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**Polish High School Learners: Are They Studying English To
Secure Employment in Great Britain or Ireland?**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this brief commentary is to determine if Polish higher school learners are studying English so that they can obtain jobs in Great Britain or Ireland. Thirty students who study full-time at AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland were surveyed, and the author found that most learners (57%) are studying English in order to secure employment in the British Isles. The theoretical framework for this article is provided by the general idea of the school as an organization and social institution.

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Introduction

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

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

Motivation for the Study

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

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

Research Question

Are Polish higher school students studying English so that they can obtain work in Great Britain or Ireland? The predicted answer was “yes” because it is relatively easy for Poles to be employed in both of these countries.

Student Answers and Results

On 16-17 April 2007 thirty students who study full-time at AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland were asked to indicate on small sheets of paper if they are studying English so that they can secure employment in Great Britain or Ireland. The results are as follows: 57 % (yes) and 43 % (no). Therefore, the predicted answer to our research question was confirmed..

Concluding Remarks

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

Note

1. According to the Irish Examiner, thirty three thousand Polish workers have arrived in Ireland since Poland's accession to the EU in May, 2004.
2. Special appreciation to Dr. Kimberly Grantham Griffith and Dr. William Allan Kritsonis for their assistance in getting this article published in America. See: www.nationalforum.com

References

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2. Janowski A. (1992), Polish Education: Changes and Prospects. Oxford Studies in Comparative Education 2 (1), 41-55.