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K holistickému rámcu vyučovania angličtiny v rozličných edukačných kontextoch – na ceste k rozuzleniu

Towards a Holistic Framework for Teaching English in Diverse Educational Contexts – Toward the End Game

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Abstract

In light of the growing diversity in contemporary classrooms – driven by factors such as increased migration and the inclusive education policies supported by the European Union and the United Nations – it is becoming increasingly evident that the current educational framework in Polish schools requires significant adaptation. While the inclusive model provides necessary support for students with special educational needs (SEN) and those from migrant backgrounds, it simultaneously presents challenges for maintaining academic standards, particularly in the context of national examinations. Alarmingly, recent data indicate a noticeable decline in Grade 8 examination results in Polish language performance. This article argues that while inclusive education is a necessary and irreversible trend, it must be balanced with targeted strategies to support mainstream learners and maintain high academic outcomes. Suggested solutions include the introduction of additional subject-specific support classes in Polish, English, and mathematics for general education students (typically developing students), and the broader use of differentiated instruction. By proposing a holistic teaching framework that recognises diversity while reinforcing academic rigour, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on how to reform education in a way that is both inclusive and effective.

Keywords: Inclusive education. SEN. STEM model. Typically developing students.

The educational environment in Poland – statistical overview

The education system in Poland has been gradually adapting to evolving circumstances, including the implementation of inclusive education

models, increased migration due to ongoing conflict[1], the broader impact of globalization, and the growing number of students diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN)[2]. The percentage of children with disabilities among preschool attendees rose – in the 2023/2024 school year, such children constituted almost 4% of all children attending kindergartens and kindergarten departments, while at the beginning of the last decade, it was fewer than 1%. Additionally, the shift away from mandatory homework in primary schools reflects broader trends encouraged by international frameworks such as those advocated by the United Nations[3] and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), which promote inclusive, learner-centered educational practices: "Without inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all, countries will not achieve gender equality or break the cycle of poverty that is leaving millions of people behind."[4]

Tab. 1. Authors own table, statistical data taken from GUS (Central Statistical Office in Poland) in regards to SEN students in Poland 2023/24

School year	**2023/24[5]**
Deaf	514
Hearing impaired	6006
Blind	22
Vision impaired	4612
With intellectual disability (light/moderate/severe)	24219
With autism/Asperger syndrome	**48041**
With impaired motor skills, aphasia	19890
With multiple disabilities	16024
Socially maladjusted	41
At risk of social maladjustment	7027
No of pupils (total)	**126396**

[1] In addition, in the years 2022–2023, underage refugees from Ukraine were not obliged to attend Polish schools; instead, they could continue learning in their schools in Ukraine in a remote mode. Attending Polish schools started being obligatory for them as of 1st September 2024. https://raportsdg.stat.gov.pl/en/Education_and_volunteering.html?utm_ [18.05.2025]

[2] Gov.pl: SEN students in Poland. https://raportsdg.stat.gov.pl/en/Education_and_volunteering.html?utm_ [18.05.2025]

[3] UN, Human Rights: "Poland is covered by the OHCHR Regional Office for Europe (ROE), whose primary function is to advance human rights in the European Union (EU) through technical assistance, advocacy, and reporting on human rights, based on the recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms." https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/poland [18.05.2025]

[4] UN, Human Rights, Education: https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/education-and-cultural-rights [18.05.2025]

[5] GUS: Pupils with special educational needs in primary schools by type of disability (excluding special schools), 2022/23, https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/oswiata-i-wychowanie-w-roku-szkolnym-20232024,1,19.html [25/04/2025]

When juxtaposing the EASNIE mission statement – which highlights the importance of inclusive education for all learners – with current statistical data on school performance (a decline in the average scores for the Polish language component of the eighth-grade exam across Poland's voivodeships – 3.1% drop between 2019 and 2024[6]), as well as growing concerns voiced by teachers regarding the challenges of managing increasingly diverse classrooms, a rather complex and inconsistent picture emerges. It raises a fundamental question: is inclusive education, in its current form, truly beneficial for all students? While the ideals of inclusion are rooted in equity and access, the practical realities suggest a widening gap between policy ambitions and everyday classroom experiences.

Tab. 2. Average scores of students in the eighth-grade exam[7]

Średnie wyniki uczniów na egzaminie ósmoklasisty	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	relacja [%]	relacja [%]	relacja [%]	relacja [%]	relacja [%]	relacja [%]
Ogółem						
Język polski						
ogółem	63	59	60	60	66	61
chłopcy	58	54	55	55	62	57
dziewczęta	69	64	65	64	70	65
Matematyka						
ogółem	45	46	47	57	53	52
chłopcy	45	46	47	57	54	52
dziewczęta	45	46	48	57	53	51
Język angielski						
ogółem	59	54	66	67	66	66
chłopcy	58	53	64	65	64	65
dziewczęta	60	55	68	68	67	68

As much of the institutional focus and resources are directed toward ensuring that weaker or disadvantaged students receive adequate support, academically stronger pupils often find themselves 'underserved' within the classroom. This imbalance becomes especially concerning in light of declining national examination results and the growing dependency on private tutoring, especially in core subjects such as, mathematics, and English, and later on in the next educational level in Polish and chemistry.

[6] GUS: Average Scores of Students in the Eighth-Grade Exam: https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/srednie-wyniki-uczniow-na-egzaminie-osmoklasisty,18,1.html [02.05.2025]

[7] GUS: Average Scores of Students in the Eighth-Grade Exam: https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/srednie-wyniki-uczniow-na-egzaminie-osmoklasisty,18,1.html [accessed 02.05.2025]

The increasing reliance on out-of-school, fee-based instruction suggests that the current system is not sufficiently equipped to challenge and benefit students who are capable of working beyond the standard curriculum. This trend raises questions about equity and access: not all families can afford private lessons, which in turn intensifies educational disparities. However, there may be viable ways to bridge this gap and ensure that the educational system effectively serves all learners – students with special educational needs (SEN), migrant pupils, and typically developing students alike.

A possible remedy would be to formalise and integrate advanced instruction into the regular school timetable. By introducing compulsory, subject-specific extension hours for high-performing students – focusing on advanced content and critical thinking tasks – schools could provide meaningful academic enrichment within the public system itself. These additional sessions would not replace inclusive education but would complement it, ensuring that all learners, regardless of ability, are challenged appropriately and supported to reach their full potential.

First and foremost, it would be valuable to critically examine whether the increasingly popular STEM-based instructional model, now adopted by many schools, offers measurable benefits across the full spectrum of learners. Specifically, there is a need to assess whether this approach effectively supports both lower-achieving students and their higher-performing peers, rather than disproportionately benefiting one group. Moreover, particular attention should be paid to how the implementation of STEM methodologies in core subjects – such as mathematics, science, and language education – translates into improved outcomes in the final eighth-grade examination. In The absence of clear evidence that it fosters success for all students, the widespread implementation of this model may deepen existing educational disparities rather than address them.

STEM model – problem or a solution

While a precise count of schools employing a STEM teaching model isn't specified, the widespread implementation of programs like Laboratories of the Future[8] and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan[9] suggests that a substantial majority of Polish schools are incorporating STEM education

[8] Launched by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in collaboration with GovTech Poland, this program aims to equip primary schools with modern tools like 3D printers, microcontrollers, and educational robots. By September 2023, nearly 15,000 primary schools – over 99% of all local government primary schools – had joined the initiative, benefiting more than 3 million students.

[9] This plan includes provisions to equip 16,000 schools with AI and STEM laboratories, enhancing digital infrastructure and promoting STEM education nationwide.

into their curricula already. The STEM model in education refers to an interdisciplinary approach that integrates four key academic disciplines: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Rather than teaching each subject in isolation, STEM education encourages students to apply knowledge across disciplines to solve real-world problems. The indistinguishable nature of skills in early childhood is due, in some extend, to the fact that early learning occurs across different domains with gains in one domain contributing to gains in other domains.[10] Therefore, the EdTech Poland Foundation advocates for introducing STEAM (STEM + Arts) methodologies in preschools. This interdisciplinary approach fosters analytical thinking, creativity, and teamwork from a young age, advocating growing interest among educators and institutions.[11]

These efforts reflect Poland's commitment to preparing students for the demands of a technologically advanced future. In the mission statement present on the Gov.pl in regards to the program it is stated: "Future Labs program is the largest educational program realised by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in cooperation with the GovTech Centre. Our goal is to equip all Polish primary schools with technical equipment that will enable over 3 million students to develop practical skills in various fields."[12]

However, not denying that creative, student-centered approaches like STEM, project work, and peer learning can increase engagement and develop practical skills, they don't replace the focused, structured preparation needed for high-stakes exams – especially in a system where exams are traditional, written, and mark-heavy. Therefore, educators teaching exam-oriented subjects – such as Polish, mathematics, and English – often replace the officially prescribed textbooks with exam preparation materials (*repetytoria*) in the final year of instruction. Aware of the critical importance of final exam performance, they tend to prioritize repeated practice with mock tests over the broader curriculum content. Moreover, more and more students declare that they have private lessons in at least one of the core subjects. If that is the case than the education provided by school is missing something important. After all, the tutors during private lessons use old established models of teaching. While precise statistics on private tutoring among primary school students in Poland

[10] Demetriou, A., Merrell, C., Tymms, P. (2017). Mapping and predicting literacy and reasoning skills from early to later primary school. *Learning and Individual Differences*, vol. 54, pp. 217-225. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.01.023

[11] Gov.pl: Schools in the Program: https://www.gov.pl/web/govtech-en/modern-equipment-will-be-granted-to-nearly-15-000-polish-primary-schools?utm_ [24.05.2025]

[12] Gov.pl: https://www.gov.pl/web/govtech-en/modern-equipment-will-be-granted-to-nearly-15-000-polish-primary-schools?utm_ [24.05.2025]

are lacking[13], existing data indicates a significant reliance on private lessons, particularly in subjects like English and Chemistry: "According to data of the largest Polish website with classified ads for private lessons, e-korepetycje.net, the most adds are from teachers of English and Chemistry".[14] This trend suggests a high demand for private tutoring in language acquisition and science subjects. While the implementation of the STEM education model undoubtedly fosters integration and proves effective in classrooms with a high proportion of students with special educational needs or migrant backgrounds, it may fall short in adequately preparing students for standardized final examinations.

By all means, the intention of this article is not to discredit the STEM model of education which aids perfectly the 21st century inclusive education fostered in Poland. Admittedly, the most straightforward solution would be to abolish the eighth-grade exams altogether or shift them to function as entrance examinations at the level of upper secondary education. Such a change would significantly ease the pressure placed on primary school teachers. However, given the unlikelihood of this reform, an alternative approach might involve the introduction of supplementary lessons in core subjects for high-achieving students. These sessions could take place once or twice a week in Polish, mathematics, and English, and could be cumulative for students in grades 6 through 8. Crucially, they should not rely on standard textbooks employed by their schools but instead employ more challenging materials, with a focus on deep text and data analysis, critical thinking, and problem-solving in regard to their final examinations. Depending on the school's location, there may also be opportunities to involve academic-style educators or university-affiliated teachers. The structure of these lessons would need to be carefully designed to both raise examination performance and provide students with a strong foundation in their chosen subjects as they transition into secondary education. In contemporary educational discourse, the primary emphasis tends to fall on supporting students with special educational needs (SEN), learning difficulties, or migrant backgrounds. While these considerations are undoubtedly important, typically developing students are often overlooked in the process. As instructional standards are frequently adjusted downward to accommodate students requiring additional support, higher-achieving or average learners may find themselves insufficiently challenged. This group is unlikely to raise objections, as the curriculum becomes easier to navigate and minimal effort is required to obtain satisfactory grades – even without active engagement in

[13] Private tutoring remains a largely unregulated area, as many lessons are not formally advertised due to tax considerations. Additionally, not all students are willing to disclose their participation in such lessons, which further complicates efforts to obtain accurate data on their prevalence.

[14] Obserwator Finansowy.pl: Good Education Costs: https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/in-english/good-education-costs/?utm_ [24.05.2025]

lessons. However, this dynamic results in superficial learning and insufficient preparation for high-stakes final examinations. Parents, seeing high marks on report cards, may not perceive a need for concern. Yet, the true role of educators is twofold: to support those who struggle, but also to cultivate the potential of more capable students and encourage them to reach beyond minimal standards.

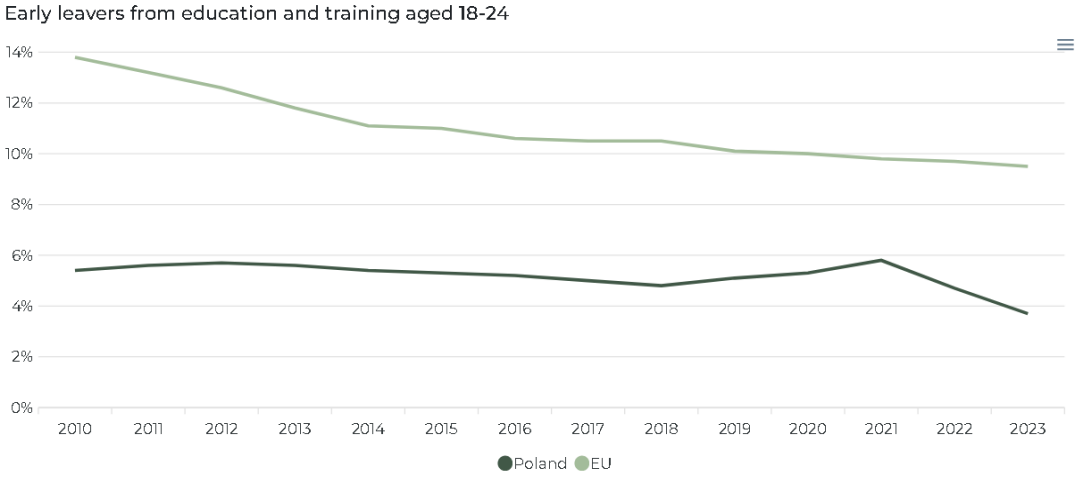
High-achieving student

Educators play a pivotal role in balancing the needs of diverse learners. While it's crucial to support students facing challenges, it's equally important to provide opportunities for more capable students to excel. This dual responsibility ensures that all students are adequately prepared for their academic futures. This concern becomes particularly pressing in light of recent statistical data indicating a declining trend in the number of students pursuing higher education. As fewer students choose to continue their academic journey at the university level, questions arise about the effectiveness of current teaching practices in motivating and preparing learners for advanced study. This shift may reflect broader systemic issues, including inadequate academic challenge for typically developing students during their primary and secondary education, which could hinder their long-term educational aspirations.[15]

In 2023, about 4% of young people aged 18–24 did not continue education (slightly fewer than in 2010). This percentage was visibly lower than the EU average, where almost 10% of young people finished education early. Poland was the third EU country (behind only Croatia and Greece) with the lowest share of young people discontinuing education. Similarly to 2010, 42% young adults aged 19–24 went to university or college in 2023. Until 2018, the percentage of university or college students at this age was systematically falling, but in subsequent years, it started growing thanks to, among other factors, the inflow of foreign students. However, due to demographic changes, the number of students in Polish universities or colleges shrank by one third in the period of 2010-2023.[16]

[15] GUS: Higher education in the 2023/24 academic year – preliminary data. https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/education/education/higher-education-in-the-202324-academic-year-preliminary-data%2C10%2C10.html?utm_ [24.05.2025]
[16] Statistic Poland: https://raportsdg.stat.gov.pl/en/Education_and_volunteering.html?utm_ [24.05.2025]

Tab. 3. Early leavers from education aged 18-24[17]



Specification	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Poland	5.4	5.6	5.7	5.6	5.4	5.3	5.2	5.0	4.8	5.1	5.3	5.8	4.7	3.7
EU	13.8	13.2	12.6	11.8	11.1	11.0	10.6	10.5	10.5	10.1	10.0	9.8	9.7	9.5

Therefore, by introducing extracurricular advanced classes in Mathematics, Polish, and English at the primary school level can have a number of well-documented academic, psychological, and long-term educational benefits, especially in the context of preparing students for the eighth-grade exam and increasing their future willingness to pursue further education. The OECD[18] has reported that early exposure to cognitively demanding instruction significantly increases long-term academic persistence (PISA data).[19] Studies on gifted education show that enriched programming in early years is linked to higher university attendance and achievement.[20]

Advanced classes can focus on exam strategies, and critical content areas – leading to better comprehension and exam readiness. By engaging

[17] Report SDG 2024: https://raportsdg.stat.gov.pl/en/Education_and_volunteering.html?utm_ [18.05.2025]
[18] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
[19] OECD, PISA database, What Students Know and Can Do: https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022 [18.05.2025]
[20] OECD, The Power and Promise of Early Learning: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-power-and-promise-of-early-learning_f9b2e53f-en.html [18.05.2025]

with materials that simulate exam-level tasks, students become more comfortable with the structure and demands of the exam.

Due to fostered individual approach and all inclusive setting, standard classroom instruction may not cover the depth required to excel. Advanced classes provide enrichment beyond basic standards, especially useful for above-average students who find the standard curriculum too easy. They provide intellectual stimulation, which helps sustain motivation and interest in school. By incorporating academic methods – problem-solving, discussions, presentations and, where possible, employing educators with academic background, such lessens would resemble secondary or university learning styles. Early exposure helps normalize the idea of further education. Students learn not just what to think, but how to think – an essential quality for future academic success.

On the other hand, without differentiated instruction, high-potential students can go unrecognized. Extra classes identify and nurture talent, increasing the likelihood that students will not only perform well during the exam but also will aim for high schools and universities in the future. Moreover, since not all students have access to private tutoring, school-based advanced classes provide free, structured opportunities for academic advancement, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas.

Conclusion

While the article rightly advocates for a holistic teaching framework that embraces diversity and academic rigour, the practical implementation of such an approach remains complex – particularly in the context of formal assessment systems, such as those in Poland. The current educational model promotes inclusivity, which is commendable when the goal is to foster empathy, ensure equal opportunities, and support students' emotional and social development. However, when educational success is measured through formal, summative examinations, a purely inclusive approach may fall short.

If the level of instruction is consistently adjusted to accommodate the weakest students in a group, there is a risk of compromising academic standards and failing to adequately challenge higher-achieving pupils. Conversely, adapting the level to suit only the strongest students can exacerbate existing educational inequalities, further widening the gap between high and low performers.

A more practical solution might lie in reorganising instructional time and content rather than overhauling the entire system (abolishing the existing grading system altogether, and shifting the final examination to entrance level exams in secondary stage of education). Instead of adjusting the level of teaching exclusively to the weakest students, all pupils would continue to attend regular, inclusive classes as they do now. However, higher-achieving

students could additionally participate in compulsory, subject-specific advanced sessions – perhaps one or two hours per week in core subjects such as mathematics, Polish, and English. These sessions would involve more challenging material and tasks, aligned with their capabilities and future academic aspirations. Given that these are also the subjects for which students most frequently seek private tutoring, the introduction of structured, in-school advanced classes could address an already evident demand. This model could help maintain inclusivity while simultaneously ensuring that more capable students remain motivated, better prepared for final examinations, and less reliant on external support. It would also provide teachers with a framework to deliver differentiated instruction within school hours, leading to potentially more equitable and measurable educational outcomes. Such measures would allow stronger students to remain engaged and challenged – improving their exam performance – while also providing tailored, inclusive instruction to those who require more support. This dual-track approach could satisfy both parental expectations of the weaker student (inclusive education) and the strong student (advanced classes) as well as the professional demands, while offering teachers an opportunity to see the tangible results of their efforts in final assessments.

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