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**YOUNG ADULTS' ATTITUDE
TOWARDS
FOREIGN CULTURE**

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INTRODUCTION

This diploma project will deal with introducing British and American culture issues to young adults at a technical school. It will focus on a specific school, namely Zespół Szkół Technicznych in Ostrów Wlkp.

The project consists of two chapters. In the first section there will be some information on what different methodologists and teachers think about culture lessons. Moreover, it will contain reasons why teachers should incorporate culture-related topics into their syllabus and what they should put emphasis on.

In the next section the main object of the study will be presented. It will comprise information on the research carried out among the students of ZST in Ostrów Wlkp. The research concentrates on the young adults' attitude towards British and American culture, their interests and needs.

The aim of the research is to find out whether the students of ZST in Ostrów Wlkp. are interested in gaining knowledge of British and American culture. This is vital for me because I started teaching in this school last year and I am not acquainted with the environment of the school as far as English teaching / learning is concerned. This is of great importance for myself, a teacher of English language, as well as other English teachers in this school. Due to the data gathered in the survey I will be able to recognize what culture related topics I should present to the students. I will also be able to estimate how many students are willing to participate in additional classes, if any. I hope this research will help me to prepare myself to bring British and American culture closer to the students in a better sufficient way.

CHAPTER 1 – The theory

1. Foreign culture teaching at schools.

In this part of the project I am going to give some account on what some of the people interested in the topic of introducing culture into lessons schemes think and suggest.

1.1. The main objectives for teaching British and American culture to young adults.

I would like to start with presenting some facts concerning grounds for familiarizing students with British and American culture and generally any foreign culture while learning a particular foreign language.

First of all, it is important to define what culture of a country is and what status it should have in learning/teaching a foreign language. In *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1995: 334) one of the entries describes ‘culture’ as “the ideas, beliefs, and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a society”. This definition, however, does not mention a language. Does it mean that a language of a nation or a group of people does not make up its culture and, if it is so, culture issues do not have to be included in the syllabus of the acquired language? According to Ramona Tang (2004), “Language is culture. Language is the soul of the country and people who speak it”. By saying this she claims that while learning a foreign language we are not able to limit ourselves to learning or teaching only grammar structures and vocabulary. She states:

By speaking the language, therefore, one automatically (to a greater or lesser extent) aligns oneself with culture of the language. To speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and thought is extremely powerful (2004).

Professor of English, Michael Lessard-Clouston (2004), finds it demanding to characterize the term ‘culture’. Following some methodologists, he recognizes three aspects of culture. These are ‘general’, ‘specific’ and ‘dynamic’ aspects. The first one, according to Saville-Troike (1975: 83) “incorporates both ‘material’ manifestations of culture that are easily seen and ‘non-material’ ones that are more difficult to observe”. The culture features are sometimes easily recognized and they sometimes hide behind some behaviours. Therefore, it is difficult to learn or teach them. Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi (1990: 3-4) by the specific aspect of culture mean:

Cinema, literature, music, and media ... family, interpersonal relations, customs, material conditions ... the system which conditions perceptions and thoughts ... the background knowledge, social and paralinguistic skills, and language code which are necessary for successful communication.

Moreover, Lessard-Clouston (2004) agrees with Robinson (1988: 11) that culture has “a dynamic system of symbols and meanings [where] past experience influences meaning, which in turn affects future experience, which in turn affects subsequent meaning, and so on”. That is why the contexts in which specific elements of a given culture are presented by teachers should be carefully chosen. It is not desirable to acquaint our students with culture tips at random.

Another reason for careful selection of culture topics is the type of motivation that learners have. As young adults, they have their own will and they have different interests and perspectives for their future. Most of them is aware of their needs while learning a foreign language. Rod Ellis (1997: 75-76) describes instrumental, integrative, resultative, and intrinsic motivation. Shortly, the first one is an instrument to get a better job. Students are not interested in more than is necessary to be fluent in the language. Integrative motivation is visible in students who “are interested in the people and culture represented by the target – language group”. For these learners, culture lessons inspire them to get better command of the language and satisfy their needs. Next, resultative motivation is “the cause of L2 achievement”. He gives an example:

In a context like Canada, success in learning French may intensify English – speaking learners, liking for French culture. However, in California success in learning English may bring Mexican women into situations where they experience discrimination and thus reduce their appreciation of American culture.

Thus, the popularity of British and American culture may enhance Polish students to learn the language. Finally, intrinsic motivation means “the degree of effort a learner makes to learn an L2 as a result of the interest generated by a particular learning activity” (Ellis 1997: 140). This kind of motivation may be encouraged by culture-related topics which seem to be motivating themselves. This is the case even more important in the situation where learners are distant from the target-language country.

Furthermore, Barry Tomalin and Susan Stempleski (2002: 7-8), following Ned Seelye (1988), mention “seven goals of cultural instruction”:

1. To help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours.
2. To help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
3. To help students to become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture.
4. To help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
5. To help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
6. To help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
7. To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

Additionally, we can find some proof for the idea of culture teaching in Larsen-Freeman's (1987: 2-10) second angle of her triangle. She mentions the importance of ‘language learning/learner’, ‘language/culture’ and ‘language teaching/teacher’. According to her, ‘developing in one’s students an understanding of the attitudes, values, beliefs of a particular target culture is at least as important as imparting factual knowledge’ (1987: 5).

As a final point, I want to mention Marcin Smolik and Joanna Galant's (2002: 4) factual opinion on the subject of introducing British and American elements of culture. They admit that culture awareness is essential in stimulating the intellectual and emotional development of the learners. They are also aware of the fact that Poland enters European Union and Poles should be educated in the sense of their own high self-esteem and identity as well as Polish students should be taught respect for other groups of people and their cultures.

1.2. Principles for teaching aspects of British and American culture.

Lessard-Clouston (2004), as well as many teachers and methodologists, often wonder what and how to teach cultural aspects of a language. Culture learning is thought to be a

receptive skill since students often inquire after the knowledge and they do not respond to it actively. Culture has been treated as a side effect of teaching. Nowadays, more and more scientists consider culture-related topics as important as grammar structures, vocabulary and communication. Lessard-Clouston (2004) suggests that we should “be systematic about our culture teaching” and we should plan and develop techniques and methods to make “our learners benefit most”. In addition, he wants to convince other teachers that they should not avoid “culture learning assessment” as it causes students to study more.

Tomalin and Stempleski (2002: 7) put forward this division of elements of culture that should be taught:

- group one - “achievement culture” - that is history, geography, institutions, literature, art, music, the way of life
- group two - “behaviour culture” that is:

<i>Products</i>	<i>Ideas</i>	<i>Behaviuors</i>
literature	beliefs	customs
folklore	values	habits
art	institutions	dress
music		foods
artefacts		leisure

The first group of topics constitute ideas which are easily followed by books and teachers. The other group has “tended to be treated in an anecdotal, peripheral, or supplementary way, depending on the interest and awareness of teachers and students” (Tomalin and Stempleski 2002: 7).

Most of the activities which introduce culture topics are based on texts which students study. Then they do some multiple-choice exercises, do crosswords, etc. Maria A. Kodotchigova (2002) describes, after Tomalin and Stempleski, role-play as a tool to introduce culture issues. Kodotchigova (2002) lists four culture related plays to check cultural behaviour and outlines of communication. Kodotchigova (2002) adds that “role playing can be effective for experiencing cultural principles and cultural awareness because it gives an opportunity to be emotionally involved in cross-cultural learning and reflect upon cultural differences”.

Moreover, according to Tomasz Roszyk (2004) teaching culture does not have to lead only to studying pure facts from books but it can be enjoyable as well. We can suggest

our students listening to songs which send some information on British or American culture subtly, for example “lyrics can be used as a starting point to interpreting literature ... e.g. Kate Bush and her songs ‘Wuthering Heights’, ‘In Search of Peter Pan’, ‘On England My Lionheart’ and so on”.

To conclude, the above arguments for introducing British and American culture and the ways of doing this encourage me to take an effort and teach these elements of English language to my students.

CHAPTER 2 – The study

1. The research review.

1.1. Basic information on the research taken.

This research was taken in a technical school in Ostrów Wlkp. I wanted to find out how much interest British and American culture arouse among the students of the first and second year. The students come from different classes and all of them attend two hours of English a week. The total number of the participants is 60. There are 37 first grade students and 23 second grade ones. All of them are boys. Some of them, about 85 % learnt English before they started going to technical school and the rest learn it for the first time now.

1.2. The scheme of the project.

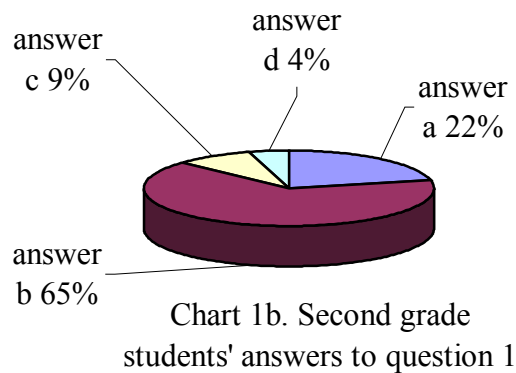
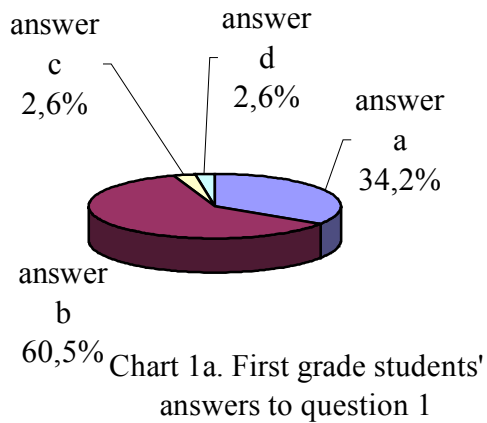
The students did not prepare themselves for the questionnaire earlier. They had about 10 minutes to fill in it. The survey consists of twelve questions on the students interests about British and American culture. Four of the questions are multiple-choice ones. There is more than one answer possible. Six questions need yes or no reply and two queries need longer answer. The questionnaire is in Polish and the replies were expected to be in that language (see Appendix 1 and for English version see Appendix 2).

1.3. The presentation of the results.

At this point I would like to give you an idea about the first and second grade students’ replies to the questions of the questionnaire:

I. The culture of which country are you interested in?

- a) Great Britain
- b) The United States of America
- c) Australia and New Zealand
- d) Canada



From the data collected in these two charts I can conclude that a great majority of the ZST students, about 60 to 65 percent, is interested in American culture. British culture is less popular in both levels but there are still more first grade students who find it challenging. The culture of Australia, New Zealand and Canada is not favoured by many students.

II. If English language were not compulsory, would you be interested in British and American culture?

'yes' answers		'no' answers	
first grade students	second grade students	first grade students	second grade students
62,8 %	45,4 %	37,2 %	54,4 %

According to the table, generally many first grade students do not feel being forced to like or dislike the British or American culture. Unlike the second grade students whose majority seems to stop learning about the culture if they did not have to do it at school.

III. Which British and American culture elements are you most interested in?

- a) history
- b) geography

- c) literature
- d) the history of English language
- e) others / what? _____

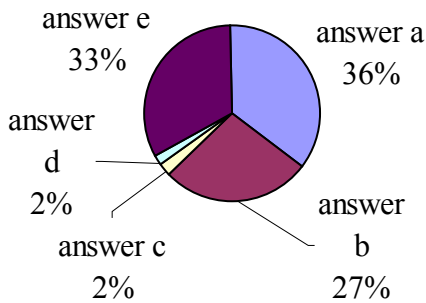


Chart 3a. First grade students' answers

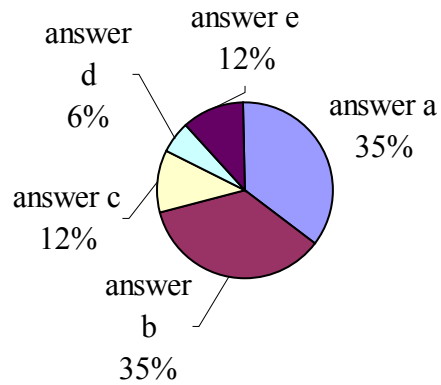


Chart 3b. Second grade students' answers

In case of first grade students, the history of Britain or the USA is favourable while second grade students chose both the history and geography as topics worth looking into. British / American literature and the history of English language are not very popular among the students. Among other possibilities given by the students are music, sport, contemporary issues, motorization, customs and technical issues (e.g. latest news, vocabulary).

IV. How does British and American culture get to you?

- a) at school
- b) from television and radio
- c) from books / what? _____
- d) from films / what? _____
- e) from a computer / (how? films, games, etc.) _____
- f) papers / what? _____
- g) others _____

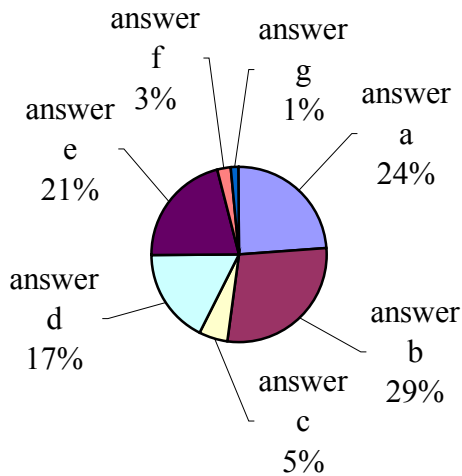


Chart 4a. First grade students' answers

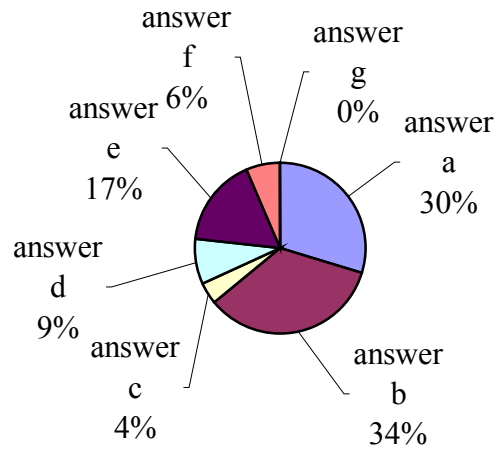


Chart 4b. Second grade students' answers

Definitely, in both levels the students get most information on British or American culture from television and radio, secondly at school. 21 per cent of first grade students derives the knowledge of the countries from films. A computer is also popular but reading books or newspapers is a neglected area by a great number of the students.

V. Does the perspective of Polish entry to Europe inspire you to look for information about British and American culture?

'yes' answers		'no' answers	
first grade students	second grade students	first grade students	second grade students
27 %	34,7 %	73 %	65,2 %

For an enormous number of both first and second grade students it is indifferent if Poland enters the European Union as far as learning about the British / American culture.

VI. Which topic out of British and American culture would you choose if you were to prepare a project for a lesson?

- a) history
- b) geography
- c) literature
- d) the history of English language

e) others / what? _____

Why? _____

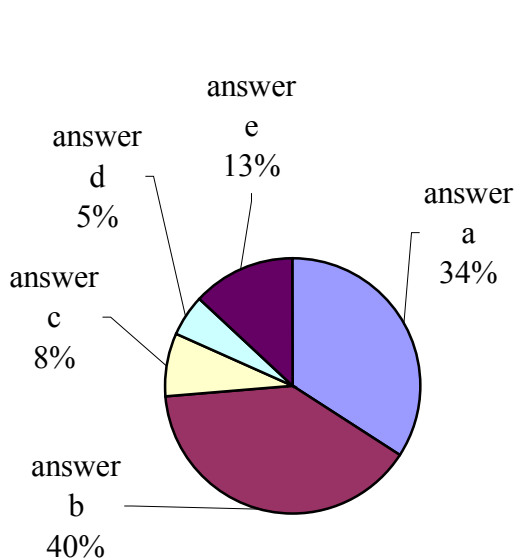


Chart 6a. First grade students' answers

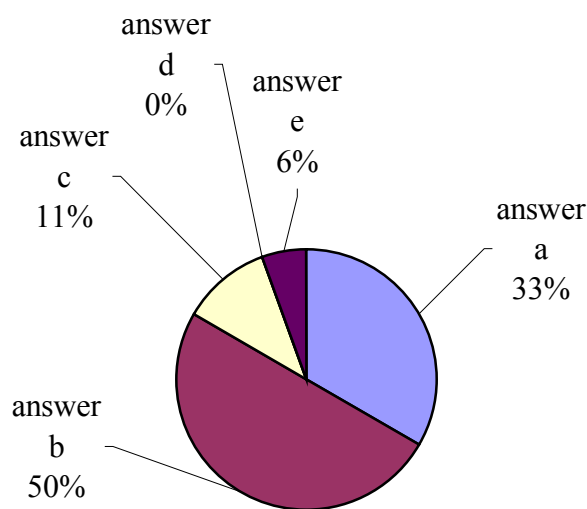


Chart 6b. Second grade students' answers

According to the data, the majority of both first and second grade students would choose geography topics as a theme for their projects. On the second place is history. Very few students would like to prepare a project on literature, the history of English language, motorization, contemporary issues, sport and music. The students gave some justification. For some of them the history hides many undiscovered mysteries and it is extensive. They admit that they are interested in such topics.

VII. Do grades from English influence your British and American culture interest?

'yes' answers		'no' answers	
first grade students	second grade students	first grade students	second grade students
40,5 %	47,8 %	59,5 %	52,2 %

Fortunately, more than half of both first and second grade students do not feel discouraged by grades while learning about British / American culture. But there are many students for whom grades an important disappointing role.

VIII. Do you get enough information about British and American culture on English lessons?

'yes' answers		'no' answers	
first grade students	second grade students	first grade students	second grade students
64,8 %	68,2 %	35,2 %	31,8 %

More than 60 per cent of the students declare that they get enough information on British / American culture.

IX. Would you like to attend additional classes which would give you more information on British and American culture?

'yes' answers		'no' answers	
first grade students	second grade students	first grade students	second grade students
36,8 %	34,8 %	63,1 %	65,2 %

Only one third of all the students questioned have replied that they would attend additional classes in British and American culture.

X. What would you like to hear on these classes?

Those who would like to be present at such lessons want to find out more about:

- the history of one of these countries
- learn the language itself
- everything connected about these countries
- latest technical news
- customs and traditions, also at specific situations and how to avoid any slip-ups
- the countries achievements on various fields

XI. Would you take part in quizzes between classes on British and American culture?

'yes' answers		'no' answers	
first grade students	second grade students	first grade students	second grade students
24,3 %	45,4 %	75,7 %	54,5 %

More than half of the students would not decide to join in such a quiz for these reasons:

- they are not interested in it
- they do not have time
- too many good students
- their knowledge in the subject is insufficient

Those who expressed their willingness to take part in quizzes say that

- they want to check their knowledge
- they think they could get a good high place
- they treat them as a game and they simple enjoy them
- it is an interesting idea

XII. What have you got interested in in the subject of British and American culture?

A few of the students answered to this question. If they did, their replies concerned terrorist attacks.

3. The analysis of the results.

The data collected in the project gives the picture of the ZST students in Ostrów Wlkp. in the field of British and American culture. It shows that there is quite many students who get interested in these cultures despite of the fact that generally they are not humanistic but technically oriented. Those who declare that they are not interested in learning more about British and American culture, and there are many of them, should be partly explained because of insufficient time and equipment to arouse their notice and some other reasons.

However, the area of the students interests is very limited. Their attention is directed towards American culture. In many cases it is caused by such factors as music and sport. Only a few of them are attracted by British culture. It seems that an American way of life has almost squeezed out other English speaking countries' customs. That means that if a teacher would like to raise greater awareness of these students and maybe others, he / she would have to put more his / her attention to topics and exercises connected with this country. On the other hand, I think that the other countries are less popular because they are not introduced to classes as often as they should be as well as their form is not attractive enough. That is why these issues should be brought in more often to familiarize

the students with. Still the areas of history and geography are the favourites. That is why they should be used to make the students acquainted with British and American culture, if that is so.

Secondly, I find out that the students are not very in fond of any reading tasks. I talked to some of the teachers of Polish and we agree that reading books and newspapers is disappearing in favour of playing computers and films. This fact can be also used in order to make them interested in British and American culture. For example, for those engrossed in history, I can recommend a book “British History Seen Through Art” by Gina D. B. Clemen and Laura Stagno in which tasks involve surfing through the net.

Moreover, the reason why so few students find British and American culture attention-grabbing is the fact that their command of English is poor. Truly, many of them do not have abilities to learn English language but it also accurate that they are too lazy. On one hand they should be stimulated by fairly easy, difficult and demanding exercises but on the other hand they need more attention and careful instruction since grades play an important role in their education. Likewise, the students should be often encouraged to present their points of view through projects in order to let them search for things that are important to know.

4. Theoretical and pedagogical interpretations of the research.

Firstly, I want to make point on what aspects of culture should be taught at a technical school such as mine. Definitely, I agree with Lessard-Clouston and others that the type of a student and an environment in which he lives as well as his level of motivation should be taken into account while introducing cultural topics. Some of the students may need only ideas how to behave in certain situations in a given country, how to avoid misunderstandings. Others will call for more detailed information of the English speaking country. That is why the process of assessment this kind of knowledge ought to be careful and sensible.

Furthermore, elements of culture should be introduced to classes even if the students are not able to appreciate them at present. Such lessons may make students more sensitive to other cultures, arouse interest and open to the world, especially when Poland enters the European Union.

SUMMARY

This project helped me to find out what ZST students of first and second grades think of culture activities. This experience was beneficial in that respect that I started working in that school last year and it is completely different from a secondary school, where I used to teach.

I got to know that the students of the technical school do not find literature as much fascinating as history or geography. But certainly there is point in familiarizing them in culture issues of Great Britain and America to prepare them for future life in united Europe.

**ANKIETA O ZAINTERESOWANIACH UCZNIÓW ZESPOŁU SZKÓŁ TECHNICZNYCH
W OSTROWIE WLKP KULTURĄ KRAJÓW ANGLOJĘZycznych**

Klasa: _____

Odpowiedz na pytania:

1. Kultura jakiego kraju interesuje Cię najbardziej?
 - a) Wielkiej Brytanii
 - b) Stanów Zjednoczonych
 - c) Australii i Nowej Zelandii
 - d) Kanady
 2. Gdyby język angielski nie był obowiązkowy, czy interesowałbyś się kulturą krajów anglojęzycznych?
 - a) Tak
 - b) Nie
 3. Jakie elementy kultury krajów anglojęzycznych interesują Cię najbardziej?
 - a) historia
 - b) geografia
 - c) literatura
 - d) historia języka angielskiego
 - e) inne / jakie? _____
 4. W jaki sposób informacje o kulturze krajów anglojęzycznych docierają do Ciebie?
 - a) w szkole
 - b) z telewizji i radia
 - c) z książek / jakich? _____
 - d) z filmów / jakich? _____
 - e) przez komputer / jak? (gry, filmy, itd.) _____
 - f) gazety / jakie? _____
 - g) inaczej / jak? _____
 5. Czy perspektywa wejścia Polski do Unii Europejskiej inspiruje Cię do szukania informacji o krajach anglojęzycznych?
 - a) Tak
 - b) Nie
 6. Jaki temat z kultury anglojęzycznej wybrał(a)byś gdybyś miał(a) przygotować projekt na lekcję?
 - a) historia
 - b) geografia
 - c) literatura
 - d) historia języka angielskiego
 - e) inne / jakie? _____
- Dlaczego? _____
7. Czy oceny z języka angielskiego wpływają na twoje zainteresowanie kulturą anglojęzyczną?
 - a) Tak
 - b) Nie
 8. Czy na lekcjach otrzymujesz wystarczającą ilość informacji o kulturze krajów anglojęzycznych?
 - a) Tak
 - b) Nie
 9. Czy chciałbyś uczęszczać na dodatkowe zajęcia (tzw. kółko języka angielskiego) pogłębiające Twoją znajomość o kulturze krajów anglojęzycznych?
 - a) Tak
 - b) Nie
 10. Co chciałbyś tam usłyszeć i dowiedzieć się o krajach anglojęzycznych?

 11. Czy wzięłbyś / wzięłabyś udział w (między)klasowych konkursach na temat wiedzy o kulturze krajów anglojęzycznych?
 - a) Tak
 - b) Nie
- Dlaczego? _____
12. Co ostatnio zainteresowało Cię w informacjach o kulturze krajów anglojęzycznych?

APPENDIX 2

THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON BRITISH AND AMERICAN CULTURE INTERESTS OF THE STUDENTS OF A TECHNICAL SCHOOL IN OSTRÓW WLKP.

1. The culture of which country are you interested in?
 - a) Great Britain
 - b) The United States of America
 - c) Australia and New Zealand
 - d) Canada
2. If English language were not compulsory, would you be interested in British and American culture?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
3. Which British and American culture elements are you most interested in?
 - a) history
 - b) geography
 - c) literature
 - d) the history of English language
 - e) others / what? _____
4. How does British and American culture get to you?
 - a) at school
 - b) from television and radio
 - c) from books / what? _____
 - d) from films / what? _____
 - e) from a computer / (how? films, games, etc.) _____
 - f) papers / what? _____
 - g) others _____
5. Does the perspective of Polish entry to Europe inspire you to look for information about British and American culture?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
6. Which topic out of British and American culture would you choose if you were to prepare a project for a lesson?
 - a) history
 - b) geography
 - c) literature
 - d) the history of English language
 - e) others / what? _____Why? _____
7. Do grades from English influence your British and American culture interest?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
8. Do you get enough information about British and American culture on English lessons?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
9. Would you like to attend additional classes which would give you more information on British and American culture?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
10. What would you like to hear on these classes?

11. Would you take part in quizzes between classes on British and American culture?
 - a) yes
 - b) no
12. What have you got interested in the subject of British and American culture recently?

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