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## ***Stories of successful adaptations of immigrant students in the Polish educational system – perspective of EFL teachers***

As a result of increasing numbers of immigrants, Poland is currently in the process of transition from a predominantly mono-lingual/cultural to multilingual/cultural country. Consequently, a constantly rising number of foreign students is joining Polish schools, who face the need to adapt to new social and institutional settings. In response to this demographic trend, the main aim of this paper is to point to the role of different factors recognised as facilitating in the process of school adaptation in the case of immigrant students in the Polish educational system. The research participants, 23 Polish teachers of English, in semi-structured interviews, described over 60 cases of multilingual children they used to work with. Out of these, the accounts describing primary school learners who had adapted well to new educational environments were selected for qualitative analysis, conducted with the aid of NVivo Software. In this case study, the stories of four successful adaptations have been selected to illustrate the importance of factors recognised in the analysis as those which favourably assist the process of school adjustment. These include: (1) the individual dispositions of the newcomer, (2) the behaviours of their classmates, (3) the supportive actions of teachers, (4) parents' engagement and assistance.

**Keywords:** EFL teachers' perspective, immigrant students, school adaptation, school adjustment



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**Słowa kluczowe:** perspektywa nauczycieli EFL, uczniowie imigranci, adaptacja szkolna, przystosowanie się ucznia do środowiska szkolnego

## 1. Introduction

According to the data provided by the United Nations (“Migration”, 2019), nowadays more people than ever live in a country which is not their homeland – some of them “move in search of work or economic opportunities, to join family, or to study. Others move to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations. Still others move in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or other environmental factors”. Irrespective of the reasons, immigrants need to adapt to new life circumstances and environments rapidly, including, in the case of school-aged migrants, acclimatisation to a new educational system.

In response to the increasing number of foreigners joining the Polish educational system, the main aim of this paper is to present the facilitating role of different agents involved in the process of the immigrant children’s adaptation into the new school environment. School adaptation is viewed here as a multidimensional process that includes variables ranging from the learner, his/her family, to the school (teachers, peers) (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999). The process is then analysed from the psycho-pedagogical perspective, i.e. from the position of a professional, who is not necessarily a psychologist, looking at the pedagogical situation and taking into account “psychological and classroom dynamics and the larger cultural and political context” (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999: 348).

On the practical level, case studies of four multilingual learners have been selected in an effort to illustrate how actions undertaken by different participants in the educational process, including the learners themselves, teachers, peers, and parents, might facilitate the adaptation of an individual. In my research, I specifically concentrated on the perspective of EFL teachers because, as one can observe, foreign language teachers are the ones usually treated as translators and cultural mediators, expected to facilitate communication with immigrant students for others, regardless of their real qualifications in this respect (cf. Rokita-Jaśkow et al., 2022).

## 2. Theoretical background – the multidimensional perspective on school adaptation

As pointed by Zhang et al. (2018), adaptation, understood as a process in which individuals learn how to function in a new environment, constitutes

one of the most important human capabilities. In the educational context, school adaptation involves the ability to adjust to the conditions and specifics of a given educational institution and usually concerns (1) students who start their education at the primary level (so called *early school adaptation/adjustment*); (2) those who move to the next educational stage (e.g. from primary to secondary school); (3) those who change school during the educational cycle for various reasons, including changing the place of residence within the boundaries of a given country, or moving abroad. As shown in numerous studies (cf. for example, Hopp, 2019; Rokita-Jaśkow et al., 2022), the case of individuals who immigrate to another country is especially complex, as in their situation cultural and language-related factors are involved.

School adaptation processes are often referred to as being governed by two-way mechanisms. That is, on the one hand, the environment affects the individual/student and requires some changes from him/her so that they can adapt to the existing conditions, and, on the other hand, the individual himself/herself also influences and changes the environment (Oleksa, 2016). In addition, as already hinted, the smoothness of the process of school adaptation is influenced by a number of different external factors. For example, Brizuela and Garcia-Sellers (1999) focus on the school adaptation of the immigrant student and present it as a triangular process, involving the student, his/her family, and the school.

When it comes to student-related factors, research conducted after the 1960s suggests that the cognitive dispositions of the individual are only partially responsible for successful adaptation, and, apart from these, one's behavioural, emotional and social competencies are also meaningful in the process (Perry & Weinstein, 1998). Therefore, the tendency to evaluate the success of school adaptation only through the prism of academic success and the cognitive outcome already ceased to dominate studies in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999).

In turn, family-related factors form a complex network of mutual influences and, as pointed out by Brizuela and Garcia-Sellers (1999: 347), in the case of immigrants might involve "[p]arents' level of education, immigrant status, parents' expectations and beliefs, parental role and disposition, socioeconomic status (...)". According to the same authors, language discontinuities between the home language and the language of school instruction have also been recognised as one of the most significant factors influencing school success. This link has been observed both in studies based in the USA (cf., for instance, Medvedeva, 2018) and Spain (e.g. Medvedeva & Portes, 2017). Interestingly enough, as shown in the study by Rokita et al. (2022) conducted in the context of the Polish educational system, knowing the language of a given community is not only vital for the multilingual

learner, who needs it mostly for educational and socializing purposes, but it is also of great importance to his/her parents:

Those parents who spoke Polish were reported to have helped their children with school difficulties, making up for their children's deficiencies in academic Polish and, occasionally, even in English, usually by sending them to private tuition classes. According to the teachers, these parents visited schools frequently and were willing to talk about the child's progress/difficulties with school staff (teachers, head teachers, psychologists, counselors, speech therapists, etc.). The teachers appreciated their involvement in the realization of the curriculum goals and treated those parents as partners in the child's education. Consequently, they asked them to help their children in doing homework or completing class notes. When there was close contact between the teacher and the parent and when the parents appeared willing to succumb to the teacher's expectations, this usually resulted in the child's better position at school (Rokita-Jaśkow et al., 2022: 9).

Finally, the adaptation of a learner is also influenced by the school to which he/she starts attending. Focusing on early school adjustment, McIntyre et al. (2006) highlight the complexity of the process by pointing out that children face several challenges when entering this new environment. Precisely speaking, "they are expected to adapt to teacher and classroom demands, navigate through a barrage of peer interactions, and develop autonomy and identities of their own" (McIntyre et al., 2006: 350). Furthermore, referring to studies on early school and classroom adaptation, McIntyre et al. (2006) underline the importance of some external assistance in this difficult process. The studies mentioned by them indicate that students' good relationships with teachers (Pianta et al., 1995) and their peers (Guralnick, 1999; Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004) positively affect child's adjustment. The same tendencies have been observed in research concerning adaptation and/or socialization of multilinguals (cf. Rokita-Jaśkow et al., 2022).

Taking into account the theoretical assumptions and results of the study presented above, it can be stated after Brizula and Garcia-Sellers (1999) that adaptation difficulties and successes should be seen through the prism of a child's individual dispositions, family situation, and educational/pedagogical factors. Therefore, adaptation is not only about the child's academic success, but it also involves social, cultural, affective, and cognitive aspects. Basing on Zhang et al. (2018), the success of school adaptation of an individual might be evaluated with reference to three main areas of his/her functioning: (1) learning adaptability, (2) stress/emotional management, and (3) personal communication. Learning adaptability is reflected in one's ability to take advantage of the educational processes to gain knowledge

and develop skills. Stress/emotional management is related to an individual's capacity to handle emotional aspects of schooling. Finally, the aspect of personal communication enables the learner to "adjust to a new learning environment and to get along with new classmates and teachers" (Zhang et al., 2018: 2–3).

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Research aims and questions**

In my paper, I look at the stories of successful adaptations of immigrant language learners as reported by their teachers of English as a foreign language. In accordance with the adopted theoretical assumptions, the main aim was to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Looking from the according to their EFL teachers, how do actions undertaken by different participants in the educational process facilitate the school adaptation of the immigrant learner?
- 2) Are there any features of immigrant learners that help them adapt to the new school environment?

#### **3.2. Research background**

This article has been written as a part of a bigger research project inspired by the observably increasing number of immigrant students in Polish schools in the last decade. As one might read on the webpage of the European Parliament (2021), Europe is a migration destination for numerous reasons, including mainly socio-political, demographic, economic and environmental ones. Recently a significant rise in the number of immigrants has been also observed in Poland – in the three first quarters of 2021 the number of foreigners with valid residence permits in Poland increased by 15%. In early October 2021, 525,000 people had been granted such documents. According to the data of the Office for Foreigners (Pol. Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców, 2021), the numbers of citizens of Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia have increased the most. What is more, as the Central Statistical Office (Pol. Główny Urząd Statystyczny [GUS]) estimates, in 2020 the number of Poles temporarily staying abroad dropped by 176,000 (cf. Kalwasiński, 2021). This large-scale return migration of Poles might be attributed almost entirely to Brexit. Along with returning adult citizens, a new generation born and raised in Great Britain has come to Poland. Then, in 2022 the

war in Ukraine caused mass exodus of Ukrainians to Poland, mostly women with children. Consequently, according to the data from April 2022, 160 000 Ukrainian students were enrolled in Polish schools (press release, 4. April 2022).

These migration trends have also been reflected in the educational reality. According to the data offered by the Ministry of Education and Science (Pol. Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki [MEiN]) (2021), the number of foreign students attending Polish schools increased from 9,610 in 2009 to 133,281 in September 2021 (cf. Jankowska, 2021). Jankowska (2021) underlines that it is difficult to assess to what extent schools acknowledge and address the needs of such students, as MEN does not control educational institutions in this regard. Furthermore, as the presence of immigrants in Polish classrooms constitutes a relatively new phenomenon, principals and teachers are often not aware of the scant systematic tools at their disposal. In addition, due to lack of experience and formal training, teachers in Poland rarely possess knowledge and skills which would allow them to effectively work with immigrants and, as a result, they have to seek new didactic methods and techniques on their own.

### 3.3. Participants

As a part of the research project *Teachers' beliefs and practices in working with multilingual children* (2020–2023) conducted by Rokita-Jaśkow, Król-Gierat, Nosidlak and Wolanin, 120 invitations were sent to Polish teachers of English which resulted in obtaining consent to participate from 23 primary school EFL teachers who had some experience of working with multilingual, immigrant students. The dominance of female teachers visible in the educational sector in Poland was also reflected in our sample, as out of 23 interviewees, only 3 were male. The age of the participants ranged from 24 to 50 and the length of their teaching experience varied greatly – from less than a year to 25 years in service. When it comes to the locations of the schools in which they worked, ten were situated in cities, six in towns and seven in villages. The teachers' self-declared level of English proficiency could be described as advanced/C1 (in accordance with the CEFR descriptive scales). Most of them held master's degrees in English philology and expressed the need for further professional development. The majority of the participants (almost 75%) had some experience of time abroad, which might be presumed helpful when working with immigrant students.

The teachers who participated in our study were asked to answer a number of detailed questions concerning multilingual children whom they had

met in the course of their pedagogical practice. In total 60 children were mentioned, out of which 41 cases were described more extensively and included: 14 children of Polish return migrants, 13 children with foreign parents who had decided to live in Poland, 12 children from mixed families (including families with one Polish parent, and those with two parents each from different countries), 2 cases of non-native bilinguals. For this study, only the cases of immigrant students have been taken into consideration.

### **3.4. Procedure**

The data was collected via Zoom between November 2020 and January 2021. All the participants granted their consent to participate in semi-structured interviews and to be recorded. All the talks were conducted in Polish. The interview script was divided into three parts, and explored the topics of (1) the teacher's education and work-related experience, (2) their beliefs on multilingualism, (3) their personal experience of teaching multilingual learners, with the focus on the teaching approaches taken, while working with such learners. The questions were based on literature concerning teacher beliefs in different settings (e.g. Alisaari et al., 2019) and studies on immigrant learners in Polish schools (Grzymała-Moszczyńska et al., 2015).

### **3.5. Analysis**

All the interviews were transcribed with NVivo transcription software, and the accuracy of the transcriptions was checked by another team member. When interpreting the data, the phenomenological approach (cf. Creswell, 2007) was adopted in order to examine the perceptions of the study participants, characterised by different life and work-related experiences, on the phenomenon of interest. Then, in accordance with the assumptions of thematic content analysis (cf. Krippendorff, 2003; Saldana, 2009), the scripts were read and coded. This resulted in the identification of various factors which facilitate the process of school adaptation in the case of immigrant students.

## **4. Research findings: a multiple-case study**

In the following section, the selected cases of immigrant students who successfully adapted to the new school environment are described. Each of the

stories illustrates the helpful role of different variables/agents in the process, including the student himself/herself (Elsa), the supportive role of peers (Alicja), the assistance of parents (Klara) and the help of an English teacher (Paola).

#### 4.1. Elsa – individual disposition of the immigrant student

Elsa is an example of a multilingual child who adapted to a new educational situation smoothly. The girl was born in Brazil and at the age of four emigrated to the USA with her Brazilian parents. She spent a year in New York, where she attended kindergarten. This short stay allowed her to become bilingual – she achieved native-like proficiency in English. Then, her family decided to move to Poland, where she joined a pre-school class (the so-called *zerówka* – *reception class*).

The interview with Elsa's English teacher was conducted when the girl was 9 years old, attended the third grade of primary school in Poland and was already a fluent speaker of Polish (which she was able to learn communicatively practically within only one year, despite the fact that her parents did not know any Polish.) As the teaching staff's communication with Elsa's parents was hindered, when there was a need, the girl often translated from Polish into Portuguese for them.

In Elsa's case, the success of school adaptation was visible in the area of personal communication, as her relationships with peers, teachers and other school staff were friendly and harmonious. This could be attributed to Elsa's personal disposition. For example, when asked what emotions accompanied her when working with Elsa, the teacher described the girl as a very likable and diligent individual:

Really positive [emotions]. We maintain very good relations, she is a very nice, active person, very friendly, hardworking, and very positive. [T23: Elsa]

She stands out in a positive way. She has such a specific energy, she's always helpful and noticeably positive. [T23: Elsa]

Her relationships with peers were also characterised as highly positive, and this success was once again attributed to Elsa's personality:

It seems to me that she has just a character like that... She is very kind and always willing to help, so she has quickly built relationships, especially with girls in the classroom. [T23: Elsa]



What is more, although Elsa would sometimes manifest her cultural background, wearing a T-shirt with the inscription *Brasil* on it, at the same time the teacher who was interviewed noted the child's natural need to integrate with the target language community and observed her using different compensatory communication strategies, such as code-switching or appealing for assistance:

When other children were playing and she didn't understand a given word, then she would come and ask for explanation or translation. [Teacher 23: Elsa]

#### **4.2. Alicja – the supportive role of peers**

The story of Alicja illustrates the importance of peer support in the process of school and class adaptation. The girl was born in a Polish family who had lived in the UK and decided to come back to Poland when she was 15 years old. When it comes to communication, Alicja was described by the teacher as a fluent speaker of both English and Polish, so no serious challenges were reported in this area. Still, as the girl had spent many years immersed in the British educational system, the peculiarities of the Polish system were often surprising to her. Consequently, she was somewhat lost in the beginning and needed three months to adjust.

As described in the interview, Alicja was lucky enough to be surrounded by a supportive school administration staff and teachers, including the English teacher, who was also her class tutor. Still, the role of her classmates, especially a girl called Kalina, seems to have been especially significant when it comes to assisting Alicja with her adaptation in the areas of emotional management and personal communication:

I have one girl in this class who comes from a very difficult family. It's a large and loving family, but after difficult experiences. And she's a child that is able to integrate anyone. We have already had a few new students in our class and Kalina every time does her best. She taught Alicja everything, taught her what we do [during classes]. She integrated her, even explained to her the relationships between children, like who doesn't like whom and why. So here the kids did a great job. [Teacher 17: Alicja]

Obviously, as the teenage years are difficult when it comes to forming and maintaining relationships, there were also some incidents of teasing and more hostile behaviours towards the newcomer. Importantly enough, there were people in the class ready to immediately help Alicja:

I have the impression that she is too trusting, but I can see that she's learning slowly ... And for example, what I like [about the whole situation]... As my girls behave like children .... This is such a stupid age! Yes, being 13, 14, 15 years old is stupid age and children like to trick each other. We have one such a joker in the class, but everyone knows her already, so even when she tries to [play a joke on Alicja], one of my children says something [to stop it]... Well, because I can see it all on a class messenger group. So I see it all there, but I don't interfere until I really need to. I'm just observing, but I've seen several times how, for example, this "unkind" Weronika tried to upset Alicja and immediately someone said: "Watch out, she's already done such tricks!" And they can turn it so nicely into a joke, so that they never take offence. Well, it works very nicely here. [Teacher 17: Alicja]

In Alicja's case, the support of classmates was even more valuable, as the girl suffered from an incurable metabolic disease and had to take medicines regularly. The girl decided to inform her peers about her condition and received great support in return for her openness:

She already knows to whom she can turn to when she feels worse. She knows that they will inform me immediately, because, you know, they have only English and the form period with me and other subjects with different teachers. And they have organised some kind of shifts to watch over her. If someone is absent, someone else immediately checks on Alicja. But they aren't overwhelming doing this. So the kids do a good job here! [Teacher 17: Alicja]

### **4.3. Klara – the supportive role of parents**

Klara constitutes another example of a child who adjusted successfully to the new school environment. At the time of the interview the girl attended the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school and had already been in Poland for three years. She was born in the UK to a Polish family, which decided to come back to their homeland when the girl was around 10 years old. Klara was described as rather shy, but she managed to acclimatise quickly, both to the new class and to the educational system. In fact, her native-like English competence, together with her Polish citizenship worked for her benefit and allowed Klara to take part in numerous language competitions.

In Klara's case, the adaptation success was especially visible in the area of learning adaptability (cf. Zhang et al. 2018), as the girl was able to take advantage of the new educational settings. The teacher who was interviewed repeatedly underlined the effort of her parents. As they had

their own immigrant experience, they understood the value of language knowledge and did a lot to support Klara's further English development and prevent language attrition:

She is also a bit shy, but very hardworking. At the moment, she is also participating in the competition organised by the Local Education Authority [pol. Kuratorium Oświaty] because I've entered her. She works on her language all the time. I can also see that the motivation is coming from her mother, or from both her parents, all the time. They don't want her to forget this language. [Teacher 8: Klara]

She is now in the seventh grade and has already acclimatised, has no problems with functioning in our reality. But she hasn't forgotten the language [English]. She works on it, and she says that she reads in English, she watches [TV, films] in English, so there must be some kind of help. It seems to me she gets it at home, such help, because it [English] is, after all, an investment in her future. When a child already knows this language and doesn't need to learn it, and if they have a wise parent, the parent will support it. I can see that Klara gets such help. [Teacher 8: Klara]

The girl read books in English and, as she declared, "stayed in touch" with this language. The efforts of Klara and her parents brought tangible results:

However, I know that she reads in English and "feels" the language very well. Before the contest, I gave her a set of questions from a previous edition, and she did it flawlessly (...). And she was able to do it being in the seventh grade now, which means she's working on the language. And I know that she has read "Harry Potter" in English. [Teacher 8: Klara]

Moreover, Klara was dedicated to becoming an integral part of the new class and adopted a strategy of not standing out from the rest of the group. Also, in this case the language-oriented dedication of her parents was helpful, as when Klara joined the new school she was a fluent speaker of Polish:

She wanted to adapt to the class more and spoke Polish – she spoke it well. So the parents probably had to [speak Polish to her too]. I don't know, because I am not her class tutor, but probably once again it's the parents' job – the big role of parents is visible here. She doesn't show off with her English, she doesn't volunteer... Maybe now she's becoming a bit more willing to show her skills... Her English is really beautiful! [Teacher 8: Klara]

#### 4.4. Paola – the supportive role of the English teacher

Another teacher recalled the case of Paola – an American girl who came to Poland with her American parents. The teacher who was interviewed worked with the girl when she attended the fifth and sixth grades of primary school, but Paola came to the school a year earlier, after already spending some time in Poland, but attending a different school. At the time of the interview, she was functioning well in the school and classroom environment – she communicated in Polish fluently and her English competence was described as C2.

In the case of Paola's adaptation, the role of the supporting attitude and didactic approach of the English teacher was visible. First of all, the teacher conducted her classes almost entirely in English and, when needed, assisted Paola when more advanced knowledge of Polish was required:

Well, as I mentioned earlier, I conduct 99% of my classes in English, so there is not only the textbook here... Of course, when certain instructions were in Polish, if necessary, they were translated. As there are some questions in Polish often [in English coursebooks] and the instructions during national exams are in Polish, so here such help is definitely needed. [Teacher 3: Paola]

Apart from that, Paola, as a first language speaker of English and a source of cultural knowledge about the USA, was also encouraged to help the teacher during English classes. In this way, Paola's presence in the class was not only appreciated by the teacher, but also by other students, as the girl was given an opportunity to assist her classmates:

Sometimes she was a group leader, she conducted an exercise, or helped less proficient students. She was also treated as a bit of a teacher's help, so to speak. So she had a slightly different role than other students. Sometimes I also encouraged her to use her abilities and knowledge to share them with others and to support them in this way. [Teacher 3: Paola]

In such a way, Paola became an integral and important part of the class. Her language abilities were also motivational for other students, who wanted to achieve a similar level of English. Although she did not need to, she participated in different English-oriented activity clubs where she inspired others and acted as a source of knowledge for them. Paola was also prompted to take part in different competitions and even succeeded in some of them:

She has won several national competitions in English and also took part in the Olympics<sup>1</sup>, but she only participated in the district level and didn't manage to reach the voivodeship one. [Teacher 3: Paola]

The supportive role of Paola's English teacher was also visible in relation to the girl's parents. The teacher was also used as a translator for the school's officials and the parents. In addition to this, the teacher involved the whole family in the life of the school:

Interviewer: How was your cooperation with the girl's parents?

Teacher 3: Very good. Really good. There were some joint ventures organized, because they also had some friends there [in the USA], or the grandparents came for the holidays. So that sometimes it was possible to organize some kind of an event. For example, they came to us for a Christmas lesson as guests. [Teacher 3: Paola]

## 5. Discussion and concluding remarks

The main aim of the presented study was to illustrate the facilitating roles of different agents in the process of school adaptation of immigrants in the Polish educational system, as seen from the perspective of EFL teachers. As already suggested, the success of the adaptation process can be reflected and evaluated in different areas of a child's functioning in school, not only the those related to academic progress and cognitive development (Zhang et al., 2018). Therefore, when selecting the illustrative cases for this study, aspects of emotional management and personal communication have also been taken into consideration.

Some students adjust to the new school environment with ease. Their **individual disposition** makes the process easier for the learner and those around him/her, including parents, teachers and even school administrative staff. The case of Elsa illustrates the importance of one's personality and willingness to become an integral part of a new community. Still, the process of school adjustment was easier for the girl, as she seemed to be an especially gifted language learner, already speaking three languages communicatively at the age of 9. Thus, in her case, the problem of language discontinuity between the home language and the language of school

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<sup>1</sup> Here, *the Olympics* [Pol. Olimpiada] refers to yearly competitions checking students' knowledge and skills from different school subjects and organised under the auspices of the Polish Ministry of Education and Science. These competitions usually have three stages: district, voivodeship and national ones.

instruction, whose detrimental effect on school adaptation is accentuated by Brizuela and Garcia-Sellers (1999), was quickly mitigated.

Interestingly enough, some learners not only adapt to new academic requirements quickly, but, when guided appropriately, can actually take advantage of them. This was especially visible in the case of native/native-like users of English, who had the opportunity to use their advanced language skills, both during EFL classes and when participating in numerous competitions (cf. Klara, Paola). Moreover, in the Polish educational context, fluent English speakers are also often admired by their peers and might constitute a source of motivation for others (Paola). They may also be invited to take the role of assistant to the teacher and so use their advanced command of English. In this way, learners might feel a valuable part of a new school community. Therefore, one's knowledge of **English** can be seen as a tool facilitating school adjustment, not only in the area of learning adaptability, but also when it comes to emotional management and personal communication.

As shown in Klara's story, **parents** can play an important role when it comes to preventing language attrition and preparing the child for the culturally and linguistically new school environment. This deeper understanding of the value of language knowledge might be potentially linked to parents' own immigration-related experience (cf. Klara). The significance of such parental support seems to be especially visible in view of the results of the study conducted by Banasiak and Olpińska-Szkiełko (2021: 49). They investigated "the determinants of heritage language maintenance and second language acquisition in immigrant speakers" in the Polish educational context and have discovered that "in most cases bilinguals are at a high risk of losing their L1, and L2 becomes their dominant language" (Banasiak & Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2021: 49). Furthermore, apart from the language-related aspect, Klara's case also demonstrates that parents' active involvement in the life of the school can contribute to the final adaptation success of a child.

In the case of the adaptation of English-speaking learners, the contribution of **EFL teachers** is also noticeable, as they play important roles of translators, cultural mediators, and guides to the Polish educational system (cf. especially the case of Paola). As already stated, they actively use the linguistic abilities of their multilingual learners during classes, also to the benefit of other students, and prompt these children to participate in various competitions and extracurricular activities. Moreover, the facilitating role of educators is not only limited to learning-related aspects of school adjustment but can also be seen in the area of peer relationships, which are especially important to children and young adolescents. As illustrated in the case of Alicja, **positive relationships with classmates** can make the school adaptation of a newcomer smoother. Importantly enough, even a few friendly

faces in a new class can make a difference and prevent bullying (cf. Alicja) to which immigrant learners are particularly vulnerable due to their ethnicity, country of origin, ways of behaving or first language (cf. Gawlicz et al., 2015).

As can be concluded from the discussion, the success of school adaptation of immigrants has a variety of sources, starting from the learners themselves. The supportive role of the school, teachers, parents, and peers seems to be especially important in the case of shy, reserved and academically less gifted individuals.

Despite the specific research context, which is restricted to Polish primary schools, the observations based on the selected cases of successful adaptation stories confirm the results of previous research on school and classroom adjustment (cf. Section 2). Additionally, the analysis revealed the facilitating role of English language knowledge in the process. Apart from this, the selected cases show the two-way mechanisms of school adaptation (cf. Oleksa, 2016) – while adapting to a new school environment, a newcomer is likely to change the classroom dynamics (cf. Alicja), influence the work of the teacher (Paola) and pose new challenges for his/her parents (Klara).

Lastly, it is important to note that the study presented in this paper is not free of limitations. As the author looked at the process of adaptation of immigrant learners from the perspective of their teachers, she only managed to gain an indirect insight into the process.

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