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International education programmes as an element of educational change in the Polish education system

**Międzynarodowe programy kształcenia
jako element zmiany edukacyjnej w polskim systemie oświaty**

Abstract: The main aim of the article is to present selected international education programmes implemented in Poland (International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, International General Certificate of Secondary Education) in the context of educational change. The background of the analyses is the metamorphoses in the Polish education system after the period of political transformation. Literature in the field of education policy, theory of educational systems, normative documents of educational law, European Union directives and programme documents of international organizations conducting and accrediting IB, AP, and IGCSE programmes were used for the research. The author argues that the educational change that took place after 1989 in the organization and structure of the education system made it possible to implement international education programmes and contributed to the democratization and socialization of the Polish education system. Currently, international education programmes constitute an attractive educational offer that provides a chance for continuing education at renowned foreign universities, makes it possible to efficiently find oneself on the global labour market, and also prepares young people to be active members of civil

society, guided by such values of political and social life as respect for human rights, democracy, solidarity, freedom of speech, and tolerance.

Keywords: international education programmes, educational change, education system, civil society.

Introduction

Change as a dynamic category is a complex and multifaceted process, difficult to implement because, apart from its structure, elements, and stages, the key role is played by the conditions in which it is implemented. Before it is introduced, it is necessary to consider its need, purpose, scope, and addressees. The role of a leader and methods of motivating and initiating change, and, after the implementation of planned activities, consolidation and evaluation, are also important issues. Despite careful planning, change may be unpredictable; it may bring about various events and complications (Elsner, 2005, p. 24). After the political transformation in Poland, an important element of educational change was the possibility of establishing private schools and educational establishments run and maintained by social and educational organizations, private persons, etc. In the wake of these transformations, the first international schools and establishments implementing international education programmes began to appear. The changes concerning the functioning of schools in the new conditions were reflected in the legal provisions, first contained in the Act of September 7, 1991 on the education system (Journal of Laws 1991 No. 95, item 425), and then in the Act of December 14, 2016 – the Law on School Education (Journal of Laws No. 2017, item 59).

Currently, international schools in Poland usually have the status of private schools operating on the basis of international accreditations, which ensure a high level of education. Their number is growing owing to the influx of more and more foreigners. Most often these are educational establishments gathering children of diplomats, investors, and employees of companies that have opened their offices in Poland. In international schools neither the Polish core curriculum, nor the Polish assessment system are in force (the curriculum is compiled in accordance with the requirements of a foreign ministry of education). Science subjects are taught in a foreign language according to a selected foreign programme.

International divisions can be established in both state and private schools. Under art. 21 of the Act of December 14, 2016 – the Law on School Education (Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1082), launching such a division

requires a permit from the minister responsible for education. The application for permission to establish an international division is submitted by the body running the school in which an international division is to be established, and the permit is granted, if the curriculum established by a foreign educational institution makes it possible for students to obtain knowledge and skills enabling them to take the exam. In addition, the following documents must be submitted with the application: consent of a foreign educational institution for the school to enter education in accordance with the curriculum established by this institution, consent of the teachers council to establish an international division, and the opinion of the education superintendent containing an assessment of the organizational and human resources making possible the implementation of the curriculum set by a foreign educational institution in a given school. Students attending international divisions fulfil their compulsory schooling and compulsory education obligation. At each stage of their education, they have the option of transferring to the Polish education system.

In Poland, both international schools and international divisions most often run programmes such as International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). As part of the IB programme, the most popular is the International Baccalaureate programme (IB DP) at the general secondary school level, fully implemented in English, French, or Spanish.

The main aim of considerations presented in this paper is to present selected international education programmes implemented in Poland. The educational change and transitions resulting from the systemic transformation provide background of the analysis. The research was exploratory in nature and was performed using a desk research methodology. The literature on education policy, education systems theory, normative documents on education-related legislation and the European Union directives were the main sources. Additionally, metadata and programming documents of international organisations which run and accredit international education programmes in Poland were used for the analysis as well as helped to identify the three most frequently implemented programmes. The initial phase of the research involved collection and selection of the documents as well as acquisition of the metadata. They lasted from September till December 2021, while the following months covered the stage of their analysis and description. Due to the subject, the time horizon covered the documents that were binding between 1989 and 2021. The adopted research procedure made it possible to consider and better understand the historical context of educational changes in Poland. The knowledge gathered may inspire deeper reflection on the

role of the structure, content and functions of the international education programmes with the purpose of preparing educated, active and civically engaged generations of Poles. It may also contribute to taking specific actions aimed at the process of education democratisation and socialisation.

International education programmes implemented in Poland

Currently, the most popular international education programmes in Poland are the International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), of which the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme has been implemented the longest. The IB programme was created by the International Baccalaureate Organization, which was established in 1968 in Geneva. The initiators of the idea of international teaching were teachers and experts from various countries. The organization has the status of a foundation and offers four international education programmes known as IB programmes. These are: the Primary Years Program (PYP), the Middle Years Program (MYP), the Diploma Program (DP), and the Career-related Program (CP). The IB programme focuses on the individual needs of each student, develops critical thinking and a sense of responsibility. The status of an IB school is obtained through a 2-3-year authorization process which consists of several phases with distinct goals and timeframes. Authorization is an international seal of quality, therefore, it is separate for each IB programme. Schools that have obtained a certificate are subject to regular checks because authorization guarantees the world standards of education (International Baccalaureate, 2022). According to the data from the International Baccalaureate Organization, currently there are over 5,000 IB schools in the world, and the programme is implemented in over 140 countries. Most establishments are located in the Scandinavian countries, Central and Eastern Europe, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States. In Poland, the first school with the IB programme was launched in 1993. Since then, the number of accredited establishments has increased significantly. Currently, one or more of the four IB programmes are offered by 63 schools in Poland (PYP – 13, MYP – 15, DP – 55) (International Baccalaureate, 2022). The implementation of the programme at the diploma level (DP) provides the opportunity to continue education at universities around the world.

Another popular education programme is Advanced Placement (AP) created by the College Board, the American organization of schools in the United States. Since 1955, the College Board has been responsible for developing guidelines for the courses, supported teachers involved in the creation

and implementation of the programme, and verified its compliance with the assumptions. The AP programme is addressed to high school students and makes it possible to gain directional knowledge in various areas. It currently includes 38 subjects to choose from. The programme makes it possible for Polish students to master the English language and other issues at a very high level. In contrast to the IB, which puts an emphasis on inquiry-based and skill-based learning, in the AP programme it is most important to learn the content of the curriculum. AP courses are less interdisciplinary, they delve into the content of a specific scientific discipline, which is reflected in the methods of knowledge verification. Each AP course ends with an exam (answers are classified as correct or incorrect). Assessment criteria are developed by the people who designed the course (Advanced Placement Central, 2022). AP exams are held every May worldwide.

Unlike other programmes, in Advanced Placement teachers develop their own curriculum taking into account the standards of education at the academic level. The organization encourages the use, modification, or adaptation of existing, approved and released documents. Each new project is subject to authorization in the process of the AP Course Audit. If the curriculum is approved, the school can use the AP designation and is included in the official list of all courses – the AP Course Ledger, and the teacher has access to numerous materials and resources prepared by the organization (Advanced Placement Central, 2022).

Next to the IB DP, AP is an exam recognized by many universities around the world, which makes it one of the most popular English-language exams. The programme is in high demand in high schools in the United States and Canada. In Poland, it is implemented mainly by international schools (in the school year 2020/2021 – 6 schools). In practice, completing an AP programme is often associated with the preparation for the international baccalaureate (IB).

The third programme is the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) which was developed over 30 years ago by University of Cambridge International Examinations. As a result of internal changes and transformations in the organization, three examination committees were established in 1998: Cambridge Assessment International Education, which runs international education programmes for students aged 5 to 19; Cambridge Assessment English, which deals with English language certification; and OCR, which recognizes and confirms students' achievements (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2022). Currently, it is an internationally recognized curriculum for students aged 14-16. As part

of the IGCSE there are over 70 subjects, including as many as 30 languages. Most schools require students to take exams in at least 5 or 6 subjects, each of which is certified separately. The main feature of the programme is its flexibility, i.e. the programme is not a package that must be implemented in its entirety. Schools may combine programme elements with local education programmes, many of them using the IGCSE as the English language element of the bilingual educational programme (Cambridge IGCSE standards and GCSE, 2019). The IGCSE places emphasis on building subject knowledge, but also on developing the skills of critical thinking, independent research, problem solving, and collaboration. Students are credited for subjects throughout the duration of a course, by means of written, oral, and practical tests, and assessed on the basis of exams organized by Cambridge International Examinations (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2022). Each subject is assessed separately, examinations are held twice a year, in June and November (the results are published in August and January). Thanks to the holistic approach to education, the IGCSE programme prepares students for international diploma programmes such as the IB.

It is worth mentioning that Cambridge Assessment International Education provides access to source documents for each IGCSE subject. (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2022), and also guarantees comprehensive methodological support for teachers. In addition to syllabi for individual subjects, they may use teaching materials and textbooks, as well as make familiar with question sheets from previous exams, results statistics, examiners' reports, and sample lesson plans. In addition, they have access to information on the preparation of students for exams, discussion forums and consultations with subject experts and other teachers. They can also participate in regularly organized trainings.

The IGCSE programme is becoming more and more popular all over the world. Currently, it is being implemented by almost 5,000 schools in over 145 countries. In Great Britain itself the number of institutions offering education in accordance with the IGCSE is constantly increasing. Currently, there are over 200 schools in the state sector and 438 in the private sector (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2022). In Poland, in the school year 2020/2021, the programme was implemented by 10 schools.

International education programmes have numerous advantages. First of all, they are constructed in such a way that they instil in students enthusiasm for learning, arouse curiosity, build self-confidence, and teach independence and responsibility. They develop skills necessary for both good academic performance and professional success.

International education programmes as an example of educational change in the Polish education system

The concept of „change” may have many meanings and contexts. It refers both to the introduction of new solutions based on the social, economic, and demographic situation of a given community, as well as to the effects of undertaken actions. In the context of education, the term is most often identified with a process and refers to such concepts as reform, innovation, and novelty. Maria Kocór (2006) divides educational changes into planned and gradual. Gradual changes are a slow, natural, sometimes difficult to grasp and observe, transition from the old to the new. On the other hand, planned changes destroy the old order and introduce a new quality. They include:

- educational reforms;
- changes resulting from the application of research results;
- changes resulting from social inspiration or pressure;
- changes initiated by educational authorities;
- changes inspired by the activity of teachers, students, or parents.
- Referring to the above classification, in Poland, thanks to the systemic transformation, there has been a fundamental educational change, the elements of which are reflected in the types and kinds of reforms. Taking into account the essence, scope, and quality of educational changes, Bogusław Śliwerski (2019, pp. 796-802) distinguishes between:
 - remedial reforms, removing or repairing individual elements of the education system which had a negative impact on its functioning;
 - modernization reforms, aimed at modernizing the content and methods of teaching itself, teaching aids, and textbooks;
 - structural reforms, related to the change of the types of schools, the change of the financing system, the change of the status of teachers, pedagogical superintendence, etc.;
 - systemic reforms, concerning paradigm changes – these are the so-called „deep” reforms, involving change in the relationship between the educational system and the social system; they cover institutional and organizational changes, and lead to a radical change in the quality and effectiveness of education.

For many years, Polish education was centralized. The high degree of centralization was associated with the influence of politics on most spheres of life. Educational management was the responsibility of central institutions and schools were under special control and supervision. Over the years,

it was the central government that decided the content of the main subjects, and the textbooks were reviewed and approved by the ministry. Along with the political transformation, attempts were made to decentralize the education system. However, despite the lapse of over 30 years and numerous efforts made, education still remains a largely centralized structure, and the dominant entity in terms of decision-making is the minister for education. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that, as a result of the reforms, many changes took place in the field of education after 1989. The most important ones include the possibility of establishing non-state (private) educational establishments, introducing the right to pedagogical innovation, including the establishment of original programme classes and schools. Another important factor proving the changes taking place was the process of socialization of education by transferring the running of kindergartens and schools to local self-governments (in accordance with the Act of 24 July 1998 on the introduction of the basic three-tier territorial division of the state). This, in turn, brought about an increase in the financial, organizational, and curricular autonomy of schools. Partial decentralization related to the process of managing the establishments (in terms of administration and content) was also of great importance. The above circumstances made it possible to initiate the accreditation process and to open schools with international education programmes.

The consequences in the form of educational change were also caused by Poland's accession to the European Union and the need to adapt to common priorities. From that moment on, as part of European cooperation Polish education was to pursue the following objectives:

1. to make lifelong learning and learning mobility a reality,
2. to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training,
3. to promote equality, social cohesion, and active citizenship,
4. to enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training (Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training („ET 2020”, pp. 2-9).

This process was to be carried out, inter alia, by disseminating foreign languages, supporting the mobility of students and teachers, the possibility of continuing education abroad by students from Poland, and the recognition of qualifications and comparability of diplomas. Decisions and desiderata were regulated by relevant laws and regulations.

On the wave of the above changes, there was the talk of building a civil society in Poland, the members of which would actively participate in matters

creating the democratic order. The element that was to help in the implementation of these assumptions was the shift of education towards openness and mobilization to participation in the public sphere. The implementation of this strategy required the „»budding« of local initiatives, establishing communities, mobilizing care, and creating fragments of the public sphere wherever possible” (Witkowski, 2000, p. 166). Preparation for life in an open society, based on respect for the freedom and dignity of every human being and concern for the common good, could be achieved thanks to the fundamental changes in the education programme. After the educational change, the school was to be a space conducive to the building of a community, developing pro-social and civic attitudes, the indicator of which is the involvement and participation of students in public life. International schools and international education programmes, which put emphasis not only on knowledge, but above all on the development of practical skills, also in the field of social and civic competences, turned out to be the answer to preparing young people for active life in a democratic society.

In connection with the above, it should be emphasized that the establishment of international schools and the implementation of international education programmes has been an important element of the educational change in the Polish education system after 1989. These transformations fit into both the scale of the macrosystem (changes in the structure of education and legal regulations governing the functioning of the education system) and the microsystem (the level of functioning of specific educational establishments, activities of coordinators of international education programmes, teachers, and school principals). The implementation and realization of programmes such as the IB, AP, IGCSE contributes to the activation and socialization of students, develops their critical thinking, prompts them to make independent decisions (e.g. selection of subjects), teaches responsibility (e.g. voluntary service, pro-social activities at school and in the local milieu). Achieving the above assumptions is possible thanks to cooperation between institutions in which experts develop education programmes implemented in schools in different countries, including in Poland.

Conclusions

In the recent history of Poland, the most important educational change had a socio-economic background and was related to political transformation. This process caused a breakthrough in education, which for many years had been highly centralized and subject to supervision and permanent control. Central authorities played a key role in the organization of the

education system. Schools were run by the state, and teachers were the passive executors of orders and assigned tasks. Therefore, one of the most important achievements of the process of democratization of education after 1989 was the possibility of opening non-state (private) educational establishments, as well as the changes that took place in the scope of creating education programmes. In 1999, the place of one curriculum obligatory in all schools was replaced by the so-called core curriculum for general education (regulated by the Regulation of the Minister for National Education of February 15, 1999 on the core curriculum for general education). Since then, teachers have been able to prepare their own, original programmes. The above changes made the implementation of international education programmes in state and private schools possible. It was also not without significance that together with the accession to the European Union, Poland undertook to introduce the changes in education postulated by the European Council. These issues concerned the so-called „European dimension of education”, which was to be present in the curricula and concerned such issues as educating society in the various fields related to the history, present, and future of united Europe; ensuring adequate preparation of society for professional work in the situation of the free European market and market economy; changes in mentality and lifestyle thanks to the promotion of education for democracy and through democracy, and thanks to the presentation of the specificity of the processes of European integration; and emphasis on learning foreign languages (Kość, 2006, pp. 323-324).

The above requirements could be met, *inter alia*, through the teaching process based on international education programmes such as the IB, AP, IGCSE. These programmes have become an attractive educational offer because they guarantee not only a high level of education, but also comprehensive development. Moreover, they provide an opportunity to continue education at renowned foreign universities, make it possible to efficiently find oneself on the global labour market, and prepare a young person to be an active member of the civil society, guided by such values of political and social life as the respect for human rights, democracy, solidarity, freedom of speech, and tolerance.

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