

Developing a new school-leaving exam of English in Poland: synergies and tensions

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Outline

- ▶ The NM and why it was introduced (EZ)
- ▶ Initial teacher questionnaire data (EZ)
- ▶ Main study comparing teacher and student perceptions of the NM (JL)
- ▶ Impact of the NM on language learning in Poland (JL)
- ▶ Synergies & tensions (JL)
- ▶ Q&A

Historical Background

- ▶ 1999: new exam proposed
- ▶ 2002: extensive piloting of the new exam
- ▶ 2005: full implementation of the new exam
- ▶ Ss required to take 3 core subjects + optional subjects of their choice
- ▶ Modern foreign language one of the 3 core subjects to be taken for NM
- ▶ Ss can take an additional language as optional but only at the extended level

Aims of the NM

- ▶ Standardization
- ▶ Abolition of university entrance exams
- ▶ Cover range of learner abilities (hence the introduction of the **basic** and **extended** levels & **pass mark of 30%**)
- ▶ Modern foreign language to test all 4 language skills
- ▶ Format of all modern foreign language exams to be the same.

The New Matura in English

Basic Level

- ▶ Written exam (50 points)
 - Listening (15 points)
 - Reading (20 points)
 - Writing (15 points)
- ▶ Oral exam (20 points)
 - 3 guided dialogues (9 points)
 - Description of a picture + 2 related questions (6 points)

(Language accuracy 5 points)

Extended Level

- ▶ Written exam (50 points)
 - Vocab & grammar (5 pts)
 - Writing (18 points)
 - Reading (12 points)
 - Listening (15 points)
- ▶ Oral exam (20 points)
 - Presentation & discussion based on stimulus material (6 points)
 - Oral presentation + discussion on 1 of 2 given topics (7 points)

(Linguistic proficiency & accuracy 7 points)

Study Design

- ▶ 3 phases
 - Teachers' perceptions of the NM (English)
 - **Comparison of teachers' and students' perceptions of the NM (English)**
 - Observation of classroom practice

- ▶ 2nd Phase Questionnaire
- ▶ Distributed to Ss in autumn 2008
- ▶ Divided into 2 parts
 - Part One: Background information
 - Part Two: English classes

Issues Emerging from 1st Phase

- ▶ Mixed-level teaching
 - Teaching to the majority (i.e. primarily to those taking basic level exam)
 - Little 'value' placed on oral results
- ▶ Wide gap between basic (B1) & extended levels (B2)
 - 30% considered low
- ▶ Teaching focussed on exam skills, though time devoted to grammar and vocabulary as well
- ▶ Considerable use of L1 in English classes

Profile of Respondents

- ▶ 281 Student Q'aires
 - learning English av. 7.28 yrs – range 2–18 yrs
- ▶ 15 Teacher Q'aires (6 from Warsaw)

Students choice of exam level

	Basic Level	Extended Level	No Response
Written Exam	178 (63%)	97 (37%)	6 (2%)
Oral Exam	237 (84%)	38 (16%)	6 (2%)

Reasons for Selecting the Chosen Level of the NM

	Reason	No. of responses
A	This is the level required by the university/faculty to which I am applying	108 (38%)
B	This level reflects my language ability	167 (59%)
C	This is the level expected of me by my school	6 (2%)
D	This is the level expected of me by my parents	3 (1%)
E	This is the level at which my friends are taking the exam	8 (3%)
F	Other (please specify)	14 (5%)

Students' Perceptions of Own Language Proficiency

	A1 (1)	A2 (2)	B1 (3)	B2 (4)	C1 (5)	C2 (6)	Av. rating	A1+A2+B1 (%)	B2+C1+C2 (%)
R	10	34	50	120	61	5	3.73	94 (33%)	186
L	16	55	82	90	35	2	3.28	153 (54%)	127
W	14	50	67	105	42	2	3.41	131 (47%)	151
S	20	54	71	93	36	6	3.31	145 (51%)	165
N = 281									

Perceptions of Exam Difficulty

- ▶ Basic level = easy (48%)
- ▶ Extended level = difficult (50.5%)
- ▶ Evidence that gap is encouraging Ss to 'play safe' and take basic level exam if possible
- ▶ Many Ts in 1st phase felt that 30% pass mark is too low, but majority of Ss (69%) did not agree that it is too low

Most Frequently Performed In-class Tasks

- ▶ Listening to T explanations of grammar (4.09) & vocabulary (4.34)
- ▶ Doing grammar exercises (3.98) & vocabulary tasks (3.78)
- ▶ Doing listening comprehension (3.86) & reading comprehension (3.85) tasks
- ▶ Gap-filling/cloze tasks (3.71)
- ▶ Listening to teacher's explanation of exam taking strategies (3.66)

Least Frequently Performed In-class Tasks

- ▶ Giving or listening to other students give a presentation (2.29)
- ▶ Discussing cultural aspects of language (2.34)
- ▶ Peer & self-correction of writing (2.61 / 2.53)
- ▶ Doing practice tests (2.60)
- ▶ Working in groups (2.80)

Students' Attitudes to English

- ▶ Most students have positive attitude to English: 84% agree they need to know English
- ▶ Most agree that the tasks they practice in class are the ones they need for the NM (65 % for written test, 68% for oral)
- ▶ Only 25% consider that thanks to the NM their English has improved, 31% consider their English has not improved and the rest are not sure.
- ▶ Additionally, 37% consider they had made no progress since the beginning of the school year.
- ▶ Some 13.5% are critical of the oral exam

Use of Polish

- ▶ 53% noted that the use of L1 is necessary since instructions on the exam are in Polish (with 30% disagreeing & 17% not being sure whether the use of L1 is necessary)
- ▶ About 31% admit that for the oral exam, they work out their answers in Polish and translate to English, while 27% first write their answers in Polish and then translate them during the writing test

Synergies and tensions

- ▶ Impact from test specifications for English as well as from the Ministerial requirements for NM
- ▶ Impact of offering 2 levels is complex
 - Ss making pragmatic choices regarding level
 - Mixed level classes: Ts teaching to the majority
 - Offering opportunity for everyone, but may be affecting standards and motivation of the better Ss
- ▶ Low pass mark concern for Ts, less so for Ss
- ▶ Discrepancy suggested between Ts & Ss reports of what is taught esp. regarding grammar and vocab.

THANK YOU