachers seem to be more aware of the exercises, strategies, methods, and approaches that can be used to develop reading fluency, activate background knowledge, motivate students to read, integrate reading and writing, and provide beginner or intermediate level students with text structure, following Grabe's (2004) and Pang et al.'s (2003) research findings. To add to that, Polish teachers seemed to be more aware of the types of text that could interest their students. They were able to list genres, types of texts, as well as titles and authors. Spanish teachers listed only some genres and the fact that books should match the interest and ages of the students.

More Spanish than Polish respondents claim to teach reading strategies to students. Additionally, more Spanish respondents claim to use a range of strategies rather than a single one while reading, as Grabe (2004) advises. However, they do not seem to be able to name any of the strategies, and the ones listed belong to the category of rather individual strategies. Less Polish

respondents claim to teach reading strategies; however, they were able to list a higher number of strategies that can be taught.

As seen above, Polish teachers seem to be more aware of the existing techniques, activities, strategies, and methods that can be implemented in teaching reading in order to develop all necessary skills. This leads to the conclusion that by providing students with these strategies, their reading skills will improve. This may contribute to why Polish students score higher on reading tests.

4.3 The strong and weak elements of Polish and Spanish educational systems

4.3.1 **Spain**

Among the strong elements of the Spanish educational system are the expenditures on education, expected years of schooling, classroom environment and the instructional time.

Generally, since 2013 governmental spending on education per pupil/student has been higher in Spain than in Poland when compared to Euros and PPS. This is beneficial since increased per-pupil spendings improve student outcomes (Kirabo, et al., 2015).

Expected years of schooling are also in favour of Spain since extending obligatory school years is critical for economic growth, global health, climate change mitigation, and societal progress (Stone, 2015).

Classroom environments in Spanish schools are perceived by teachers as positive and it is a vital element influencing education (Ambrose, et al., 2010). Teachers are aware of the elements affecting the climate and use various strategies to maintain a positive environment.

Instructional time is higher in Spain which can be seen as positive or negative. On the one hand, students should learn more due to increased hours. On the other hand, they may be overloaded with work and material. However, generally, they are given more time to spend in the classroom in all the subjects. Similarly, Spanish teachers devote more time to reading, which is of high importance.

Several elements can be considered weaker when compared to Poland. However, in many cases, the differences are not very prominent. The class size, teacher-pupil ratio, mean years of schooling, dropout percentage, age of students, and timetables can be considered the weaker elements.

Generally, the teacher-pupil ratio is used as a proxy for the quality of education. Due to that, a lower ratio indicates better educational outcomes. When compared to Poland the ratio in Spain is higher. Additionally, the number of teachers employed in Polish schools is growing; even though the number of students enrolled is smaller than in Spain. Smaller classes are beneficial for both students and teachers. It is easier to work in smaller groups, build relationships, and cooperate (Pate-Bain et al., 1992). The number of students per class seems to be increasing in Spain, whereas, in Poland, it is decreasing. Questionnaires with the teachers revealed that the average class size in Poland is 18 and 23 in Spain. This leads to the conclusion that lowering the number of students per class in Spanish schools could improve both learning and teaching.

Even though Spanish students are expected to stay in school for a longer period, the mean years of schooling are lower. Expected years of schooling stood at around 17.9 in 2019, in the same year mean years stood at 10.3, which is 7.6 lower than expected. The dropout percentage is also high, recorded as 16% in 2020. This is problematic since, following Stone (2015), extended years of schooling positively influence the economy, health, climate, and society. Fortunately, the percentage of early leavers of education seems to decrease which indicates the possibility of significant improvement in the coming years. The starting age for students in primary education could also be increased. Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito (2018) claim that early entry age has rather negative long-term effects on the development of children, their mental health, and the probability of continuing their education. Considering the delay in the primary school entry age could be beneficial for students and could lower the dropout percentage.

Another matter worth considering is the timetables. Polish students, especially in grades I-III, finish school earlier than Spanish. There are several disadvantages of longer day as they can result in low energy and motivation, exhaustion, and lack of concentration (Tucker, 2008).

It is worth analysing the stronger and weaker elements of the system since they may lead to positive changes, allocating the resources in appropriate fields, reconsidering the choices, and influencing the well-being of the students.

4.3.2 **Poland**

The strong elements of the Polish education system are class size, teacher-pupil ratio, age of students, years of schooling, dropout percentage, classroom climate, and timetables.

As previously discussed, smaller classes tend to be more favourable in terms of teaching and learning. Therefore, the fact that the average class size in Polish primary schools is 18, is an advantage. Similarly, Poland manages to lower the teacher-pupil ratio. In the past years, there are more teachers employed; even though there are fewer students enrolled. This may influence the class size in a positive manner.

The entry age of students in primary education also seems to be reasonable. Children are obliged to enter *przedszkole* (pre-school) at the age of six, before starting the schooling. The advantages of delayed entry are, for instance, better mental health and a higher probability of following the educational path (Cáceres-Delpiano & Giolito, 2018). Though the expected number of years of schooling is lower in Poland than in Spain, the mean years are higher. This is advantageous and influences the economy of the country, the climate awareness, decreases health issues, and develops society (Stone, 2015). Additionally, the dropout percentage is way lower in Poland than in Spain and stands at around 5.5%.

Classroom climate in Polish schools is perceived by teachers as positive and it is a vital element influencing education (Ambrose, et al., 2010). Teachers are aware of the elements affecting the climate and use various strategies to maintain a positive environment.

Timetables in Polish primary schools also seem to be more advantageous than in Spain. This is mostly due to the fact that Polish children finish the school day earlier, especially in grades I-III.

This leaves them with more free time to play, allows them to focus throughout the lessons, and does not decrease their motivation to study (Tucker, 2008).

On the other hand, the expenditures on education, expected years of schooling, and the instruction time are weak elements of the system.

Extending spending on education is proven to be beneficial (Kirabo, et al., 2015). The Polish government spends less than Spanish on pupils. This could be changed as it would increase the education outcomes of students. As mentioned, expected years of schooling are lower in Poland than in Spain. Extending them positively influences many social and economic aspects (Stone, 2015). Therefore, encouraging students to continue their educational path would be advantageous.

The difference between Poland and Spain in terms of the minimal instruction time is enormous. Providing students with more time to practice their skills and gain knowledge is perceived as positive. It may have some drawbacks when the instruction time is excessively large since it may lead to work overload. However, generally, increasing the instruction time should lead to better educational outcomes. Therefore, a slight increase in the number of minimal instruction time in Polish schools could be beneficial.

4.4 Results of standardised native language and English reading tests

Two tests aiming at evaluating the native language proficiency reading skills are analysed, PISA, and PIRLS. From the year 2000 till the year 2018, Polish students scored higher than Spanish on the PISA test. Moreover, in Poland, the tendency is positive with increasing results for the students, whereas, in Spain, the tendency is negative with decreasing results. Additionally, in the year 2018, the results of Spanish students were not published due to “implausible response behaviour amongst students” (OECD, 2019b). This may lead to the conclusion that Spanish students do not take such tests with proper importance. The lack of data from the year 2018 is also seen as a limitation. Due to that, no accurate data on the reading performance of Spanish students could be gathered.

PIRLS is a test organised for fourth graders. In the year 2016, Polish students scored higher than Spanish. Additionally, 14% more Polish students reached Advanced Benchmark in this test. Polish students achieved also better results for literary and informational reading purposes. To add to that, they scored higher in achievement in comprehension processes. It seems that Polish students' reading comprehension is more advanced.

English language proficiency is measured based on the Cambridge English tests for Pre-A1, A1, and A2 children aged 6 to 12. From 2015 to 2019 Polish students scored better than Spanish. It did not depend on the level of English since in all three examinations more Polish students scored five shields and fewer scored one. The limitation is that these tests are external and are not organised in schools. To this day, there is no examination organised internationally in schools for students to measure their English language skills. By the year 2025 PISA is going to organise the Foreign Language Assessment aiming to assess the reading, listening, and speaking skills of students around the world (OECD, n.d.). Due to that, comparing the results of this test would be of excellent value to supplement the current study.

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

As outlined, the main aim of this study is to investigate the differences in educational systems of Poland and Spain and approaches to teaching reading skills in primary schools. The research was also concerned with finding an explanation as to why Spanish students tend to score lower on language proficiency tests, such as PISA, PIRLS, and YEL. The study was conducted based on the literature review and on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from statistical centres, OECD, Eurydice, and questionnaires with teachers of the native language and English as a Foreign Language in Polish and Spanish primary schools.

5.2 Key Findings

In response to RQ1 expenditures on education, teacher-pupil ratio, and class size, expected years of schooling and dropout percentage, age of students, and classroom environment affect the results of teaching reading in Polish and Spanish primary schools. The construction of education systems also influences the outcomes of teaching, especially the structure of the system, its key features, the organisation of school time, instruction time, the curricula, teaching methods and materials, as well as the assessment and evaluation. Additionally, since education systems in both countries allow for the personalisation of curricula, the approaches, and methods that teachers use are of considerable influence.

Regarding RQ2, mean years of schooling, the age of students, class size and teacher-pupil ratio, the structure of the educational system, the timetables, the methods, strategies, and approaches used by the teachers, and the type of assessment are the most influential in terms of outcomes of teaching reading in both native and foreign (English) languages.

Findings related to RQ3 indicate that both systems contain some strong and weak elements. Among the strong elements of the Spanish educational system are the expenditures on education, expected years of schooling, classroom climate, and instruction time. The weaker aspects are the class size, teacher-pupil ratio, mean years of schooling, dropout percentage, age of students, and timetables. Strong elements of the Polish system are the class size, teacher-pupil ratio, mean years of schooling, dropout percentage, age of students, classroom environment and timetables. On the other hand, the expenditures on education expected years of schooling, and the instruction time are weak elements of the system. The structure of the system methods and strategies used to teach reading, assessment and evaluation, the curricula, and the length of the school year are considered neutral elements.

In response to RQ4, the analysis of the results of PISA and PIRLS revealed that Polish students achieve better results in reading tasks in their native language throughout the years. Moreover, children aged 6-12 scored better in pre-A1, A1, and A2 YEL tests in terms of reading and writing in 2015-2019.

5.3 Limitations

As per the limitations regarding the data collection, the lack of more recent data on the class size in Spain and Poland from Eurostat can be listed. This was partially solved by gathering the information on that matter from the questionnaires with the teachers.

The study was also limited by two variables affecting the analysis of outcomes of education. Since the results of the reading part of PISA 2018 in Spain have not been revealed, the analysis of results was limited and no more accurate data on the reading performance of Spanish students could have been gathered. Additionally, YEL tests are organised by Cambridge English and not any international assessment centres. Therefore, participants may be attending language schools in order to prepare for such an exam and not all students are assessed. To this day, there is no examination organised internationally in schools for students to measure their English language skills.

With the limited number of questionnaire participants, it is not possible to make generalised statements about the teaching practices of the teachers in Polish and Spanish primary schools. Additionally, there were two times fewer Spanish participants which might also affect the results of the study.

5.4 Future Recommendations

This study performed a detailed analysis of educational systems in Poland and in Spain regarding the influence of the variables on outcomes of teaching reading. Although it was not the focus of this study, the analysis could be further exploited to provide information on the influence of all the analysed factors on the outcomes of teaching other skills, such as writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

The study provided an opportunity to compare the teaching methods in both countries and teachers' awareness of using them, not only in terms of teaching reading but also different skills. By conducting questionnaires with a higher number of teachers, more accurate and valuable data could be gathered.

Future research could also evaluate the differences in terms of classroom climate in both countries. By observing the classes and conducting the questionnaires or interviews with teachers and students, a great deal of data could be gathered to confirm the opinions on the climate of teachers participating in this study.

Finally, to supplement this study, comparing the results of the PISA 2025 Foreign Language Assessment of Polish and Spanish students would be of excellent value. Especially, since to this day there is no examination organised internationally in schools for students to measure their English language skills.

5.5 Implications

This study uncovered an unexpected point. In the beginning, it seemed that several variables are in favour of the Spanish education system. However, thorough research revealed that these elements are actually in favour of Poland. For a Polish person, receiving education in Polish schools it seemed that the Spanish system would be superior. The Polish system seemed to contain flaws such as being disorganised due to the changes that have occurred in recent years. As the data has revealed, the case seems to be that neither system is simply better or more advanced. Both the Polish and Spanish educational systems contain strong and weak elements, as suggested by RQ3, which should be evaluated and improved in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What country do you teach in?
2. What type of school do you teach at?
3. How many educational institutions do you work in?
4. What subjects do you teach?
5. How many classes in total are you teaching in the school year 2021/22?
6. How many students are there in each of your classes?
7. What is your opinion on the size of the classes you teach?
8. What actions can you take in order to assure a positive classroom climate? By positive classroom climate, a safe, supportive, respectful, and relaxed climate is meant.
9. Would you say that the classroom climate in your classes is positive, neutral, or negative? (Bearing in mind that students' behaviours and interactions also form classroom climate)
10. What can you say about the communication between students and communication between teaching staff and students? Is it satisfactory, respectful, chaotic, precise, etc?
11. What is your method of providing feedback to your students?
12. Among the skills expected from your students (such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing) which one is the most vital for you?
13. At what age are students introduced to reading? Do you think that it is the appropriate age? What is the best age to begin reading training, according to you?
14. How much time do you spend on teaching reading? (The number can be estimated and put into percentage or number of hours.)
15. What grades do you put the most emphasis on developing oral production in order to influence the reading?
16. What are the strategies, methods, or activities you use to do that?
17. What are the strategies, methods, or activities used to increase language awareness in your classroom? (Language awareness consists of the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, syntax, etc.)
18. What grade do most of your students read fluently? Contrary to that, at what age are they expected to read fluently?
19. What are the strategies, methods, or activities used by you to develop reading fluency?

20. When teaching reading, do you provide students with background knowledge activation tasks? How do you do that?
21. What techniques do you use to practice comprehension of the text?
22. How can you motivate students to read and practice their reading?
23. Can you think of any activities that integrate reading and writing? Do you use them in your classroom?
24. What kind of texts would you use for particular grades (1-3 or higher) when it comes to teaching reading? (You can mention the genres, and topics, or provide examples of titles.)
25. Do you believe that providing beginner and intermediate learners with instruction on the structure of the text is appropriate? If yes, how can it be done?
26. How do you assess and evaluate the progress of your students' reading skills?
27. Do you provide them with feedback? If yes, how is it done?
28. Would you say that your students have enough opportunities to practice reading in a school?
29. Do you teach your students any reading strategies?
30. Are they individual strategies or approaches that combine multiple strategies?
31. Could you provide some names of the strategies that you teach? (If the names are unknown, a description of the approach/strategy will be satisfactory)
32. In what way is teaching reading contained in your own or your school's curriculum?
33. Does the curriculum allow you the personalisation of your teaching techniques? If yes, in what way?
34. Do any ideas for the improvement of teaching reading in schools come to your mind?