

Foreign language portfolio and EU funded foreign language courses in Poland

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Due to globalization processes, the importance of the knowledge of foreign languages in almost every field of professional and private life is constantly growing. This has had an impact on the policy of many international institutions, including those in the European Union. Supporting language pluralism has been an explicit aim of the European strategy for multilingualism since 2008. The following paper presents the results of an interdisciplinary research study initiated by representatives of two different fields of science: linguistics and political science. Among the generation of young people aged between 18-24, who belong to the so-called Generation Z (White 2017: 224) and were brought up as EU citizens, the study points to a conflict between the perception of foreign language skills and opportunities to develop them using EU funds. The research aims to analyze the awareness of the EU language policy in Poland, combining questions related to people's foreign language portfolio and knowledge about existing possibilities of learning foreign languages, as well as the ability to obtain external financing. The survey was conducted among 100 students of linguistic and non-linguistic studies and enabled the formulation of initial conclusions that are the basis for further research.

Keywords: EU funds, foreign language skills on the labour market, foreign language policy, multilingualism, foreign language learning

1. Literature review

1.1. Poland as an EU member

At the time of submitting its application for EU membership in the 1990s, Poland was a difficult and controversial candidate. This period saw the beginning of the transformation of the political system (from one-party to multi-party) (Laska 2014: 27-39), economy (from centrally-planned to capitalism) and society (from the Soviet block nation to a nation with the right to freedom, as had been practiced for years in the US and Western Europe) (Mikołajewicz 2003: 361-373).

The country's demographic potential became an unquestionable advantage of Poland's accession. Its population of 38 million inhabitants constituted an important sales market within the European Single Market. It was relatively cheap labour force, having a relatively high (for the 1990s) level of qualifications (unfortunately not language-related). Before Poland's accession to the EU, the share of population working in agriculture was 26%, while in the EU-15 it was only 5%, whereas the percentage of population working in the services sector in 2003 was around 50%. In 2004, Poland joined the EU as the poorest new country in the group. The country's GDP per capita accounted for only 42% of the EU-15 average. It is this fact that made Poland net beneficiary of the EU budget (Pawlas 2016: 110-111).

EU accession simultaneously triggered growth in Poles' mobility, mainly in search of better salaries. The Polish Central Statistical Office estimates that the number of Polish citizens employed in the EU countries increased from 1 million in 2004 to 2.3 million in 2007 to about 2.5 million in 2016 (Szczerciak 2012: 8-9). However, the growing number of Poles migrating abroad revealed internal problems in the structure of the labour market in Poland. As a result, the private sector of the Polish economy was poorly developed after joining the EU, and there was a lack of adequately qualified human resources. This was an obstacle for the implementation of many international investment projects. Thus, modern technological and organizational solutions were introduced in micro, small and medium enterprises. The implementation of a range of reforms and change towards a knowledge-based service economy was also necessary (Gawrycka 2006: 7-16).

These facts have contributed to ongoing changes in everyday life for many Poles, introducing a multilingual reality in a relatively isolated and homogeneous country.

1.2. Multilingual policy of the EU

Foreign languages are learned and used for both instrumental (communication) and integrative (identity) purposes (Dabašinskienė & Čubajevaitė 2013: 22). Interestingly, English is used in the contemporary world as a language of communication without being a language of identification, a "native-culture-free code" (Pölzl 2003; Fiedler 2011: 80). However, as was pointed out by Edwards, "language is far more than an instrument of communication" (2010: 68). Language is also meant to be a transmitter of cultural and national values. This is the reason why English as a modern lingua franca necessary to communicate in different fields of human life is currently coexisting with many different languages in the structures of the European Union.

With 24 official languages and 60 other languages also considered as part of the EU heritage, languages that are spoken in specific regions or by specific groups (European Commission 2008: 4), the EU is the biggest multilingual and multicultural institution in Europe. The coexistence of so many nations and cultures is possible thanks to mutual respect for the diversity represented by their members. According to Article 3(3) TEU, the European Union "shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safe guarded and enhanced", which is the reflexion of

linguistic pluralism. Linguistic diversity is also protected by Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU¹, which provides that “The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity” (European Commission 2012b: 78).

Consequently, the multilingualism policy established by the European Commission has three main aims reflected in the activities undertaken and supported by the European Union:

1. To encourage language learning and promote linguistic diversity in society;
2. To promote a healthy multilingual economy; and
3. To give citizens access to European Union legislation, procedures and information in their own languages (European Commission 2005: 3).

For the purposes of the research presented in the following paper, the first aim is taken into consideration and analysed. Language learning is a complex process requiring the awareness of the coexistence of various language communities in Europe and the meaning of the preservation of one’s identity. The first is highlighted by Czyżewska (2014: 14), who underlines that the awakening of this awareness is not only a duty of the EU, but also an obligation of its members.

These aspects of EU policy, as well as the organisation of its structures, contribute to the widespread idea of cooperation and communication (unity) in addition to individual autonomy and the identity of nations expressed by the preservation of their own languages. Apart from English being the first-learned foreign language, learning a second and a third foreign language is nowadays a key competence for cooperation in the multilingual and multinational world. “Effective communication, which is based on languages, must facilitate the movement of capital, labour, goods and services. For the EU it seems that Europe’s multilingualism might be an important asset in the context of economic globalization and interaction with the wider world” (Dabašinskienė & Čubajevaitė 2013: 44).

As a result of the multilingual policy in the business sector, the Business Forum for Multilingualism was set up by the European Commission (2008), giving a clear recommendation for learning foreign languages as an asset for Europe’s future. CILT, The UK National Centre for Languages, in collaboration with an international research team, undertook studies aiming to analyse the impact of language skills on business performance of small and medium enterprises. From the results of the survey it was possible to conclude that companies with a clearly defined language strategy that use a mix of native speakers, language-skilled employees and specialist translators will have a significantly higher proportion of exports than those that do not use these language management techniques (Moore & Hagen 2006).

In summary, multilingualism in Europe is currently not only a privilege, but is also slowly becoming an obligation. However, as Czyżewska (2014: 14) concludes, implementing the policy of multilingualism is a very expensive challenge for the functioning of the EU. One of the main reasons why the funds are so important is the fact that, taking into consideration Poland’s microeconomic and macroeconomic situation, they represent an alternative financing mechanism for the economy that Poland can benefit from.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights_en (Accessed 2018-08-12).

1.3. EU funds for developing language skills in Poland

For the European Union an investment in foreign language learning is an investment in intellectual capital (Mouritsen et al. 2005: 69-81) of the member states. Increasing the level of competence of employees is an opportunity to strengthen the competitiveness of the whole of Europe (Rain & Tan 2014) in comparison with the whole world, especially with the growing economic position of Asian countries or the United States of America.

An investment in foreign language learning is also an investment in the cohesion of the European Union. The European funds are tools of the cohesion policy that has been in place for years (Sikora-Gaca et al. 2018: 17-61). Since the 1990s in Poland these funds have financed numerous investments to strengthen the state's potential. Since 2004, when Poland became a member of the European Union, specific horizontal policies resulting from individual financial perspectives have been implemented (Sikora-Gaca & Kosowska 2014). For the purposes of this article, the most important data is that concerning foreign language teaching and the development of language skills for both private and professional purposes, as well as target groups that will be presented for all three programming periods in which Poland was and is involved: 2004-2006, 2007-2013 (already completed) and 2014-2020 (currently ongoing, see Figure 1).

In 2004-2013, many investments were made in Poland to improve language competences of various social and professional groups and more will have been implemented by 2020. These activities were co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Community Initiative EQUAL. They are always implemented by means of individual operational programs at the level of member states.

When analysing the first perspective, 2004-2006, it is possible to list more than 400 projects whose goal was to increase language skills (Map of subsidies, 14/07/2018). The source of their financing was the ESF and the Community Initiative EQUAL (for the Operational Program Human Resources Development) and ERDF (for the Integrated Regional Operational Program, as well as for the Operational Program Interreg Poland-Mecklenburg). During this programming period, the beneficiary of the project with the highest value was the General Education Department of the Ministry of National Education, which received PLN 48.11 million from the ESF for the implementation of the nation-wide undertaking. The total value of the project called "Courses for teachers in the field of foreign languages" amounted to PLN 64.15 million. It is estimated that in the years 2004-2006, investments in improving language competences of Poles amounted to approx. PLN 280 million, with about PLN 200 million from European funds.

In the financial perspective of 2007-2013, over 1,200 projects for improving language skills were implemented in Poland. Once again, the main source of their funding was the ESF and ERDF. It is estimated that in the second financial perspective, investment in developing language competences of Poles amounted to over PLN 575 million, with over PLN 465 million of this from European funds (Map of subsidies, 15/07/2018). The project with the highest value for implementation in the financial perspective of 2007-2013 was the "Expansion and purchase of the equipment for the Teacher Training College of

Foreign Languages in Siedlce”. The beneficiary of the project was the local government of the Mazowieckie Province, and the total amount invested was PLN 14.08 million. A subsidy of PLN 11.96 million was obtained from the European Regional Development Fund under the Regional Operational Program of the Mazowieckie Province, measure 7.2. Infrastructure for Education. For the years 2014-2020, 281 investments have already been contracted for implementation. These are the projects that are most often in the implementation phase. Once again, the most important role is played by two structural funds: the ESF (Operational Program Development of Education Knowledge) and ERDF (Regional Operational Programs Operational Program Digital Poland, Operational Program Development of Smart). At the moment, the value of the investment in Poles’ language skills started in 1 January 2014 can be estimated at over PLN 373 million, approx. PLN 310 million of which was contracted via grants from the structural funds. It should be remembered that applicants may apply until 31 December 2020 for the third financial perspective, with the deadline for completion on 31 December 2023, meaning that a number of projects are yet to begin.

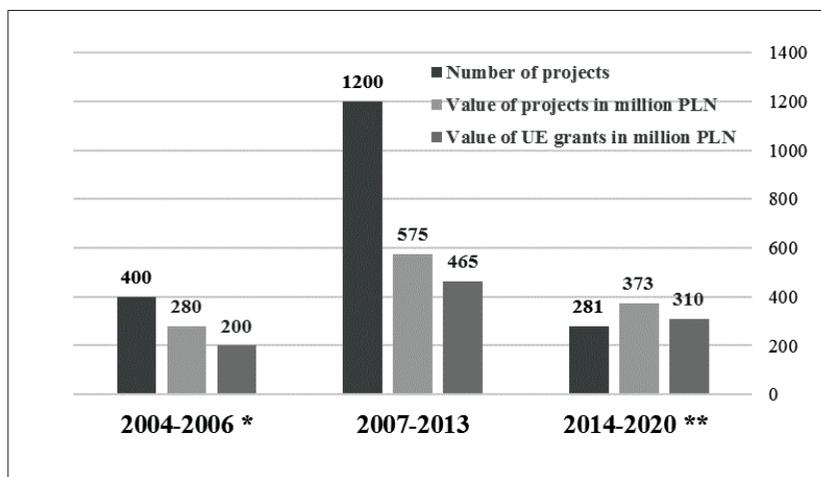


Figure 1. European Union investment in increasing language competences of Poles in 2004-2018

* Number of projects, their value and amounts of co-financing from European funds. Data for the third financial perspective, presenting the state of contracting in July 2018.

** The first financial perspective in the European Union was implemented in the years 2000-2006. This was limited to 2004-2006 for Poland in accordance with its first year of membership.

Source: Author's study based on Map of subsidies², 14/07/2018

² <http://www.mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty?wojewodztwo=&powiat=&fundusz=&program=&dzialanie=&beneficjent=&tytul=j%C4%99zyk&lata> (Accessed 2018-07-30).

Table 1 gives an overview of the main financial perspectives and the target groups benefiting from the financial perspectives, as well as sample projects.

Table 1: European Union investment in increasing language competences of Poles in 2004-2018*: target groups and sample project types

Financial perspective EU	Target groups/ Beneficiaries	Example projects
(I) 2004-2006	Public administration employees, civil service, police, medical sector, automotive industry, tourism, energy, private administration employees, various professional groups in individual administrative units (40+), education and science employees.	<p>“Operation of emergency telephones in the conditions of membership in the European Union: Language and communication training program for emergency services”;</p> <p>“Language courses for working adults from the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship”;</p> <p>“Improving foreign language skills in business through a dynamic development of the company”;</p> <p>“Modernization of and purchase of equipment for the Foreign Language Teaching Centre of the Lodz University of Technology”.</p>
(II) 2007-2013	Public administration employees, uniformed services (police, fire brigade), pupils, students, private administration employees, education and science employees in the education sector (starting next levels of language education), private enterprise sector in the field of specialized language, various professional groups in individual administrative units (45+, 50+, 60+).	<p>“B1, B2, START! – English courses for teachers”;</p> <p>“Language courses for employees 50+”;</p> <p>“Development of language qualifications of employees of Warsaw universities”;</p> <p>“Language training for enterprises”;</p> <p>“German language through games and activities in European education”;</p> <p>“German for the young and the old”;</p> <p>“Courses of specialist French for employees of offices, courts and prosecutors in Łódź and the Łódź region”;</p> <p>“Surefire success: language training for construction engineers”;</p> <p>“Improving the quality of the educational facilities and the education process of the Gródek municipality by creating a foreign language learning laboratory and renovating the buildings of the Primary and Public School of the Middle School in Gródek”.</p>

(III) 2014-2020*	Various professional groups in individual administrative units (45+, 50+, 60+), education sector (starting non-language courses in a foreign language), IT systems for foreign language learning, construction, mechanical, transport, enterprise sector, private sector in the area of specialist languages, a combination of language courses with IT training.	“International program of education in English in the field of IT at the first degree of full-time studies at the EEE in Lublin”; “Say it in English! Language training for Lublin residents”; “Language barriers to overcome”; “Language School Kindergarten”; “Course on adult language courses in the Opolskie Province”; “Alef-Bet – Interactive online platform for learning Asian languages”; “A new perspective on digital and language competences!”; “English competences in the modern labour market”; “Foreign languages for the construction area”.
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* Data for the third financial perspective, presenting the state of contracting in July 2018.
 Source: Author’s own study based on Map of subsidies³, 21/07/2018.

All of these investments in language competences of Poles made after 2004 will definitely affect the development of good-quality social and intellectual capital. The European Union invests in the human capital of its member states. This is one of the elements of employment development in the EU (employability) supporting smart growth. For Europe, these elements are an economic and social necessity.

1.4. Multilingualism in Poland

The results of surveys conducted on a regular basis by CEBOS⁴ provide a good overview of the status of multilingualism in Poland. The main observations resulting from the surveys are as follows:

- The results indicate that the percentage of adult Poles who can communicate in a foreign language has been increasing steadily and in 2015 stood at 53% (in 1997 it was only 36%).
- “Poles’ linguistic skills are to a large extent socially conditioned.⁵ They are mainly differentiated by such characteristics of respondents as age, level of education, place of residence and professional and financial situation”.

³ <http://www.mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty?wojewodztwo=&powiat=&fundusz=&program=&dzialanie=&beneficjent=&tytul=j%C4%99zyk&lata=> (Accessed 2018-07-30).

⁴ The Centre for Public Opinion Research, or rather, the Centre for Public Opinion Research Foundation, is the most credible public opinion research centre in Poland and has been operating since the 1980s.

⁵ https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_005_16.PDF (Accessed 2018-07-15).

- The percentages of those who speak at least one foreign language are: 86% for pupils and students, 83% for people with higher education, 81% for managers and senior specialists, 80% for inhabitants of the largest cities, 79% for people aged 18 to 24, 78% for administrative employees and 74% for respondents with a per capita income of at least PLN 2,000.
- The percentage of respondents who do not know any foreign languages has changed over the years: in 1997 it was 63% of respondents, in 2004 it was 56% and in 2015 it was 47%. The level of knowledge of English, German and Russian among Poles based on the study conducted by CEBOS is presented in Figure 2.

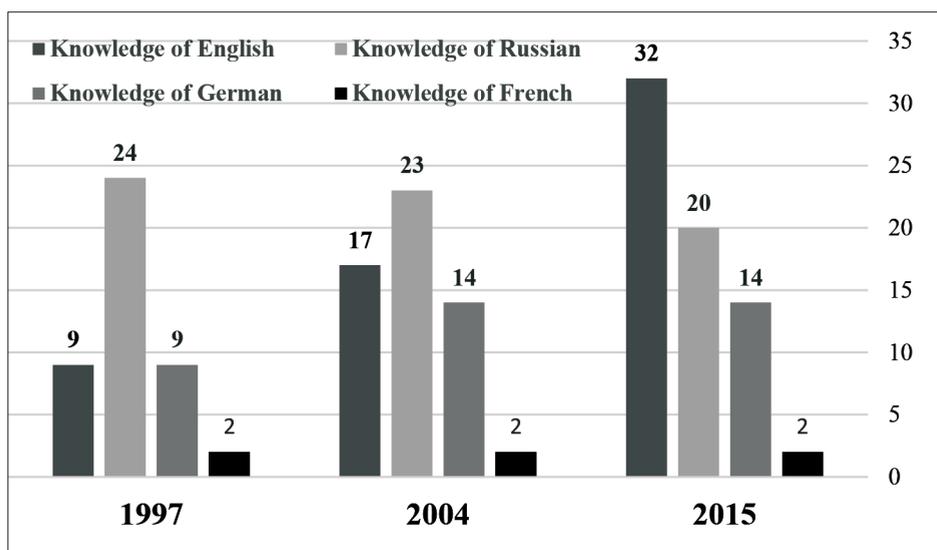


Figure 2. Percentage of the population in Poland speaking foreign languages in 1997, 2004 and 2015

Source: Author's analysis based on https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_005_16.PDF (Accessed 2018-07-15)

According to the international ranking of knowledge of the English language (EF EPI)⁶, Poland is ranked eleventh out of 80 countries and regions in the world and ninth out of 27 countries and regions in Europe. This level of language proficiency, assessed in 2017 as being very high, was only considered moderate in the year 2011.

⁶ <https://www.ef.pl/epi> (Accessed 2018-07-12).

2. Methodology

2.1. Aims of the research

The study aims to analyse Poles' perceptions of the importance of language skills in relation to their professional future after 15 years of being in the EU. It is particularly interesting to analyze this issue with regard to the target group which grew up when Poland was already a member state, the group who perceives foreign language learning through the context of professional and social opportunities: they are referred to as Generation Z⁷ (White 2017: 224). These people were raised with easy access to technology and have an approach to many issues that is completely different from those who were raised in the socialist era of their parents or grandparents. This is a social group who is aware of the value of language. The knowledge of English is so common in this group that they are slowly ceasing to treat it as a foreign language.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do the respondents describe their language portfolio?
2. Did the respondents use European funds while developing their language skills?
3. What is the respondents' level of understanding of basic concepts of the European funds?
4. How has the self-assessment of their language skills developed in relation to their gender, place of residence, field of study and form of education (school vs. non-school)?

The main research hypothesis assumes that European funds, which support various forms of foreign language learning in the member states, are a tool for helping improve the language skills of the citizens of the European Union.

2.2. Participants

The target group consisted of 100 students in the 18-24 age group. The respondents were students of full-time studies in the humanities (philology) and social studies fields (innovation and management of the public sphere and national security). The choice of the target group is the result of two premises:

1. This is a generation for whom the European Union has always been a fact. It has been 15 years since Poland's accession to the EU, and these students are 21-25 years old, so Poland has been an EU member throughout their entire lives.
2. These are the future beneficiaries of EU programs, as professionally active persons, business owners, etc.

An important factor characterizing the research group is, among other things, knowledge of modern technologies (Generation "Z") (more in White 2017: 224).

⁷ Generation Z (Generation Z) – generation Z, Post-Millennials, internet generation, Generation C. It is also called the "generation of multitasking", "quiet generation", "generation @", "Generation V", "Generation C", Centennials, the Pluralist Generation, and Plurals. This is the youngest generation, for whom technology is the main tool for expanding knowledge. For Generation Z, the digital world has always existed; they are a generation who has grown up in the world of modern technology, spending little time in the "real" world.

2.3. Research time

The survey was conducted in May and June 2018 at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The surveyed sample was chosen randomly among the students in their second, third and fifth year of studies.

2.4. Instruments

The research tool consists of 28 closed or semi-open questions. Filtering, conditional and tabular questions were also applied. In the latter, the Likert scale was used to increase the “scale sensitivity” (Jeziór 2013: 117). The research instrument is an original project based on the knowledge and experience of people involved in the study in the context of linguistic and EU knowledge. The time for filling in the form was about 30 minutes. The questions were asked following the funnel strategy: each subsequent question related to the next, with their range becoming smaller and smaller. The questions were coded, and the main variables were field of study, place of residence and gender.

Due to the fact that the initial considerations are interdisciplinary and the authors represent two completely different research areas, three separate parts were identified in the questionnaire: 1) characterizing the respondents’ language portfolio, 2) verifying their ability to navigate the EU subsidies and 3) analysing their language skills. The last question from the questionnaire, number 28, is an important summary of the research process. In order to answer the research questions, statistical analyses were carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 package. The threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$ was considered a materiality level; however, the results of the test statistic probability of $0.05 < p < 0.1$ were interpreted as significant on the level of statistical tendency. A series of analyses were performed using Mann-Whitney U tests, χ^2 tests and Fisher’s exact tests.

2.5. Limitations

During the study, no particular problems were noted. However, the respondents did have questions about particular concepts. Although a glossary of the main terms was presented and discussed, some of the respondents had questions concerning the meaning of the terms used. All of the surveys were conducted personally by the authors, which gave the respondents an opportunity to properly answer all the questions. Thanks to this, all of the 100 questionnaires that were analysed contained correct responses. During the pilot research, a number of conclusions were drawn to help modify the tool for the implementation of the extended study. The part of the questionnaire devoted to European funds needs to be extended to allow for even more detailed conclusions.

3. Results

3.1. Part I: characteristics of the respondents' language portfolio

In this part of the research, the school⁸ and out-of-school⁹ forms of foreign language learning were analysed. The researchers focused on the following: the number of people attending language classes at various stages of education; the number of hours per week devoted to learning foreign languages at particular stages of school education; the types of extracurricular forms of learning a foreign language used by the respondents, the time they devoted to them and the costs. In this part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide a subjective assessment of the level of acquired language skills in school and out-of-school forms of foreign language learning.

Over 32% of the respondents indicated that they learned English in kindergarten, the first stage of school education, while only 2% started learning German¹⁰ at this time. At the elementary school stage, 86% of the respondents had already started studying English, 45% German, 4% Russian and only 1% French. At the lower secondary school stage, 94% of the respondents studied English, while 82% studied German. For high school, these rates were 99% and 77%, respectively, and for higher education they were 95% and 53%. The highest rate for English language learning was recorded in high school; middle school for German; high school for French; and university for Russian, Italian and other languages. The results are shown in Figure 3.

Also of interest was the time that the respondents devoted to learning foreign languages at particular stages of their school education. Interestingly, based on the arithmetic average (average power of the order), it was shown that on average 38% of respondents spent 1-2 hours per week on learning a foreign language at all stages of education: 30% spent 3-5 hours per week and 21% spent over 5 hours per week. The largest percentage for the 1-2 hour interval was at the level of primary education. The best result for the range of 3-5 hours per week was observed in middle school education. The highest percentage of language learning for more than 5 hours a week was observed at the university level; however, this is not a statistically reliable result for all fields of study, as half of the study population were philology students (this aspect will be further discussed, as the negative tendency is very common among non-philological majors).

Among non-school forms of foreign language learning, the most popular responses were: tutoring with a teacher (55%), language schools (26%) and courses (21%). A total of 49% of the respondents indicated that they used sound and image files or CDs. The time spent on participating in out-of-school forms of foreign language learning was as

⁸ By school forms of language learning the authors of the study mean pre-school education, primary school, middle school, high school, and higher education.

⁹ By out-of-school (non-school) forms of learning foreign languages, the authors of the study mean all other forms of foreign language learning that are not related to school education.

¹⁰ This is due to the fact that in Poland foreign language is not a compulsory subject at the pre-school education level, but only an optional one, often additionally paid. On the other hand, the number of English-speaking kindergartens is growing.

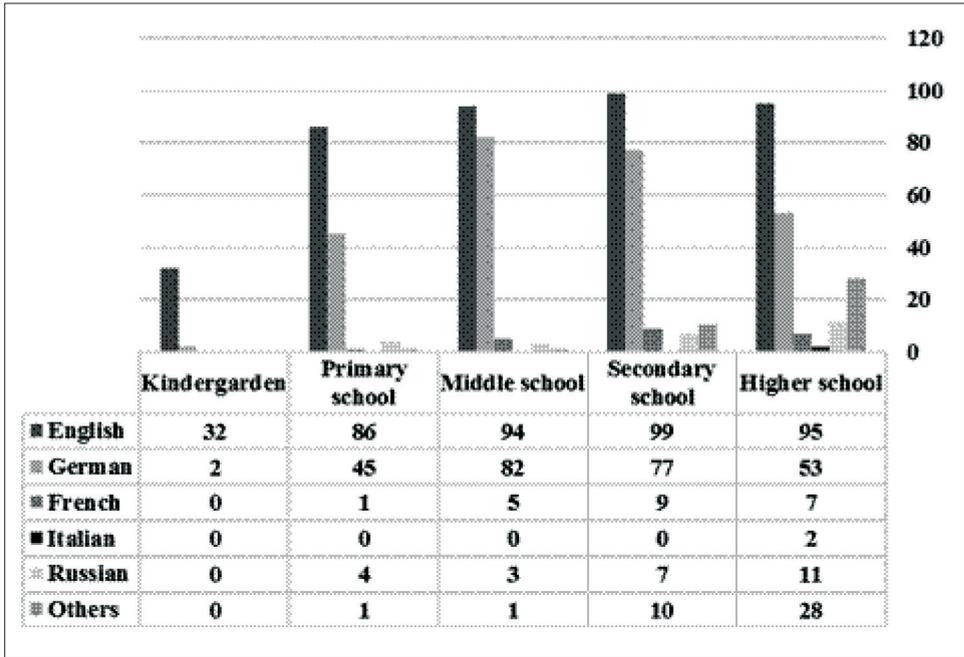


Figure 3. Number of people attending language classes at various stages of education in %
Source: Based on author's study

follows: 41% spent 1-2 hours per week, 29% spent 3-5 hours per week¹¹ and 4% spent over 5 hours per week. Out-of-school forms of education were used to increase language skills for 1-2 years for 28% of the respondents, 3-5 years for 21%, 10 years for 5-7%, 7-9 years for 6%, 9-11 years for 3% and over 11 years for 6%. These are not satisfactory results compared to school education, which lasts on average 19-20 years; the legally sanctioned obligation is 15 years (but whether or not this is effective for foreign language learning is unclear). For the 74% of respondents who used non-school forms of foreign language learning, 16% of them participated in free-of-charge activities. Only 6% of respondents used forms of foreign language learning co-financed by European funds, while 60% of the respondents spent between 0-80 PLN (USD 0-20) per week on additional forms of foreign language learning and 23% spent 81-150 PLN (USD 21-40) per week.

The respondents were also asked to assess the language skills they acquired in school and out-of-school forms of foreign language learning. In school education, the respondents most often assessed their level of language skills at B1 (40%) and B2 (30%). Importantly, in the case of school education, each of the respondents indicated the achievement of a certain level of language skills; this was in contrast to non-school forms of foreign language learning, for which as many as 25% of the respondents defined their achieved

¹¹ At this stage of education in Poland, a second foreign language is often added.

level of language skills as “zero”. This means that as many as one-fourth of the surveyed population was unsatisfied with the out-of-school form of improving language skills. In the case of extracurricular forms of foreign language learning, respondents most often assessed their level of language proficiency as B2 (25%). Significantly, a larger percentage of respondents (than in the case of school education) indicated language proficiency at the C1 level (17%).

3.2. Part II: verification of the knowledge about EU subsidies

In the second part of the questionnaire, an attempt was made to evaluate the respondents’ knowledge of language development opportunities co-financed by European funds. The understanding and knowledge of basic terms connected with European funds is necessary, in the opinion of the researchers, both to apply for a fund and to find suitable offers for developing language skills on the Internet.

For 82% of respondents, the possibility of free, out-of-school language learning would be an incentive to improve their language skills. However, only 30% of the respondents had heard about the possibility of participating in additional language classes co-financed by European funds, which confirms that there is low public awareness of EU issues. It is true that 96% of respondents understand the concept of a “subsidy”, i.e. a non-repayable¹² or refundable¹³ grant which can be obtained from European funds. However, on average, 74% of the respondents did not know the basic concepts that would allow them to apply for this grant. Unfortunately, this is an unsatisfactory outcome after 15 years of participation in EU structures. The most incomprehensible for the respondents was the concept that is the most crucial for obtaining subsidies: “actions/sub-measures in the priority axis to the operational program”. Furthermore, only 28% of the respondents were aware of the fact that in their place of residence they can use European funds for out-of-school forms of foreign language learning. Only 25% declared that they knew how to raise funds from European funds to improve their language skills. Interestingly, 21% of the respondents said that in their current professional situation they have the opportunity to participate in free, out-of-school forms of foreign language learning co-financed by European funds.

3.3. Part III: characteristics of respondents’ language skills

In this part of the study, questions related to the characteristics of the respondents’ language skills were verified. They were asked to answer the following questions: Which language skills are the most important in your professional work? Which would you like

¹² Non-returnable subsidies refer to European funds together with the state budget’s co-financing of a given investment. The beneficiary’s share is their so-called contribution.

¹³ The repayable subsidy refers to the European Union granting the beneficiary a loan at preferential interest rates, for example when it operates in an industry recognized as a regional specialization or has created additional jobs.

to practice? Which have you practiced both in school and non-school education? The respondents were asked about the number of foreign languages they believed would be necessary in workplaces of the future. Once again, respondents were asked to make a subjective assessment of the level of their language skills. This time, however, people were asked about their skills for presenting, speaking, reading and listening in a foreign language. The respondents were asked for such an assessment for their English skills and their skills in another foreign language. Their attitudes towards their language skills were also verified.

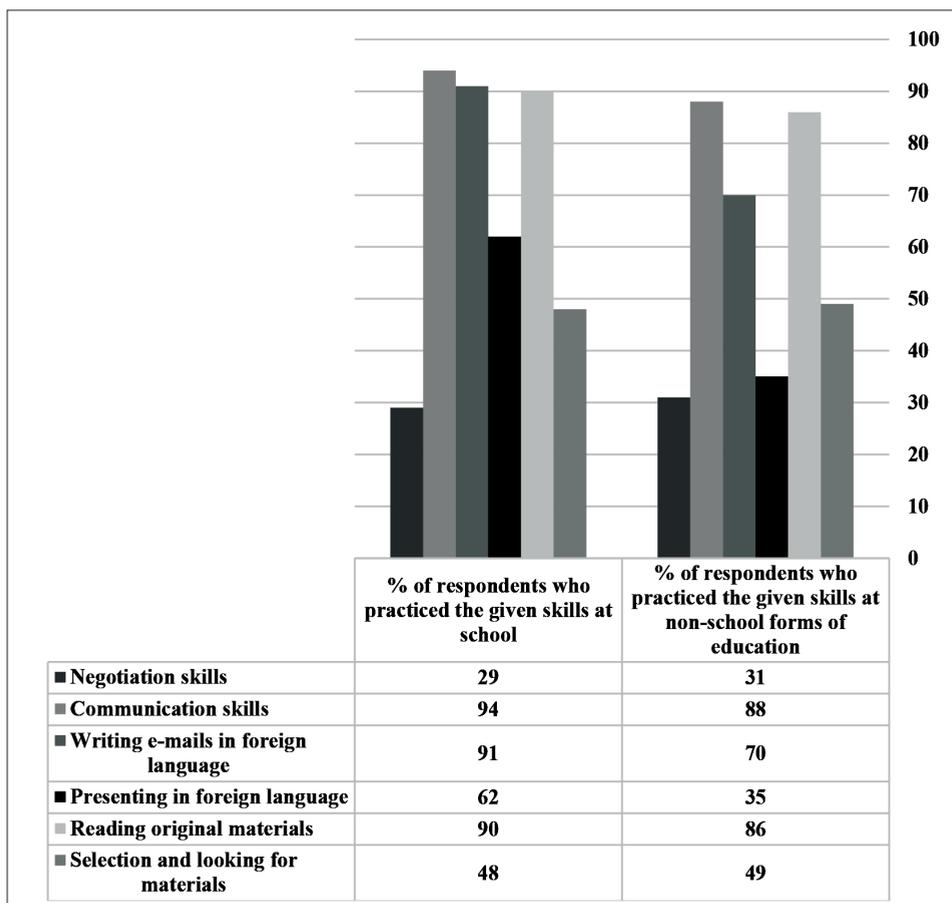


Figure 4. Language skills practiced/developed in school education and out-of-school forms of foreign language learning (number of respondents in %)

Source: Based on author's study.

On average, 91% of the respondents stated that the following language skills are very important in their professional work: communication, negotiation, writing emails, preparing and delivering presentations on a given subject, reading materials prepared in a foreign language and selecting and looking for materials. The majority (92%) of the re-

spondents recognized that these skills would give them access to new knowledge resources, and 93% said that these skills would open new career prospects for them. On average, 66% of the respondents depend on their language skills for job advancement and higher pay. Since the respondents pay so much attention to specific language skills, it became important to find out which of these skills were practiced and what forms of education were used to practice them. The respondents indicated that in both school education and non-school forms of foreign language learning, they most often practiced the following skills: communication, writing e-mails and reading materials prepared in a foreign language.

These skills were developed as part of school education for 94%, 91% and 90% of the respondents, respectively. Accordingly, these skills were practiced through non-school forms of foreign language learning for 88%, 70% and 86% of the respondents. A large difference was noted in the development of the skill of preparing and delivering presentations on a given topic: 62% of the respondents indicated that they practiced this skill as part of their school education, and only 35% practiced this skill in non-school forms of foreign language learning. Interestingly, the least-practiced skills were negotiation competences. Only 29% of respondents exercised this skill in their school education, and 31% in non-school language learning. The results are shown in Figure 4. Based on the classical measure of the answer distribution, it was found that on average 69% of the respondents practiced the indicated language skills in their school education, and 59% in non-school language learning.

Almost half (45%) of the respondents admitted that the knowledge of two foreign languages would be necessary for them in their future workplace, 17% indicated the need for three foreign languages, and 9% said more than three would be required. Only 29% of the respondents considered it sufficient to know one foreign language. Most of the respondents (97%) considered English to be the most important in their professional lives, while 83% thought German to be most important. The importance of knowing Spanish was emphasized by 28% of the respondents, 22% indicated French, 9% Portuguese, 25% Scandinavian languages, 19% Arabic and 23% Asian languages. The Russian language, which was marked as important by 25% of the respondents.

The respondents had different levels of language skills. For the skill of writing, the highest percentage of respondents indicated the use of this language at B2 level; speaking at level B1; and reading and listening at level C1. In terms of the second (any) foreign language, the respondents most often assessed their level of writing, speaking, reading and listening at A1. None of the respondents claimed that they did not have any English language skills, and as many as 94% of the respondents indicated some level of knowledge of a second foreign language. English proficiency at C1 level was recorded for the following percentage of respondents: writing – 21%, speaking – 20%, reading – 38%, listening – 25%. For the second foreign language, these percentages were 16%, 13%, 23% and 16%, respectively. English proficiency at C2 level was recorded for the following percentage of respondents: writing – 2%, speaking – 2%, reading – 5%, listening – 3%. For the second foreign language, this was 1%, 0%, 2% and 1%, respectively.

4. Correlation analysis

During the implementation of the study, the basic variables were determined based on which target group was verified. They were gender, place of residence and field of study. Among the 100 subjects, 80 were women and 20 were men. A total of 38% came from rural areas, while the others came from urban areas (only 3% of respondents came from cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants). Half of the respondents were students of philological studies, and the other half were students of other humanities and social studies. A series of analyses was performed using Mann-Whitney U tests, χ^2 tests and Fisher's exact tests.

A comparison of gender-related test results did not reveal any specific differences. There were few on the level of statistical tendencies, namely: women more often than men undertook learning German at university ($\chi^2 (1) = 3.25$, p {statistical significance} = 0.071, $V = 0.18$). Men used non-school forms of foreign language learning more often than women ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.01$, $p = 0.909$). In addition, there were two differences at the level of statistical tendency. Women more often used seminars with a native language user (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.065$, $V = 0.19$), while men participated in individual language classes (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.092$, $V = 0.19$). However, the strength of both effects was low. Women more often indicated that the possibility of a non-school form of learning a foreign language would motivate them to improve their language skills (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.046$, $V = 0.22$). Women were also more likely to claim that having certain language skills gave them access to new knowledge resources ($U - 591.0$, $p = 0.035$, r {strength of effect} = 0.21). Women rated the level of reading literacy and the ability to write e-mails in a foreign language acquired in non-school forms of foreign language learning ($U - 393.5$, $p = 0.036$, $r = 0.23$), as well as German language skills ($U - 618$), $p = 0.072$, $r = 0.18$). However, the strength of the reported effects was low, and in a few cases moderately high. In the next step, the answers of people from villages and small towns with the group from large cities were compared. There were two statistically significant differences. People from large urban agglomerations were less likely to learn German in elementary school ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.30$, $p = 0.021$, $V = 0.23$), but more often they learned French in middle school (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.028$, $V = 0.28$). Those coming from smaller towns and villages more often attended German language classes in high school (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.049$, $V = 0.22$) and at university ($\chi^2 (1) = 6.00$, $p = 0.014$, $V = 0.25$); the latter also more often indicated that they took Spanish lessons (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.036$, $V = 0.21$). People from large cities more often used e-learning classes (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.022$, $V = 0.26$) and individual language classes (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.050$, $V = 0.23$). Those from small towns gave a higher rating to the level of language skills acquired in school education ($U - 560.5$, $p = 0.284$, $r = 0.11$). People from big cities had a higher level of understanding of the expression "national operational program" ($U - 501.0$, $p = 0.096$, $r = 0.17$). People from smaller towns pointed to the greater importance of German, Spanish, French and Arabic. Again, the strength of the recorded effects was usually low.

The study showed statistically significant differences, including in the number of hours per week devoted to learning foreign languages in school education, but only at the high

school stage. At this stage of education, students of philology participated in more language classes per week ($U = 961.0$, $p = 0.028$, $r = 0.22$). However, the strength of the recorded effect was low. The diametrical difference does appear at the university stage ($U = 4.0$, $p = <0.001$, $r = 0.96$), where the strength of the recorded effect was enormous. The research has shown that students of fields other than philology develop language skills in kindergarten, primary school and middle school. At the high school stage, the number of hours devoted to learning foreign languages per week is lower in their case than the average for philology students; however, the foreign language learning process virtually stops at the university stage. At this stage of education, the number of hours per week devoted to learning foreign languages is comparable to that in primary school. In kindergarten, primary school and middle school there were no differences in the number of hours per week devoted to foreign language learning between philology students and students in other majors. The difference at the elementary school stage is related to the fact that philology students more often learned German in elementary school ($\chi^2(1) = 6.83$, $p = 0.009$, $V = 0.26$). However, the strength of the recorded effect was small. At the university stage, there were four statistically significant differences. Students of philology more often learned German ($\chi^2(1) = 88.68$, $p < 0.001$, $V = 0.94$), which had an extremely strong effect; Spanish ($\chi^2(1) = 38.89$, $p < 0.001$, $V = 0.62$), which had a very strong effect; French (Exact Fisher Test, $p = 0.012$, $V = 0.27$) and Russian ($\chi^2(1) = 5.01$, $p = 0.025$, $V = 0.22$) had a low strength effect. Students of philology definitely rated the usefulness of the above-mentioned languages, as well as Scandinavian languages, much higher. Students of fields other than philology usually learned English, and the number of hours per week they spent on learning the language was roughly the same as for primary school.

Students of philology more often used non-school forms of foreign language learning, including courses ($\chi^2(1) = 10.19$, $p = 0.001$, $V = 0.32$), language schools ($\chi^2(1) = 7.48$, $p = 0.006$, $V = 0.27$) and tutoring with a teacher ($\chi^2(1) = 4.89$, $p = 0.027$, $V = 0.22$). In addition, philology students more often indicated that the possibility of a non-school form of learning a foreign language would be an incentive to improve their language skills ($\chi^2(1) = 4.34$, $p = 0.037$, $V = 0.21$). This is due to the fact that philology students are more aware of language skills in the professional world, perhaps because of their field of study, and they pointed to the need to know more languages more often than the non-philological students did. It is not surprising, then, that the philology students more often agreed with the statement that “an employee knowing foreign languages receives higher wages” ($\chi^2(1) = 8.57$, $p = 0.003$, $V = 0.29$).

When assessing the weight of specific language skills, students of philology more often pointed to the importance of negotiating skills ($U = 848.0$, $p = 0.002$, $r = 0.31$), selecting and looking for source materials ($U = 899.0$, $p = 0.007$, $r = 0.27$) and presentations on a given subject in a foreign language ($U = 953.0$, $p = 0.027$, $r = 0.22$).

It was not surprising that the philology students rated their language skills to be higher, both in the case of English and another foreign language; statistically significant differences were noted. Due to the fact that comparing school and non-school education gives rise to a number of issues, both aspects were compared in the study. In the next step, it was checked whether the level of language skills acquired in the school education

process is lower than those acquired in non-school forms of foreign language learning. A series of Wilcoxon tests was carried out. The overall assessment of skills was first compared. A statistically significant result was found ($Z = -2.55$, $p = 0.031$). The level of language skills acquired during out-of-school education was higher. The analysis was conducted taking into account only 74% of the target group – that is, the one that attended extracurricular classes – otherwise the result would be the opposite ($Z = -3$, $p = 0.003$). There were statistically significant differences in the ability to write emails in a foreign language ($Z = -2.44$, $p = 0.015$) and the ability to prepare and deliver presentations on a given subject in a foreign language ($Z = -3.10$, $p = 0.002$). In both cases, the assessment of skills developed during school education was higher. Thus, although the general assessment of skills acquired during out-of-school activities is higher, in the case of individual competences, the respondents indicated that the two were more extensively trained during school activities. The next step assessed whether the amount of time devoted per week to language classes at different levels of learning varied. The non-parametric analysis of Friedman's variance was highly statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 241.92$; $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests were carried out. A series of statistically significant results were noted. Only the difference between university and middle school was not close to statistical significance, and the difference between middle school and high school was significant at the level of statistical tendency.

5. Discussion

A total of 6% of the respondents used forms of foreign language learning co-financed by European funds, but what is interesting is that 21% of the respondents said that in their current professional situation they have the opportunity to participate in non-school forms of foreign language learning co-financed from European funds. Therefore, an interesting question arises: Why, despite the opportunities, do people aged 18-24 not participate in these opportunities? The answer may be insufficient knowledge of basic concepts related to this issue, and thus a lack of ability to reach specific sources of support. A total of 26% of the respondents did not use any extramural forms of foreign language learning. These people displayed lower skill levels for speaking, listening and reading in a foreign language than the other respondents.

Despite the growing popularity of extracurricular forms of education, most of the time devoted to learning foreign languages in Poland is in school education. The Wilcoxon test showed that a higher level of language skills was acquired during out-of-school education. Interestingly, the least-practiced skills were negotiation competences, although these were the most important to the students of philology. Only 29% of the respondents practiced this skill as part of their school education, and 31% in non-school language learning.

Based on the classical measure of the distribution of responses, it was found that on average 69% of the respondents practiced the indicated language skills in school, and 59% in non-school forms of foreign language learning. However, as has already been mentioned, the level of language skills acquired during out-of-school education was high-

er. Analysis of individual correlations has shown that out-of-school forms of language learning definitely develop reading and listening skills in a foreign language. The differences between school and non-school education are not recorded for the skill level of writing in a foreign language. Interestingly, 25% of respondents said that they acquired zero language skills in non-school forms of foreign language learning. However, during the study there was a very strong positive relationship ($\rho = 0.796$, $p < 0.001$) between the time devoted per week to extracurricular activities of foreign language learning and seniority in the years devoted to this. This means that the weekly intensity of learning a foreign language goes hand in hand with the experience in such learning, which clearly allows for the conclusion that the respondents have not shown proper involvement in the process of learning language skills, and therefore they deem their results to be unsatisfactory. The respondents' self-assessment of foreign language skills is definitely higher when they characterize their level of knowledge for writing, speaking, reading and listening separately. The research has shown that students of fields other than philology develop language skills mainly in kindergarten, primary school and middle school. At the high school stage, the number of hours devoted to learning foreign languages per week is lower in their case than the average for philology students. However, the foreign language learning process virtually stops at the university stage. At this stage of education, the number of hours per week devoted to learning foreign languages is comparable to the level for primary school. Students from fields other than philology usually learned English for the same number of hours per week as primary school students.

6. Conclusions

The knowledge of foreign languages is more and more important and appreciated by young Poles, who also claim that they spend at least 1-2 hours a week on improving their language skills. Additionally, apart from regular classes resulting from the curriculum, the respondents also decided to spend money on additional individual classes adjusted to their individual needs, which shows the need for conducting constant needs analyses to collect information for planning and designing language courses.

Philology students were not only more eager to spend more time on learning languages, but were also more aware of the importance of knowledge of more than one foreign language. This leads to the conclusion that there is a need for planning separate courses to improve language skills of philology graduates and non-philology graduates, as well as campaigns promoting multilingualism. Moreover, the study showed that extracurricular forms of foreign language learning, i.e. language schools, tutoring with a teacher and conversations with a native language user correlate most with the ability to write and speak in a foreign language. It can therefore be concluded that the co-financing of courses and training in language schools using European funds is a good step towards increasing the level of Poles' foreign language skills.

Although the European funds are considered to be an important instrument in supporting the multilingual policy, the percentage of respondents taking advantage of the language courses co-financed by the European funds is relatively small (6%). This may

stem from the fact that the appropriate information campaigns may be missing, or there is a widespread belief that EU-financed courses are intended for the unemployed. Another contributor to low popularity of EU co-financed forms of improving foreign language skills is the fact that the respondents do not understand basic terms connected with the EU multilingual policy, which leads to the conclusion that they may not be able to find information on relevant courses or decide whether they are appropriate for them. This may also influence the number of respondents who were beneficiaries of such courses. Some of them who have even had the opportunity to participate in the courses did not take it into account.

The question of encouraging subsequent target groups to participate in such activities remains open to debate. It might be appropriate to link additional forms of study with compulsory school education; however, it would be necessary to increase its effectiveness. It cannot be ruled out that initiating broader information and promotion activities would motivate more people to participate in non-school forms of foreign language learning co-financed from European funds. However, to obtain more reliable results, the research process should be continued, and the extended study should be corrected and re-conducted on a much larger group after the end of the third financial perspective.

The respondents also confirmed that foreign language teaching at schools does not, in their opinion, provide them with necessary language skills. The need for special training courses devoted to, for example, presentation skills in a foreign language is visible.

European funds are a tool to support language skills in the member states. However, the example of Poland shows that their potential is still not used properly. The analyses carried out in Poland show the involvement in the process of language education in Europe. The issue is new in the pertinent literature and has not yet been analysed. Additionally, the financial perspective of 2014-2020 is still being implemented, which means that the research process should be continued.

7. Perspectives

The study should be extended to other professional groups covered by co-financing from 2004 in the field of foreign language learning. The results presented in this article are a pilot study. The results of research on working adults, as well as in specific professional sectors, such as the medical field, tourism, or public and private administration, would be interesting.

Considering the number of European funds devoted to learning foreign languages for the age group of 18-24 in 2014-2020, the study should be repeated with respect to the number of hours devoted weekly in school and out-of-school forms of foreign language learning in further research groups. However, these groups should be selected purposefully, especially after completion of the third financial perspective.

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Online sources

EU Grant map:

Mapa dotacji [Map of grants]; <http://www.mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty?wojewodztwo=1&powiat=&fundusz=&program=&dzialanie=&beneficjent=&tytul=j%C4%99z&lata=2004-2006>. (Accessed 2018-06-17.)

Mapa dotacji [Map of grants]; <http://www.mapadotacji.gov.pl/projekty?wojewodztwo=all&powiat=&fundusz=&program=&dzialanie=&beneficjent=&tytul=j%C4%99zyk&lata=2007>. (Accessed 2018-06-15.)