Literature for all in Poland? Opportunities and challenges of easy to read standard in special education for the d/Deaf students in primary school - preliminary remarks

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The article discusses the development and challenges of the easy to read (EtR) standard in Poland. The research described in the article aims to evaluate the effectiveness of EtR texts for students with special communication needs, particularly those who are deaf or have aphasia. Conducted as a pilot study, it focuses on whether selected literary texts from the Integrated Educational Platform are understandable for these students and examines the features that may hinder comprehension. The study, carried out during the 2023/2024 school year, involved analyzing selected texts and conducting comprehension assessments with students. The authors chose "The Nightingale" by Hans Christian Andersen and "The Barrel Organ" by Bolesław Prus to gauge understanding among fourth and sixth graders, respectively. The research highlighted that comprehension varies widely within heterogeneous student groups, necessitating further differentiation in text adaptation to meet diverse communication needs. Key findings indicate that vocabulary selection plays a critical role in comprehension, with many terms being unfamiliar or outdated for students. Additionally, low social awareness of EtR's purpose can lead to stigmatization of easy language, particularly as it is often associated with individuals with intellectual disabilities. The article suggests that more inclusive approaches, such as involving target groups in adapting texts and creating materials suited to different levels of proficiency, could enhance the educational effectiveness of EtR texts. It emphasizes the need for unified guidelines to address the specific needs of various audiences, ensuring better communication and understanding in educational settings.

KEYWORDS

special education, communication needs, d/Deaf, literature, easy to read

1 Standard easy to read—what it is and for whom? In the context of access to literature and education

In Poland, the first easy to read and understand text was published in 2002 in the journal "Społeczeństwo dla Wszystkich," issued by the Polish Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PSOUU).[1] This association is the most active organization in Poland utilizing the easy to read (EtR) standard for communication with audiences and has been preparing publications in the "Biblioteka self-adwokata" series. In 2010, PSONI, a member of Inclusion

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1   Today, it is known as the Polish Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities—PSONI.

Europe, translated the European standards for preparing easy to read texts (Information for All)[2] into Polish. Currently, plain language appears more frequently in the public communication than easy language. Many public administration units are changing their communication models with audiences.[3] However, despite the existence of relevant legal regulations,[4] few of them implement the easy to read standard. There are still no widely available and commonly used standards in Poland that have been tailored to the specifics of the Polish language (including its syntax, inflection, etc.). Easy to read and understand texts that have been produced in Poland to date most often adhere to the guidelines set forth by Inclusion Europe. However, it is important to note that these are merely recommendations and authors of easy texts are not obligated to follow them. Furthermore, there are currently no studies that confirm the effectiveness of applying these guidelines in enhancing comprehension of the content.

Therefore, as noted by Agnieszka Przybyła-Wilkin, when easy to read information is produced, it is often of poor quality. This is primarily a consequence of the lack of training for those creating these texts, as well as the aforementioned absence of coherent guidelines suitable for the Polish language (Przybyła-Wilkin, 2021, p. 406).

The differences between Standard Polish and Easy Polish are illustrated in the following example (Przybyła-Wilkin, 2021, pp. 411–412) (see Table 1).

The below examples illustrate the differences between the two standards: plain language and easy to read text. These differences are evident at every level: lexical, syntactic, as well as graphic and editorial. The following example[5] illustrates these differences.

Plain language

Koronawirus zaczął się w Chinach, ale zaraziły się nim już miliony osób na całym świecie. Najczęstszymi objawami tego wirusa są: gorączka, kaszel i problemy z oddychaniem. Jeśli od jakiegoś czasu odczuwasz te dolegliwości, zadzwoń do lekarza lub sanepidu.

Adres najbliższego sanepidu znajdziesz w internecie pod adresem: https://gis.gov.pl/mapa/. Aby chronić się przed zachorowaniem, myj często ręce wodą i mydłem. Jeśli kichasz i kaszlesz, to zasłoń usta chusteczką higieniczną lub w zgięte ramię.

Przestrzegaj też kilku zasad:

1 unikaj dużych grup ludzi. W miejscach, w których są inni ludzie, musisz zakładać maseczkę albo przyłbicę.
2 na ulicy zachowaj dwumetrowy odstęp od innej osoby. Obecnie sytuacja pandemiczna w kraju jest dynamiczna. Warto słuchać aktualnych ogłoszeń w radiu lub telewizji i stosować się do zaleceń.
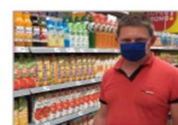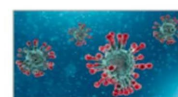
Easy to read text

There is still no single term to describe this language standard. In Polish, one may encounter phrases such as "easy to read and understand language" or the borrowed term from English "easy to read" (also used as "EtR").[6] Furthermore, there is no unified definition, and the challenges in creating one are evident not only in the Polish context.[7]

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2 *Information for All. European Standards for Preparing easy to read and Understand Texts*, translated by Boruc (2010). Additionally, there is a publication titled *Easy to Read and Understand Text: Guidelines for Creating and Using Educational and Exercise Materials*, prepared by PSONI in 2021 as part of the initiative "I read and I know – Easy to Read Texts in Schools." This document includes the development and dissemination of educational and exercise materials in an easy to read format, guidelines for their creation and use with students, and recommendations for implementing these solutions into school practice. Available at: https://zpe.gov.pl/b/tekst-latwy-do-czytania-i-zrozumienia-instrukcja/P17Ib7LYC (accessed September 1, 2024). See also: Abramowska (2015). More on this topic is written by Abramowska et al. (2021).

3 These changes pertain to the lexical and syntactic layers, as well as text composition, sender-receiver relationships, language etiquette, and polite expressions.

4 The respect for human rights and equal treatment is established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed on December 10, 1948. It is also worth mentioning other legal instruments addressing accessibility, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Accessibility Act, and in Polish legislation, aside from the Constitution, the Accessibility Act of July 19, 2019.

5 https://psoni.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ETR_o-epidemii_17.06.2020.pdf (accessed October 25, 2024).

6 In German, the term *Leichte Sprache* is used, which translates to *easy language*. In Croatia, the dominant term is *lako čitljivi tekstovi* (easy to read texts), while in the Czech Republic, it is referred to as *snadno čitelné a srozumitelné formy* (forms that are easy to read and understand). In Sweden, the term used is *Lättläst* (easy to read).

7 In some countries, such as Belgium, the definitions of the two terms plain language and easy to read text do not differ from one another. See: Vandehinste et al. (2021, p. 60).

TABLE 1 Comparison of the standard Polish with Easy Polish, developed by Agnieszka Przybyła-Wilkin.

Standard Polish	Easy Polish
W ciągu ostatnich czterech lat Polskie Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnością Intelektualną przeobraziło się (…). **Po pierwsze**, w każdym Kole PSONI unoszą się słowa o „niezależnym życiu osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną," „samostanowienia" i „podmiotowości." **Po drugie**, w każdym Kole PSONI działa grupa self-adwokatów i self-adwokatek, wspierająca Zarządy Kół w działaniach, reprezentująca swoje stanowisko w każdej sprawie dotyczącej osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną (…) **Tak powinno brzmieć podsumowanie kadencji Zarządu Głównego PSONI 2020–2024 (…).**	**Co chce robić Zarząd Główny?** Zarząd Główny pracuje dla Stowarzyszenia. W Zarządzie Głównym są ludzie z różnych miast w Polsce. Będą razem pracować przez 4 lata. W naszym Stowarzyszeniu najważniejsze są osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. Zarząd Główny chce, żeby każda osoba z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną mogła niezależnie żyć. To znaczy mieć mieszkanie, pracę i znajomych, decydować o sobie. Osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną mogą decydować o Stowarzyszeniu. Na przykład brać udział w ważnych spotkaniach, mówić co dla nich jest ważne. Mówić czego im najbardziej potrzeba. Source: Zima-Parjaszewska, Monika. „Jak działać 'na rzecz'? Co chce robić Zarząd Główny?" [How to work „for" [people with intellectual disabilities]? What does the National Board want to do?]. *Społeczeństwo dla wszystkich [Society for all]* September 2020: 2. Web. 22 February 2021.
[Over the last four years, the Polish Society for People with Intellectual Disability (PSONI) has been transformed (…). **First**, every PSONI branch has the terms 'independent life of people with intellectual disabilities', 'self-determination' and 'subjectivity'. **Second**, in every PSONI branch, a group of self-advocates is at work, supporting the Branch Boards in their actions, presenting their position on every matter concerning people with intellectual disability (…) **This is what the summary of the PSONI National Board term 2020–2024 should sound like (…).**	**What does the National Board want to do?** The National Board works for the Society. In the National Board there are people from different cities in Poland. They will work together for 4 years. In our Society, people with intellectual disabilities are the most important. The National Board wants every person with intellectual disabilities to be able to live independently. This means: to have a home, a job and friends, and to decide for themselves. People with intellectual disabilities can make decisions about their Society. For example [they can] take part in important meetings, say what is important to them. [They can] say what they need most.]

The most significant distinguishing factor between plain language text and easy language text is that easy language texts must always be co-created with individuals with intellectual disabilities or representatives from other target groups to whom the text is addressed. Easy language text involves not only increasing font size, using simpler words and sentences, and incorporating graphics, but also consulting with the individual for whom the text is being adapted to ensure that the content is accessible to them.

Easy to read texts are primarily intended for individuals with complex communication needs. Functionally describing this group, it is essential to distinguish between those who have experienced communication difficulties from birth and those who have developed such difficulties later in life due to accidents or illnesses. Thus, the group includes:

1 persons with disabilities who require easy to read texts on a continuous basis,
2 readers with limited language or reading skills who may need easy to read texts for a period of time, such as foreigners learning the language of the country they are in.

Representatives from various European countries in the *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe* indicate that individuals who can particularly benefit from texts developed in the easy to read and understand standard include individuals with clear cognitive impairments (e.g., developmental disabilities, memory disorders), people with various learning disabilities, neurocognitive disorders (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum disorders) or functional illiteracy.

However, it is important to note that the target group for easy texts is, in fact, a very extensive and open collection. As stated in the introduction to the *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe*:

In some cases, Easy Language has also supplanted the standard language as a language format for the general public. When the Satakunta Hospital District in Finland introduced Easy Language patient instructions, no one wanted to use the standard language patient instructions anymore. One answer to the question of who

the Easy Language target groups are is: everyone. Each individual should have the right to choose whether they want information in Easy Language or in standard language. It is important to ensure that Easy Language is a publicly available, neutral and non-stigmatized option for all public communication in society (Lindholm and Vanhatalo, 2021, p. 60).

2 Easy to read in literature and education

When discussing easy to read texts in education, it is essential to mention the concept of universal literature,[8] which appears to be realized by organizations as Leser søker bok in Norway (Books for Everyone) (Bovim Bugge et al., 2021, p. 373). This term refers to a type of literary text that can be read and understood by individuals for whom the standard version is not accessible for various reasons. Universal literature can be seen as a specific adaptation of the original text, but it can also arise when an author creates such a text as an original work, with the intention that the reader may have special communication needs.

In the previously mentioned publications, that outline European standards for creating easy to read and understand texts, there are no guidelines specifically addressing the creation of literature (both poetry and prose). This is significant, as one of the rules states that metaphors should not appear in easy to read texts. This requirement is particularly challenging to apply in literature, considering the essential role that stylistic devices, such as figures of speech and allusions, play in the meaning and interpretation of a text. It should also be noted that the literary texts included in the canon obligatory

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8 This concept has not yet been defined in the relevant literature. We propose to introduce it as a synonymous term to the descriptive concept of "books in easy language," which is used, among others, in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. See: *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe*, op. cit.

at school come from different eras. Therefore, we are not always dealing with texts written in contemporary language.

Moreover, when creating universal literature in an easy to read format, the sender typically addresses the recipient using the informal "you." In poetry, the author does not necessarily need to be identical to the lyrical subject or the protagonist. Additionally, the guideline to avoid repeating information and including unnecessary content is complex; what constitutes unnecessary content in informational texts differs from that in literary texts. In the case of adapting existing literary texts into an easy to read format, there remains the question of how to express levels of semantic depth.

Adapting original texts to the easy to read (EtR) guidelines carry the risk of oversimplifying the message and potentially failing to engage readers with the content. It is crucial, as highlighted by Maaß (2020) in her book, that EtR texts are inclusive while also avoiding the basis for stigmatization in the pursuit of a high level of reader comprehension.

The development of universal literature varies significantly from country to country. In the Scandinavian countries, the first literary publication in EtR was produced in the 1960s.[9]

In Poland, adaptations of literary texts have emerged through various projects implemented by different organizations. One such initiative is the project "I read and I know – Easy to Read Texts in Schools".[10] This project, carried out by the Polish Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PSONI) on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Science, resulted in the creation of 35 sets of educational and exercise materials in an easy to read format, as well as guidelines for creating and using these texts in teaching.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning the efforts of the Sign Language Linguistics Laboratory at the University of Warsaw, which, since 2014, funded by the Ministry of National Education, has been working on the Integrated Educational Platform, which features educational materials from various school subjects developed in accordance with EtR standards, as well as a series called "Accessible Readings".[11] Approximately 60 literary works have been adapted as part of the project. Among the selected works are pieces by both Polish authors, such as Adam Mickiewicz, Bolesław Leśmian, and Jan Kochanowski, as well as international authors[12] like Mark Twain and others. It is important to note that these readings were created in different eras, making the original text an example of the language of its time, which

can pose a barrier to understanding even for Polish-speaking students who do not require communication adaptations.[13] These materials are presented in the form of multimedia books available online. For each reading, a package of materials has been prepared, including: a video recording translating the text into Polish Sign Language (PJM), the reading content presented in the easy to read standard, graphic materials where the reading content is presented in comic form and worksheets for students, worksheets with PCS symbols, and communication boards featuring PCS symbols. The authors aim for these educational aids was to support the consolidation of knowledge and skills outlined in the general curriculum for primary schools.

3 Description of the research procedure

The aim of the research, the results of which are described in the following sections of the article, was to open a discussion on the effectiveness (or lack thereof) and the legitimacy of using easy to read texts in the education of students with special communication needs. It is important to emphasize that the research was designed as a pilot study. Therefore, the conclusions drawn are not meant to be generalized; rather, they serve to initiate further steps necessary for a thorough verification of the hypotheses posed.

The subsequent part of the article will present the research findings aimed at addressing the following research questions:

1 Are the literary texts available on the Integrated Educational Platform understandable for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, as well as students with aphasia?
2 What features of the analysed texts developed according to the EtR standard may make them difficult for these groups of primary school students to understand?
3 What are the risks and opportunities of using literary texts developed according to the EtR standard in education?

The research procedure was carried out in stages, including:

a) selection of material from the educational platform and its critical analysis;
b) conducting the study with a group of students from a school for the deaf and characterizing the research group and the results;
c) presentation of research results and discussion of conclusions from the conducted study.

4 Characteristics and analysis of the research material

To address the research questions, the authors designed an experimental study conducted during the 2023/2024 school year at the School and Education Center in Poznań. The study aimed to

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9   The title of this book is *Summer with Monika*. It was published in 1968, and the original author is Per Anders Fogelström, who wrote it in 1951.

10   In this project, for the first time, easy to read and easy to understand standards were applied to the development of educational and practice materials for educational stages involving students with special educational needs, specifically the first and second stages of primary school. This includes materials for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, as well as for vocational preparation schools and first level vocational schools. As part of the project, materials were developed for subjects including Polish language, mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, and computer science, as well as for courses on personal and social functioning, ethics, entrepreneurship, communication, and creativity. See: https://psoni.org.pl/czytam_i_wiem/ (accessed September 21, 2024).

11   The materials are available in the section "Accessible Readings" at the following link: https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/lektury-dostepne (accessed September 21, 2024).

12   It is important to note that the emerging easy to read text is prepared based on a translated version of the original.

13   It is noteworthy that, within the context of school education, Polish language teachers are increasingly turning to the comics developed as part of the "Accessible Readings" project to help students understand the meaning of texts where the language presents significant barriers to comprehension (cf. Rybka and Września-Pietrzak, 2022).

assess the level of comprehension of easy to read (EtR) materials available on the Integrated Educational Platform. After consulting with teachers, two texts were selected for the study: the fairy tale "The Nightingale" by Hans Christian Andersen and the positivist novella "The Barrel Organ" by Bolesław Prus. Although these texts belong to different literary genres, both are written in prose. Despite the differences between a fairy tale and a positivist short story, it is important to note that both works feature a clear structure, with a single main plot presented in a coherent, chronological narrative, which also carries a didactic message. In the school curriculum, fairy tales are typically introduced to students at the beginning of the second stage of education, while short stories are usually discussed in higher grades. Following further consultation with teachers, the authors have decided to assess the comprehension of the fairy tale among fourth-grade students, and the comprehension of the short story among sixth-grade students.

Due to the fact that our analysis aims were focused both on the adaptation of the literary text to EtR standards and its functionality in education, as well as on the comprehensibility of the prepared materials, it is necessary to begin by presenting and characterizing the materials selected for the study. Both texts and the exercises designed to assess reading comprehension were prepared by the same team. The EtR texts were authored by Piotr Mostowski, while the worksheets were developed by Małgorzata Skuza and Agnieszka Bajewska-Kołodziejek. As the authors of the materials indicate:

> The easy to read text (EtR) was developed in accordance with the IFLA Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials and the publication 'Information for All: European Standards for the Preparation of Easy-to-Read and Understand Texts'. Its purpose is to make the content of the reading accessible to readers who, for various reasons, are unable to comprehend the original text. These are primarily students with aphasia or intellectual disabilities, although an easy to read text can be helpful for any child who faces a language barrier or an overload of content. The changes made in the EtR version affect two layers: language and content. The linguistic layer was modified in terms of vocabulary and syntax – frequently used words that are easy to understand were applied, and information was presented mainly in simple sentences, following the principle: 1 line of text = 1 sentence. Subplots were removed from the original text, and subheadings were added in longer texts. (Information from the introduction to the exercise materials available in each set of educational materials).

It should be noted that the authors only adapted the texts linguistically; they were not accompanied by illustrative material, which is a necessary element in the EtR standard. Although the authors do not explicitly state this, it is likely that illustrations facilitating text comprehension were replaced by comic strips that visually depict the content in accordance with the conventions of the comic genre. According to the authors, these illustrations aim to make the text content more accessible to students. They note that:

> Teachers can refer to the proposed illustrations while working with the text – using either the entire comic strip or selected elements. For students, this aids in visually reconstructing the plot of the work and in memorizing it. For some, the short texts in the frames are the only form of engagement with the reading. (Information from the introduction).

Nevertheless, the authors of these materials assume that working with the reading text can also be done without referring to illustrations. Thus, it can be observed that in the series of available readings, the EtR standard is primarily perceived as an adaptation of the linguistic layer, with visual elements being considered redundant.

A semantic analysis of both works evokes several questions that are crucial when adapting literary texts to the needs of students and the educational context. One such question concerns the criteria for omitting content and limiting the semantic layer to the main plot. Both texts have a didactic nature. The structure of the fairy tale, for instance, is based on contrast (axiologically marked opposition, fitting into the framework of good versus evil). In the case of "The Nightingale" this contrast has been reduced to the juxtaposition of the real and mechanical birds. However, a crucial element concerning life in captivity (imprisonment) *versus* freedom, as well as the idea that something perceived as a reward (a golden cage) by one might signify captivity and suffering for another, has been omitted. This omission is evident when comparing the content of the EtR version of the work with the questions related to the text, which include interrogative sentences such as "What was the highest reward for the nightingale?" and "Where did the mechanical nightingale come from?" The reader, however, will not find answers to these questions in the text.

Similar issues can be observed in the relationship between the content of B. Prus's "The Barrel Organ" and the questions related to it. One of the questions testing text comprehension requires students to eliminate a false statement from two options given in the sentence. This question makes students identify the amount of money Mr. Tomasz gave to the caretaker to prevent the organ-grinder from entering the yard. However, the developed text contains no information about the transfer of money to the custodian. Due to this, the authors of this article decided to remove this question from the questionnaire addressed to the sixth-grade students in this study.

It can thus be observed that the developed materials were not reviewed, and the division of tasks among different authors, in the case of the relationship between the text and comprehension questions, may have contributed to the identified shortcomings. Based on this observation, one can conclude that a good practice in the process of preparing educational materials correlated with a literary work should involve the principle of having the same authors or team of authors develop these interrelated texts.

Given that the target audience assumed by the authors of the developed materials were students with disabilities who have learning and/or communication difficulties, including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, intellectually disabled, or have autism or aphasia, and who attend elementary school,[14] it must be assumed that the content adaptation should also consider the cognitive and communicative abilities of this age group. Both texts included lexemes such as *cesarz* ['emperor'], *słowik* ['nightingale'], *kataryniarz* ['organ grinder'], and *katarynka* ['barrel organ'], whose familiarity among students, particularly within this target group, may be questionable. These are low-frequency lexemes, as evidenced by the results obtained from entering these lexemes into Google (*cesarz* /'emperor'—63,100, *słowik* /'nightingale'—62,200, *kataryniarz* /'organ grinder'—17,100, *katarynka*

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14   It should be emphasized that the authors of the materials did not precisely define the target group, even though the indicated recipient groups are mostly internally diverse, also in terms of communication methods.

/'barrel organ'—19,900, *adwokat*/ 'lawyer'—58,800, *ptak*/ 'bird'—210,000, *instrument* /'instrument'—2,270,000, *władca*/ 'ruler'—76,200, *król*/ 'king'—246,000, *prawnik* /'lawyer'—149,000).[15] It should be added at this point that the keywords for the literary text are absent from the Minimum Vocabulary Dictionary of the Polish Language, which lists 2,144 entries that should be known to individuals learning Polish at levels A1 and A2 (Zgółka, 2013). An easy to read text devoid of explanations (and illustrations) of key words crucial to the literary text will be significantly more challenging for readers with lower communicative competencies.

At this point, it is also worth noting that in the comprehension materials developed for Bolesław Prus's short story, the word *stróż* ('caretaker') was used, which is a synonym for *dozorca* ('custodian'). Both lexemes are infrequently used, and their occurrence in Polish is limited. A child in school may encounter someone performing similar duties who is referred to as a *portier* /'porter,' while those responsible for maintaining order or enforcing rules in places like supermarkets or other public spaces are usually called *ochroniarz* or *ochrona*/ 'security guards.' Due to this, the authors decided to remove this task from the questionnaire. Furthermore, since the developed text did not include information about the activities

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15 Data from 3rd September 2024.

performed by the blind protagonist's mother, the sentence: *The girl's mother made stockings/socks.* Was also removed.

The analysis of the tasks accompanying the developed texts demonstrates how crucial the correspondence between the text and its associated tasks is, as well as the importance of lexical choices that align with the cognitive abilities of today's elementary school students. To verify the authors' observations, an additional task was included in the sixth-grade task set, focusing on understanding key words for comprehending the short story: *być skoncentrowanym* ('to be focused'), *dozorca* ('custodian'), *obserwować* ('to observe'), *nienawidzić* ('to hate'), *katarynka* ('barrel organ') and *adwokat* ('lawyer'). Meanwhile, the test checking comprehension of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Nightingale" involved a task in which fourth-grade students were asked to compare the real nightingale with the mechanical one. This task was proposed by the authors of the materials published on an online platform. However, the article's authors made one modification—removing the illustrations of the two birds from the table, as the EtR-adapted fairy tale text did not include illustrations. Both worksheets were similar in length. Each consisted of three pages, with the first one and a half pages containing the reading text, followed by printed questions.

The detailed questions for the sixth-grade students, translated into English, were as follows (see Figure 1).

Task 1. Answer the questions:

a) What is the title of the work?
b) Who wrote this work?
c) Where is the action of the work set?
d) Who are the characters in the work?

Task 2. Answer the questions:

a) How did the emperor learn about the nightingale's beautiful singing?
b) How did the emperor want to reward the nightingale?
c) What was the greatest reward for the nightingale?
d) Where did the mechanical nightingale come from?
e) For whom did the mechanical nightingale sing?
f) Why did people love the real nightingale?
g) Who turned out to be the emperor's true friend during his illness?

Task 3.
Based on the text, compare the nightingale and the artificial nightingale. How do they differ from each other?

the nightingale	the artificial nightingale

FIGURE 1
Questions referring to the fairy tale *Słowik* by H.Ch. Andersen translated into English.

Task 1. Fill in the blanks

The author of the novella "The Barrel Organ" is ………………………………………… .

The main character of the novella is ………………………………………… .

He was a lawyer, lived alone, and most of all, he disliked ………………………………… .

Nearby, ………………………………… moved in with ………………………………… .

The girl was ………………………… .

She often looked out the ………………………….. and was sad.

One day, an ………………………….. entered the courtyard.

Mr. Tomasz wanted to chase him away, but he saw that the girl was ……………………… and dancing.

From that time on, the ……………………… was allowed to come to the courtyard and play for ……………… .

Mr. Tomasz decided to help and find …………………… for the girl.

Task 2. Cross out the unnecessary words

a) Mr. Tomasz was a lawyer / salesman.

b) He lived in Krakow / Warsaw.

c) Mr. Tomasz really liked organ grinders / disliked organ grinders.

d) Near Mr. Tomasz, two / four women and a girl moved in.

e) The girl was deaf / blind.

f) The girl was often happy / sad.

g) When the girl heard the organ grinder, she laughed and danced / cried and was sad.

h) Mr. Tomasz chased away / did not chase away the organ grinder because he saw the happy girl.

i) Mr. Tomasz wanted / did not want to help the girl.

Task 3. Answer the questions:

1. Where did Mr. Tomasz live?

2. What was Mr. Tomasz interested in?

3. What did Mr. Tomasz dislike?

4. Who did not let the organ grinder into the yard?

5. Who lived across from Mr. Tomasz?

6. Since when had the girl been blind?

Task 4. Explain the meanings of these words:

be concentrated –……………………………………………………………………………

caretaker –……………………………………………………………………………………

to observe –…………………………………………………………………………………

to hate –………………………………………………………………………………………

organ grinder –………………………………………………………………………………

lawyer –………………………………………………………………………………………

Task 5. How do you think the story of the blind girl could have ended? Write your own ending.

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FIGURE 2

Questions referring to "The Barrel Organ" by B. Prus translated into English.

The English translation of the questions developed for the short story "The Barrel Organ" is displayed in Figure 2.

5 How did the students cope with the literary texts in the EtR standard?

The authors of the analyzed materials identified individuals with aphasia and d/Deaf individuals as the target audience. Therefore, the authors of the article decided to examine how students from a school for the Deaf in Poznań would cope with the materials described above. It is worth noting here that, since the subject of this article is literary texts prepared in the easy to read format, the students worked only with written texts. They were not previously introduced to any version of the text in sign language, nor did they work with visual materials (illustrations, comics).

The described study was conducted in two classes – fourth and sixth grade. A detailed characterization of the research group is presented in Table 2.

In each group there were students who were deaf or hard of hearing[16] (4 students in the fourth grade and 6 students in the sixth grade), who typically communicated using both spoken language (Polish) and sign language (2 students from the fourth grade and 5 students from the sixth grade); however, all of them communicate orally in Polish. The analyzed groups also included students with aphasia (6 in the fourth grade and 3 in the sixth grade). Additionally, 3 students with aphasia from the fourth grade have diagnoses indicating hearing impairment. This diversity within the research group suggests that the analyses should be regarded as examples of specific case studies, allowing for conclusions about the communicative abilities of the students. Although the students were in different grades, their ages were comparable, as individuals with disabilities often start their education later or follow a longer educational path than their peers. It is worth noting, however, that in each class group, there were students whose shared characteristic was their stage of education. It should be noted that the students had not previously been tested for their reading comprehension skills. The authors assumed that their level of proficiency should meet the requirements set in the educational programs for grades 4 and 6 of primary school. It must also be emphasized that each of the students communicated using Polish language (which was sometimes indicated as their only form of communication). According to the curriculum, by grade 4, students should have mastered basic reading and writing skills, especially since Polish is the dominant language of education in Poland (Raport, 2020: 32).

Given the topic of this article, the authors focused not on the characteristics of individual students but on attempting to answer the question of whether the adaptation of materials in the form of a text developed according to the EtR standard enabled the correct completion of tasks related to text comprehension by students with aphasia and those with hearing impairments. At this point, it is important to emphasize that the students who read the developed texts and completed the tasks prepared by the authors of "*Lektury dostępne*" ('Accessible literature') were the intended target audience for these educational materials. Thus, assessing how they performed in reading comprehension of the selected texts can be considered a means of evaluating the effectiveness of these materials in educational practice. It should be emphasized that the authors of the materials did not indicate that they worked with individuals from the intended target group when developing the literary texts in the easy to read (EtR) format.

For the purposes of this study, the authors present the results obtained by the students. The number of correct answers will serve as an indicator of the comprehensibility of the literary text adapted to the EtR standard and the comprehension-checking tasks prepared for it.

General results for each class are as follows (see Tables 3, 4).

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16 This information was pointed out by teachers who described the students as hard of hearing or deaf according to their diagnoses.

TABLE 2 Characterization of the research group.

	4th grade students	6th grade students
Number of students	10	9
Gender	8 boys	6 boys
	2 girls	3 girls
Age, ways of communication and characteristic of the communication	**1 student**: 10 years old (deaf, communicates using sign language and orally) **3 students**: 11 years old (2 with aphasia, 1 deaf, they communicate using sign language and orally) **4 students**: 12 years old (3 with aphasia and communicate orally, 1 deaf—communicate orally) **2 students**: 13 years old (1 with aphasia, 1 hard-of-hearing—both communicate orally)	**2 students**: 14 years old, deaf, communicate using sign language and orally **1 student**: 13 years old, deaf, communicates using sign language and orally **2 students**: 14 years old, hard-of-hearing, communicate using sign language and orally **1 student**: 14 years old, with aphasia, communicates orally, answers to the questions are written by a teacher **1 student**: 12 years old, with aphasia, communicates orally **1 student**: 13 years old, hard-of-hearing, communicates orally **1 student**: 13 years old, with aphasia, communicates orally

TABLE 3 Results obtained by the fourth-grade students.

Fourth-grade students max. number of points—13	Number of students	Age	Gender	Language of communication	
0	1	11	Boy	P	A
	1	10	Boy	P + S	D
	1	13	Boy	P	HoH
2,5	1	12	Boy	P	A
3,5	1	12	Boy	P	A
5,5	1	12	Girl	P	D
6	1	11	Boy	P	A
9	1	11	Boy	P + S	D
10	1	12	Boy	P	A
	1	13	Girl	P	A

P—Polish; S—sign language; A—aphasia; HoH—hard of hearing; D—deaf.

TABLE 4 Results obtained by the sixth-grade students.

Sixth-grade students max. number of points—31	Number of students	Age	Gender	Language of communication	
3	1	14	Boy	P + S	D
	1	14	Boy	P + S	D
6	1	13	Girl	P + S	D
9	1	14	Girl	P + S	HoH
14	1	14	Boy	P + S	HoH
24	1	14	Boy	P (answers are noted by a teacher)	A
27	1	12	Girl	P	A
	1	13	Girl	P	HoH
28	1	13	Boy	P	A

P—Polish; S—sign language; A—aphasia; HoH—hard of hearing; D—deaf.

As the data shows, the highest scores (indicating over 50% correct answers) in both classes were achieved by students with aphasia, while the results of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, particularly in the sixth grade, were significantly lower. In the fourth grade, this difference is not as visible, as the weakest results were obtained by both students with aphasia and those who were hard-of-hearing or deaf. This may be related to the varied language acquisition processes in the group of students with aphasia and hearing impairments. The writing style and responses of deaf students clearly demonstrate difficulties characteristic of this group of Polish language learners. In the responses from both fourth- and sixth-grade students, there were instances of copied

text fragments that did not correspond to the question, incorrectly written words (phonetically distorted, inflected improperly), or word forms inappropriate for the question, such as confusing the words *słowik* ('nightingale') and *słownik* ('dictionary'), or *kataryniarz* ('organ grinder') and *katarynka* ('barrel organ'). Sixth-grade students performed much better on the task that required choosing the correct answer from two contrasting options. The solution to this task involved finding the specific answer in the text (sometimes simply locating the appropriate text fragment), allowing five students to answer these questions correctly. A detailed analysis of the provided answers will be the subject of a separate study; here, the authors focus on elements related to the comprehension of the adapted text and an evaluation of the choices made by the authors of the materials.

The concerns raised earlier in this article regarding the selection of words that, according to the authors, may have been unclear to the students, are confirmed by the results of the task comparing the real and mechanical nightingale in the fourth grade, as well as the sixth-grade students' definitions of selected key words necessary for understanding the short story. In the fourth-grade group, three students did not complete this task, leaving the answer blank. One student wrote only the word *słowik* ('nightingale'). Of the remaining seven responses, five were correct. Three students fully distinguished between the real and mechanical nightingale, noting not only the difference in color and the number of songs sung by both birds but also recognizing other characteristics of the two characters (living/mechanical bird, true friend of the emperor).

The results obtained by the sixth-grade students, whose task was to explain the meaning of six lexical items, are presented in the table below. Incorrect or ambiguous answers indicating unclear definitions are marked with an asterisk (*) (see Table 5).

The presented results show that the word from the title (*katarynka* /'barrel organ') was understood by only one person, while the remaining students provided incorrect answers or none at all. Three of the responses suggest a correlation between the *barrel organ* and sounds (music, noise, singing), indicating that these students likely tried to infer the word's meaning from the context of the text they were reading. However, the information and explanations provided in the text were insufficient.

A simplistic interpretation of these results might lead to the conclusion that the texts, as developed, are not effective for the group of students under study. However, this conclusion would be an oversimplification, as various factors may have influenced the students' performance. The variation in students' results suggests that a single way of adapting the text in the EtR standard may meet the communication needs of different subsets of even a narrowly defined group of recipients at varying levels. In this situation, the preparation of a single EtR text for such a diverse group requires teachers to use additional educational materials or strategies to prepare students for working with this type of literary text. Otherwise, the adapted EtR text is accessible and comprehensible only to those whose communication proficiency is higher.

6 Is EtR the solution?

In light of the conducted research, the titular question about the challenges and opportunities associated with using the EtR standard

TABLE 5 The results of sixth-grade students indicating the understanding of key words for the short story *Barrel Organ* by B. Prus—own elaboration.

Word to be explained	Definitions provided by students	Number of students who did not provide any answer
być skoncentrowanym [to be concentrated/focused]	- skupić się [to be concentrated/focused], - skupionym [concentrated/ focused], - być skupionym na jednej żeczyª [to be concentrated/focused on one thing], - być skupiony [be concentrated/focused], - *nie wiedział, jak to zrodzićᵇ [he did not know how to do it],	4
dozorca [caretaker / janitor]	- ochroniarz [security guard]	8
obserwować [to observe]	- patrzeć [to look at'], - patrzyć na jedną żecz/kogoś i no [to look at one thing/person], - *Pan Tomasz mieszkał naprzeciwko [Mr Tomasz has lived across the street],	3 + 1 unreadable answer
nienawidzić [to hate]	- nie lubić [to not like/ dislike], - *katarynka grała głośna [a barrel organ has played loud], - bardzo nie lubić [to dislike very much/ to really not like], - nie lubić kogoś [to dislike/ not like someone]	4
katarynka [organ grinder (or barrel organ]	- *do śpiewania [something to sing], - *robi hałas [it makes noise], - *głośna muzyka [loud music], - instrumętᶜ na którym się gra [instrument that one plays], - *kupować piękne meble [to buy beautiful furniture], - *ludzie śpiewają [people are singing]	4
adwokat [lawyer]	- *pracownik [employee], - chroni w sądzie [protects in court], - pomaga w sądzie [helps in court]	6

ªSpelling mistake: proper form in Polish is: *rzeczy*.
ᵇA student made a spelling mistake. It should be *zrobić* ['to do'] instead of *zrodzić* ['give birth to'].
ᶜSpelling mistake, proper form in Polish is: *instrument* [instrument].

to adapt literary texts for educational use in schools requires addressing several key issues. The first is recognizing that the group of students participating in the study would not have been able to work independently with the original literary text, which—in the case of both "The Nightingale" and "The Barrel Organ"—is significantly longer and written in a language that is distant from contemporary Polish. The analysis of both the texts and the tasks selected for the study revealed several key difficulties, the most important being the heterogeneity of the target groups and their differing communication needs, which should be reflected in the text. When creating materials for younger recipients, it is crucial to understand the cognitive and communicative functioning of the target group and to adapt the vocabulary to their perceptual capabilities and life experiences.

Moreover, the analysis of the educational materials used also revealed difficulties in establishing criteria for determining which content elements of the original text to omit and how these

omissions might affect the reception of the author's intended message. Since the *Accessible Readers* initiative aims to enable the realization of curriculum content, it should be noted that this function may influence how the literary text is adapted to the EtR standard. Additionally, a best practice would be to promote close collaboration among the team preparing the various materials related to the EtR-adapted text, ensuring thorough content verification.

The analysis of literary texts in the easy to read (EtR) standard highlighted the necessity of establishing unified guidelines that address the needs of the intended audience. The absence of such criteria may lead to inconsistencies in the material set and contribute to errors within them.

The conducted analysis on a diverse target group confirmed that a group with heterogeneous communication needs will achieve varying results when using the tested materials. These differences, however, are primarily associated with the type of disability and the accompanying level of linguistic proficiency of the student. The results obtained suggest that the adapted texts are significantly better understood by students with more advanced communication skills. The lower scores of Deaf students indicate that these materials should be subject to further research to develop even simpler texts that meet the communication needs of Deaf individuals.

Considering the characteristics of the analyzed texts that may have hindered comprehension of the content and tasks, particular attention should be paid to vocabulary selection. The choice of words, often unfamiliar to students, is due to their low frequency in the Polish language or their characterization as outdated or archaic. Vocabulary selection appears to be one of the key elements determining the level of text comprehension.

In attempting to address questions about the challenges and possibilities of using EtR-standard texts in education, it is worth noting one of the major difficulties: the low level of social awareness regarding the function of this standard. The low level of social awareness may lead to the stigmatization of easy language. When asked what features of easy language might lead to stigmatization, the primary response would be that it is often directed toward individuals with intellectual disabilities. Consideration should also be given to how to write and what to write (content and form) in a way that does not stigmatize or discriminate. Solutions to these issues can be found in HiLo books, which maintain content that is interesting for the reader while presenting complex information (high-content/low-skills) in a manner accessible to those with low reading proficiency. A potential threat in developing EtR-standard books is the infantilization of content and form, which may be inappropriate for teenage or adult readers. A remedy to this problem could involve including the target groups in the process of adapting original literary works.

A potential solution to the issue of text differentiation, depending on the communicative proficiency of the readers, is to attempt to differentiate levels of easy texts based on the target group. While the current approach covers a very broad audience, special education increasingly requires the individualization of the teaching process, which also entails the need to adapt educational materials to the needs and capabilities of each student.

For example, Slovenia has developed such levels based on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)[17]:

In the German-speaking context, the *Capito*[18] model operates within the framework of *Leicht Lesen* (Easy/Light Reading), which offers three levels of text preparation. Readers can choose the level that is most appropriate for them. These levels are based on the diversity of cognitive abilities but also take into account the reader's prior knowledge and experience. Based on 90 different criteria, three levels of 'easy reading' have been distinguished. Similarly, *Easy Finnish* includes three levels, defined as:

17 An example of good practice in this area might be Slovenia: http://www.blizjiknjigi.si/Knjige/Ogled/13559-cvetje-in-ogenj (accessed September 1, 2024). The analysis based on the *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe* comes from an unpublished thesis by Elżbieta Grądziel titled *Literature in the easy to read and Understand Standard in Poland and Other European Countries: Current Research and Practical Experience*.

18 https://www.capito.eu/en/easy-language/ (accessed September 01, 2024).

Easiest Easy Finnish, *Basic Easy Finnish*, and *Advanced Easy Finnish*.

The main challenges for creators adapting educational materials according to the EtR standard are primarily the costs of preparation and profitability. Despite the high costs, it is worth noting that preparing literature accessible to all may, at some stage, contribute to it gaining the same status as, for example, children's literature today. It is also important to note that in some countries, a method for publishing EtR books has been developed – sometimes these are commercial publishers, and in other cases, organizations are created to handle these activities, funded by national governments.[19]

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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19 As good practices, one can point to the activities of the Swedish organization Easy Language Group, the British organization Beyond Words, which publishes books using only images, and the Norwegian organization Books for Everyone.

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KR-K: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MW-P: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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