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## THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS WHILE TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO SEN STUDENTS

### ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the use of authentic materials when teaching English as a Foreign Language to SEN Students. A mixed-method study (with the help of questionnaires and interviews) was conducted to investigate teachers' awareness of students with SEN. We were interested to find the types of additional materials used in English lessons with SEN students, and in particular whether the investigated teachers (with different teaching seniority) use authentic materials when they work in inclusive classrooms. It turned out that English teachers' awareness of SEN students is low and their opinions are not precisely formed; the teachers use selected authentic materials, believing that inclusive classrooms do not allow them to use these teaching materials they would be willing to use there.

**Key words:** SEN, special educational needs, authentic materials, inclusive education

### ABSTRAKT

## WYKORZYSTANIE MATERIAŁÓW AUTENTYCZNYCH W NAUCZANIU JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO JAKO OBCEGO UCZNIÓW Z SPE

Artykuł koncentruje się na wykorzystaniu autentycznych materiałów podczas nauczania języka angielskiego jako języka obcego uczniów z SPE. Przeprowadzono badanie metodą mieszaną za pomocą kwestionariuszy i wywiadów, by zbadać świadomość nauczycieli na temat uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. Celem badania jest wybranie

dodatkowych materiałów wykorzystywanych na lekcjach języka angielskiego z uczniami z SPE, w tym, w szczególności, materiałów autentycznych. W badaniu wzięli udział nauczyciele języka angielskiego o różnym stażu dydaktycznym. Otrzymane wyniki wskazały, że świadomość nauczycieli języka angielskiego na temat uczniów z SPE jest niska, nauczyciele korzystają z wybranych autentycznych materiałów dydaktycznych, a opinie na temat wykorzystania innych materiałów dla uczniów z SPE są podzielone.

**Słowa kluczowe:** SPE, specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne, materiały autentyczne, edukacja włączająca

## Introduction

The issues connected with students with special educational needs (later SEN) are becoming more and more common. At the same time, the description of *special educational needs* still remains a broadly understood term for which there is no universal definition. This paper focuses on two issues: (1) the ways SEN learners can learn English as a foreign language; and (2) how the implementation of authentic materials in the lessons in which SEN learners take part can make the whole process of language education more complete and more usable for such learners. This is why both a theoretical framework for the use of authentic materials in SEN lessons and a number of descriptions of the topic found in the literature are presented. Subsequently, we present our research on the topic, together with a few interesting observations that refer to the questions raised and analysed by us. The research was carried out with the help of the mixed-method, as both a questionnaire and interviews were used. The study embraced only those English teachers who work (or worked) with SEN students. The aim of the research was to answer three research questions, which concerned (1) the level of awareness of English teachers about SEN students; (2) the size and volume of additional (i.e. both authentic and non-authentic) materials for teachers used by them while teaching English to SEN students; and (3) what kinds/forms of authentic materials the teachers prefer when teaching SEN students.

## 1. Literature Review

There is little material in the literature on the use of authentic materials when teaching SEN students, and most of the approaches discussing the issue usually focus upon one or two selected issues only. Thus, as it seems, the topic evidently requires further research where the assumption of a much broader

approach will be introduced. Based on the collected literature, it can be assumed that generally teachers are not always fully aware of who SEN students are, use almost identical materials for all (i.e. both SEN and non-SEN) students in the class, and when they introduce authentic materials in such classes they are mostly based upon those Internet sources which are characterized by detailed and rich activity elaboration.

The term *special educational needs* first appeared in the literature in 1978 and was introduced by Mary Warnock<sup>1</sup>. At that time, students with special educational needs were identified as people who encounter various both short-term and long-term obstacles and difficulties during their education. Warnock also notices many types of SEN students (such as dyslexics, autists or Asperger-impaired students on the one hand, but also hard-of-hearing and/or hard-of-seeing, or even deaf or blind learners on the other).

Zaremba<sup>2</sup> presents a definition proposed by the Special Educational Needs Expert Team, which places students with special educational needs among those learners who show certain symptoms that make it difficult or even impossible to function at various levels of development, including people at risk of disability as well as various types of dysfunctions. In their well-written book, Ellis, Tod, & Graham-Matheson<sup>3</sup> offer the statement that SEN students are students who deviate slightly from the 'norm' and are defined in such a way as to provide them with appropriate care and assistance. A far more emphatic definition of SEN learners can be found in Bartnikowska & Antoszevska's<sup>4</sup> paper; the two scholars point out that special educational needs should not be confused with disabilities, as they may result from many other factors. Thus, it is important to recognize these needs in the student and respond appropriately.

One way to ensure proper development and education for SEN students is to introduce inclusive education where both SEN and non-SEN students form a class. Domagała-Zyśk & Knopik<sup>5</sup> claim that such a procedure of placing everyone in one class is beneficial to both parties; SEN learners learn and develop at the same pace as non-SEN learners, while the latter learn the rules

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<sup>1</sup> M. Warnock, *The Warnock Report. Special Educational Needs*, London 1978.

<sup>2</sup> L. Zaremba, *Specjalne potrzeby rozwojowe i edukacyjne dzieci i młodzieży. Identyfikowanie SPR i SPE oraz sposoby ich zaspokajania*, Warszawa 2014, [online], [http://www.bc.ore.edu.pl/Content/671/identyfikowanie+spe\\_spr.pdf](http://www.bc.ore.edu.pl/Content/671/identyfikowanie+spe_spr.pdf), [retrieved: 15.01.2023].

<sup>3</sup> S. Ellis, J. Tod, L. Graham-Matheson, *Special educational needs and inclusion: Reflection and Renewal*, London 2008.

<sup>4</sup> U. Bartnikowska, B. Antoszevska, *Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the Polish Education System*, "International Journal of Psycho-Educational Sciences" 2017, 6 (3), pp. 100–108.

<sup>5</sup> E. Domagała-Zyśk, T. Knopik, *Functional Diagnosis as a Strategy for Implementing Inclusive Education in Poland*, „Revista Brasileira de Educação Especial” 2020, 26/2, pp. 203–220.

of acceptance. While discussing inclusive education Stubbs (2008)<sup>6</sup> argues that its development helps teachers approach each student individually, quite apart from the fact that growth of one's social skills is positively influenced.

While the process of individual treatment of each learner turns out to be the most important thing (not only because of their individual differences, but also because of the type of possible impairment), the fact that there generally do not exist clear rules, methods and/or procedures that can be applied to teach English to inclusively treated SEN students remains a sad conclusion of the situation. In her work, Padurean<sup>7</sup> raises several issues that relate to this topic; one of them is the use of interesting and encouraging materials for the students, with appropriately selected content adapted to the level of the student's language. Apart from this, Padurean<sup>8</sup> also notes that there is too much external pressure to follow a curriculum usually designed for all learners, SEN learners included, which naturally disregards the individual needs of SEN learners. She also believes that it is worth using interactive elements in lessons of English as a foreign language and influencing the various senses of the student. Kováčiková<sup>9</sup> draws attention to the way the classroom in which inclusive lessons of English take place is arranged. The pieces of furniture should be modular so that everything can be adapted to the individual needs of students. Different types of tasks sometimes require different arrangements of desks; it should be possible to adapt them to individual, pair, and group work. She also stresses the fact both the temperature and the lighting in the classroom ought to be paid attention to, as some SEN pupils may be very sensitive to it (e.g. too much light may disturb them at work). As for the learning materials, she observes they are often overloaded with texts and images of various kinds, which can disturb students' perception and concentration. Both Kováčiková and Padurean indicate the multi-sensory approach as the most effective in teaching English as the foreign language of SEN students. The researchers argue that this approach engages all learners' senses, at the same time being appropriate for non-SEN learners who prefer a variety of teaching styles. An approach like this makes the lessons interesting, which automatically helps to increase the students' motivation. This is also an approach where plenty of different additional materials can be used, authentic materials included.

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<sup>6</sup> S. Stubbs, *Inclusive Education. Where there are few resources*, Oslo 2008.

<sup>7</sup> A. N. Padurean, *Teaching English Language to Children with Special Educational Needs*, "TEM Journal" 2014, 3 (4), pp. 309–314.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> E. Kováčiková, *Teaching English to learners with specific learning needs. Teaching Foreign Languages to Learners with Special Educational Needs*, "E-Textbook for Foreign Language Teachers" 2015, pp. 29–38.

Just as there are a few definitions concerning SEN and SEN education, there are also many definitions describing what authentic materials are. Bacon and Finnemann<sup>10</sup>, for example, consider authentic materials as being the products of native speakers, but not intended for educational purposes (this is also the definition used in their article). This definition is slightly enlarged by Qamariah<sup>11</sup>, who sees authentic materials as created by native speakers for native speakers with no intention for further educational purposes. This approach has been extensively explained by Nunan<sup>12</sup>, who (in Akbari & Razavi<sup>13</sup>) believes that these are all materials that have been formed with no intention to teach the language.

This approach has been slightly criticized by Richards<sup>14</sup>. In his book, he divides authentic materials into two groups. While still agreeing that authentic materials have to be produced by native speakers for native speakers, Richards claims that the first group is a group of materials that are not intended for education. The second group, however, contains those materials that have been purposefully created for language teaching purposes (e.g. textbooks for teaching/learning English, in which there appear many authentic texts or recordings).

The proposition offered by Gebhard<sup>15</sup> splits authentic materials into three groups: Authentic Listening-Viewing Materials, Authentic Visual Materials, and Authentic Printed Materials. In each of the three groups, the author lists specific examples of a given type of authentic material. The first one includes, for instance, cartoons, songs or commercials appearing on TV. In the group of visual materials one can find, among others, pictures as well as photos from magazines, postcards, or even street signs. The last group includes various types of articles, e.g. from newspapers, song lyrics, restaurant menus, bills, and even food packaging, such as cereal or candy wrappers.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to using authentic materials when teaching English as a second language to SEN students. Thus,

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<sup>10</sup> S. M. Bacon, M. D. Finneman, *A study of the attitudes, motives, and strategies of university foreign language students and their disposition to authentic oral and written input*, "The Modern Language Journal" 1990, 74 (4), pp. 459–473.

<sup>11</sup> Z. Qamariah, *Authentic materials, an alternative in English classroom*, "Proceedings of the 2nd National Conference on English Language Teaching (NACELT)" 2016, Nov., Palangka Raya.

<sup>12</sup> D. Nunan, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, Cambridge 1989.

<sup>13</sup> O. Akbari, A. Razavi, *Using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms: Teachers' perspectives in EFL classes*, "International Journal of Research Studies in Education" 2015, 4 (5), pp. 106–116.

<sup>14</sup> J. C. Richards, *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*, Cambridge 2001.

<sup>15</sup> J. G. Gebhard, *Teaching English as a foreign language: a teacher self-development and methodology*, Ann Arbor 1996.

for example, Kilickaya<sup>16</sup> argues that using such materials can give students a sense of learning something real and needed, which increases their motivation. Gilmore<sup>17</sup>, (in Qamariah<sup>18</sup>) conducted a study showing that the use of authentic materials increases students' communication skills. Presenting the results of their research, Akbari & Razavi<sup>19</sup> mention that such materials positively affect all students' skills, and those of writing, reading and listening in particular. Their conclusion is that pupils who are exposed to authentic language are offered a much better chance of communicating in the foreign language practiced by them when participating in similar contacts in the future.

In the literature we can also find opponents of using authentic materials. Gardner and Miller<sup>20</sup> point out that such materials may be too difficult for some learners and may contain cultural references the materials' recipients outside of the cultural circle may not understand. Likewise, Martinez<sup>21</sup>, (in Qamariah<sup>22</sup>) lists further disadvantages, such as the short expiry date of these materials or the multitude of different types of accents and dialects, which may discourage the students and thus reduce the level of their motivation. Also, Ahmed<sup>23</sup> points out that the selected grammatical structures in authentic materials may often differ from those taught in lessons and cause confusion. He also notes that such materials often go beyond the curriculum.

## 2. Methods

The aim of the study is to find out whether (and if yes, how much) English language teachers are ready to work in inclusive classrooms, and thus to check their awareness of this subject. We would also like to learn what kinds of teaching materials teachers tend to use when teaching SEN and non-SEN students,

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<sup>16</sup> F. Kilickaya, *Authentic materials and cultural content in EFL classrooms*, "The Internet TESOL Journal" 2004, 10 (7).

<sup>17</sup> A. Gilmore, *Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning*, "Language Teaching" 2007, 40 (2), pp. 97–118.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Qamariah, *Authentic materials...*

<sup>19</sup> O. Akbari, A. Razavi, *Using authentic materials...*

<sup>20</sup> D. Gardner, L. Miller, *Establishing Self Access*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>21</sup> A. G. Martinez, *Authentic Materials An Overview. Free Resources for Teachers and Students of English*, "Karen's Linguistics Issues" 2002, 1 (1), pp. 1–7.

<sup>22</sup> Z. Qamariah, *Authentic materials...*

<sup>23</sup> S. Ahmed, *Authentic ELT Materials in the Language Classroom: An Overview*, "Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research" 2017, 4 (2), pp. 181–202, [online], <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315765820-Authentic-ELT-Materials-in-the-Language-Classroom-An-Overview>, [retrieved: 15.01.2023].

whether they also like to use authentic materials, and, finally, what they think about the materials and their work in inclusive classrooms. A mixed study has been conducted to answer these questions; the quantitative research in the form of a questionnaire for English teachers, followed by the qualitative research in the form of interviews.

Three research questions were asked:

- What is the level of awareness of English teachers about SEN students?
- What additional materials do teachers use while teaching English to students with special educational needs?
- Do teachers use authentic materials while teaching English to students with special educational needs?

Asking the first question, we wanted to check whether teachers know exactly who SEN students are; thanks to this question we wanted to establish the approximate level of their topical awareness that is shaped in Polish schools. This research question should also help us establish whether the polled teachers have been prepared to teach SEN students. The second and third questions deal with the materials used in the lessons, i.e. what topical and additional materials teachers of English use when teaching SEN students, whether they include authentic materials in their teaching syllabi, as well as what teachers think about using authentic materials in relation to students with special educational needs.

Based on the research questions presented above, the following research hypotheses were established:

- English teachers have little awareness of SEN students.
- English teachers use the same material in teaching all students.
- English teachers use authentic materials while teaching SEN students.

It was assumed that teachers are not fully aware of who students with special educational needs are due to the broad meaning of the term. We also assumed that teachers, when teaching combined classes with both SEN and non-SEN students, use (mostly for practical reasons) the same material for all students in the class. The last hypothesis concerns the use of authentic materials, and it is believed that teachers tend to use such materials even if they are not fully aware of them.

The questionnaire consisted of a pilot study to be followed by the questionnaire prepared for those teachers who have positively answered our question concerning their earlier practice concerning their work with SEN students. 305 teachers participated in the study (the questionnaire). The second part of the study (the interviews) was carried out online, and two new English teachers took part in them. One of them was a 25-year-old primary school teacher, and the other one a 40-year-old high school teacher. Both of the interviewed teachers declared different periods of their educational seniority.

### 3. Participants

100 teachers participated in the first part of the study, 92% of whom were women and the remaining 8% men. We were able to group all the pilot study teachers into 4 age groups: those of 20–30 years (these were 29% of the respondents); a group of 31–40 years (36%); a group of 41–50 years (32%), and a tiny group of teachers older than 50 years (3%). The last group was excluded because of the low number of possible participants of the study.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. General estimations

While participating in the pilot study, 59% of teachers declared that they had no preparation for teaching SEN students, in contrast to the remaining 41%, who claimed to have such preparation. It is this group of teachers we decided to work with in the remaining part of the study. The teachers who declared that they had such preparation were requested to provide information concerning the kind of preparation they had. The most common answer concerned the completion of postgraduate studies, most often in the field of oligophrenic pedagogy (this was the case for 55% of the answers). The second most frequent answer was indicated by 36% of the respondents, who wrote they had such classes during studies. The remaining part of the answers (9%) concerned various types of courses and training that most often focused on one impairment only, e.g. dyslexia, visual/hearing impairments, Asperger's syndrome, autism, etc. It is also worth mentioning that some respondents gave more than one answer.

#### 4.2. Questionnaire findings

The questionnaire was completed by 100 teachers, who earlier positively answered the question concerning their work with SEN students. The first question was a multiple-choice one and concerned the teachers' awareness of SEN students (they were asked what groups of impaired students qualify for inclusive classes). The table below (Table 1) shows the distribution of the responses. Based on the literature, we have assumed that the most commonly appearing option should be "all of the above"; the answer concerning a selection of one more specific option was also possible.



**Table 1.** Percentage of respondents to the question about their awareness of SEN students

Possible answers	%
Students with a certificate of individual education treatment (IET)	46%
Students with difficulties in meeting the curriculum requirement standards resulting from the specificity of their cognitive-perceptual functioning	36%
Chronically ill students (physical impairments)	20%
Students with environmental restrictions (physical and/or emotional cases)	15%
All of the above	57%

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Another question was about the teaching materials used in the lessons, namely whether teachers use the same materials for all students, regardless of whether they are SEN or non-SEN students, or whether they use different materials for SEN students. The responses to this question were split into two more or less even groups: 51.5% of the respondents replied that they used the same materials for all students in the class, and the remaining 48.5% declared that they did not use the same materials, selecting specific materials to teach impaired learners.

When asked to specify whether they are/aren't satisfied with the handbook materials, 86% of the teachers participating in the survey declared using additional materials in lessons with SEN students, and only 14% declared that they did not use any additional materials. The table below (Table 2) shows the percentage of answers to the question of what additional materials are used by English language teachers during lessons with students suffering from different kinds of special educational needs.

**Table 2.** The use of additional materials

Additional material	Percentage of answers
English-language books or stories	41%
English-language films	33%
Short English-language videos	88%
Articles from English-language newspapers	20%
Articles from English-language websites	39,5%
English-language blogs	30%
Things that are common in everyday life	63%

Source: authors' own elaboration.

One more question in the survey concerned the issues connected with practical management of the educational contents to be delivered in inclusive classrooms. The teachers were requested to specify whether they usually teach single-handedly in such classrooms, or whether they are given some additional help (in the form of extra-teachers, for example) to help them transfer the lesson contents to impaired learners. It is interesting to observe that although only 17.50% of the respondents declared being given such a possibility, even fewer (i.e. 11.50%) stated that such help allows them to better deliver the lesson contents to impaired learners. It appears then that very many teachers that declare to have worked with impaired learners are expected to present the lesson contents single-handedly. When, however, such extra-teachers have been proposed to them, they are often not recognized as a possibility to help the head teachers (and the impaired learners) in the all-over process of educational organization. We, naturally, did not request them to specify the reasons for their answers, mostly because of the key topics of our research.

The remaining questions in the survey concerned the application of authentic materials. First of all, the participants were requested to specify what they understood by the expression 'authentic materials'. There were 4 options to choose from, (in brackets we provide the percentage of answers to each of the possibilities): *All materials designed for teaching English* (6%), *All materials designed for learning English by a native speaker* (17%), *All materials, not created for learning English, that contain the authentic language* (84%), and *I have no opinion* (3%).

As for the frequency of using authentic materials during lessons, 5% of teachers participating in the survey indicated the option that they *never use them*, 19% declared that they *use them rarely*, 46% of them *used them sometimes*, 26% *used them often*, and only 4% *always use* authentic materials. The next question concerned the usefulness of authentic materials, and the teachers were to indicate a point on the 5-point-scale, where 1 meant useless (1%), 2 – not very useful (9%), 3 – medium useful (29%), 4 – useful (35%), 5 – very useful (26%). The penultimate question concerned the respondents' conviction on whether or not authentic materials should be included in the lessons of English delivered in inclusive classrooms. Here the obtained results slightly differed from what was expected, as 80% of the respondents answered positively, 17% gave negative answers, and the remaining 3% did not express an opinion. The arguments for the use of authentic materials went from the most obvious: *authentic materials help increase students' motivation* (70%), to the less common: *they provide an opportunity to learn authentic language* (75%), and *they help in communication* (57%). This question was a multiple-choice question, and the respondents could choose more than one option. What was quite interesting was that very many respondents argued that *authentic materials are too difficult for SEN students* (77%).

The last question focused on the use of various types of electronic devices. Quite a large group of the respondents (95%) declared that they use these devices. These results, however, cannot be taken seriously due to the period of the study (the pandemic), when the only permitted form of teaching was to be performed online. This is also why we were not able to check whether different electronic tools are used in the classrooms, in this way constituting a stable element of sustainable education.

#### **4.2. Interview findings**

Two new English teachers took part in the interviews. One of them (Teacher 1) was a 40-year-old high school teacher and the other one (Teacher 2) a 25-year-old primary school teacher. Both interviews were conducted in Polish through the Zoom platform.

Both teachers declared they were prepared to work with students with special educational needs. Teacher 1 had classes on this subject during her studies, while Teacher 2 participated in appropriate courses and training. Both of them claimed they were aware of who SEN learners are, defining them as learners who have problems and need special attention. Both of them added they also had to pay attention to gifted learners when working in inclusive classrooms. When claiming that they have considerable experience of work with SEN students, both interviewed teachers also agreed that the teacher, based on his or her own observation, can aptly determine the special educational needs of the student. Moreover, Teacher 2 pointed out that it is often the language teacher who notices various types of learners' irregularities or giftedness faster due to the specific nature of the subject he or she teaches. As for the possibility to make use of additional help in the form of extra-teachers to be included in the process of education in an inclusive classroom, Teacher 1 stated such help could be useful only if the extra-teacher is as fluent in the language particulars and as professionally ready to teach in the inclusive classroom as the head-teacher. Teacher 2, on the other hand, said she never heard about such a possibility, but if she were offered such help, she would not know how to organize the didactic approach in a way that could be useful for impaired learners. Possibly, in her opinion, time-consuming pre-lesson meetings with the two teachers to agree on the forms of material presentation to the whole classroom would be necessary.

One of the most important reasons for the implementation of the study that remained in the spectrum of our interest concerned the materials that teachers use when teaching English as a foreign language to SEN students. Both teachers interviewed by us expressed their opinion that basically such materials should

be the same for all students in the class, and that SEN students should be treated in the same way as all other learners in the class. However, Teacher 2 pointed out that although the special needs of the student must be kept in mind at all times, no special preparation of the materials for SEN students could be undertaken. What should be possible (and what Teacher 2 claims to be doing) is that during individual lessons such materials should be specifically tailored to the needs of a given student. This is where the opinions of both Teacher 2 and Teacher 1 met, as the latter teacher believed that if necessary, the classroom materials should be adapted to the cognitive potential of such students.

Both teachers also declared using additional materials (authentic materials included) during lessons with SEN students. Asked to give examples of such materials, both teachers mention songs, games, series, movies, "Peppa Pig" cartoons, restaurant flyers or the use of currently popular online platforms such as TikTok. When asked to mention the advantages of authentic materials, the teachers indicated the possibility of contact with real language, creating more interesting lessons thanks to them, and easier forms of motivation of the students to learn. Among the disadvantages, Teacher 1 notes that such materials may contain different types of errors (such a slangy expressions), so they should be selected appropriately. Teacher 2, on the other hand, points out that as the teacher is fully responsible for the use of materials outside the textbook, she must devote a lot of time and attention to it in order to properly prepare the lessons where such materials are planned to be introduced.

## 5. Discussion

The survey results show that out of 102 English teachers participating in the survey, 100 work (or worked) with SEN students (95% of the respondents). Out of this group of respondents only 41% declared that they are officially prepared to work with SEN students (because of having taken part in various specialist courses, etc.). Such a result shows that although almost every teacher meets (or have met) students with special educational needs, more than a half of them do not have adequate preparation (which means they do not know how to work with such students). Unfortunately, their declared opinions that each student should be approached individually, whether or not they have indicated special educational needs, and that having such knowledge should help teachers to provide SEN students with better education, were not to be commonly introduced by the researched teachers (mostly because many of them did not know how to convey their feelings and/or convictions). The conclusion that follows is that the work should start from the basics, i.e. with the best

possible education for all teachers. Apart from that, the information concerning the field of special educational needs to be possibly handled there appropriately, remains one of important targets of their professional studies.

Although it was assumed that teachers are not fully aware of who SEN students are (and this hypothesis was confirmed), the obtained results still look unsatisfactory in the light that only up to 60% of teachers gave a more-or-less satisfactory answer to the question concerning the description of SEN students. Comparing these results to the fact that all the teachers answering this question work (or have worked) with such students, this situation is definitely not satisfactory. What is more, the majority of the teachers were of the opinion that SEN students are only those that reveal cognitive impairments only. As we presented in the theory, the meaning of the term '*SEN students*' is much broader and embraces different kinds of impaired students.

Another hypothesis was that teachers, when teaching in an inclusive classrooms, use the same educational material for all students in the class, disregarding the fact that some of the learners taking part in such lessons can be cognitively, emotionally or physically impaired. This hypothesis did not find its confirmation in the research done by us. The teachers participating in the survey essentially split in half; one half of them claimed they use the same material for everyone, whereas the other half declared they use different materials when teaching SEN and non-SEN students. This issue found its confirmation in the interviews, where the two teachers essentially agreed that they use the same material for all students in inclusive classes. Both the teachers interviewed by us and those taking part in the questionnaire argued in a similar way, i.e. that they did not want to distinguish a given student from the class and want to treat everyone fairly. They are obviously willing to adapt the materials appropriately (for example, by enlarging the fonts or reading the story more slowly) if there is a need to do that, but no special adjustments are planned. It is also important to keep in mind the special needs of each student and address him or her in a clear and understandable way. Such a situation may change if the lessons are delivered to SEN learners only. Teacher 2 uses specially adapted materials during individual or extracurricular lessons with a SEN student; similar options were also indicated in the questionnaire answers.

It was also found that teachers are willing to use various types of additional materials during lessons with SEN students. The most frequently chosen by the respondents were short English-language videos, followed by items encountered in everyday life, such as tickets or leaflets, excerpts from classical English-language books or stories prepared by website authors, and easy to follow articles from English-language internet websites. Such additional material

was also mentioned by interviewees. In this way the third research hypothesis assuming that teachers tend to use authentic materials when teaching English to SEN students was also confirmed. Generally, the teachers participating in the study declare they are willing to use well prepared authentic materials, but only as a supplement to the textbooks they base their lessons on.

As for the usefulness of authentic materials, both the questionnaire respondents and the interviewed teachers say that authentic materials are useful in teaching English to SEN students. They argue that thanks to authentic materials, students can have better contact with real language. Such materials also help in communication and strengthen the students' motivation to learn the language. This topic was developed during the interviews, where the teachers decided that the advantages of using authentic materials far outweigh their disadvantages, so it is worth using them in lessons. Interviewees find authentic materials attractive and different for students; at the same time they also consider the materials motivating and stimulating for the learners, SEN learners included. Both interviewed teachers underline the fact that one should remember that each student is an individual, which necessitates working out specific approaches for almost every SEN learner.

## 6. Conclusion

The topic of using authentic materials when teaching English as a foreign language to students with special educational needs definitely requires further investigation, and not only because it has not been largely dealt with so far. The times when inclusive classrooms are expected to be an everyday experience in most Polish (and not only Polish) schools require the elaboration of specific forms of lesson handling. Such questions as how to deliver 'real English' to dyslexic, autistic, deaf, blind or otherwise impaired students impatiently wait to find satisfactory answers. Unfortunately, although the results of the research carried out show that authentic materials can become a valuable help in teaching English to SEN students, this topic is not popular, and thus is not widely discussed in the topical literature. Not only are the teachers appropriately educated to meet these responsible tasks, but also they are often not recommended specialist courses that could help them complete their education in this respect. The respondents of the questionnaire often indicated that during their studies they were not given appropriate information on this topic, and during their school internships they were not permitted to meet such learners and find out whether their knowledge suited the conditions expected from them to teach such learners.

Most importantly, in order to become effective in teaching English to SEN students, teachers need to be fully aware of what the context of special educational needs means in respect to foreign language education in order to be able to recognize them in students and thus help them achieve satisfying academic results. It also turned out that teachers are moderately willing to use various types of additional materials, including authentic materials. They prefer materials that could effectively help them transfer the contents indicated by the core curriculum into the atmosphere of a language classroom and smoothly relocate the material among learners, regardless of their current cognitive potential. The respondents were aware of what authentic materials are, as well as their advantages and disadvantages. In general, teachers believe that they could use these materials to increase students' motivation, familiarize them with real language and help them communicate. Unfortunately, the answer to a very important question concerning the kind of authentic materials that could be viable in inclusive classrooms could not be decisively concluded, mostly because it was not openly treated by the teachers. Although we asked them whether the same educational materials for all students in the inclusive classroom should be used, or whether there should be specially prepared materials for different kinds of SEN students only, we did not get a complete answer to this question. Many questionnaire forms were either returned with no answer to this question, or had very enigmatic indications, such as *It depends on the situation* or *It needs further consideration*. Also, the interviewed teachers were not particularly willing to talk about these issues.

The conclusions of this particular research are as follows: (1) teachers should be better educated when it comes to working with SEN students; (2) the use of authentic materials may bring many benefits to all students, i.e. both SEN and non-SEN ones; and (3) such materials should become important elements of language lessons. The theoretical framework not only showed how broad and complex the topic concerning SEN students is, but also illustrated the size of research concerning the process of introduction of 'real English' in FL classes, the application of authentic materials included. It seems then that further research on this topic is advisable.

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