

INTERCULTURAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL REFORM

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The article highlights the results of the achievements and shortcomings analysis of the secondary school reform in Ukraine, including the foreign languages teaching reform, started in 2016. The appropriate investigation methods are used. On the whole, the following techniques are applied: comparison and system analysis of methodological sources, generalisation and conceptualisation, synthesis generalisation of the positive experience of the foreign language training in secondary school, observation of the educational process and reflection, testing the school-leavers, data collection, monitoring of the Ukrainian secondary schools official sites. The article shows that in order to achieve the goals of education envisaged in the reform, it is necessary to shift from “teaching a foreign language” to “intercultural foreign language education”. Some ways of realisation of such education in the aspect of the above-mentioned reform are offered. It has been concluded that Ukraine has achieved a lot in teaching foreign languages during the independence years, but many of the key issues need solution, especially the development of the educational standards for teachers and students.

Keywords: aims of teaching; competence; educational standards; intercultural foreign language education; programmes; secondary school reform; Ukraine.

Introduction

In Ukraine during the years of independence, a lot of positive innovations have been realised in the field of education in general and teaching foreign languages (FL) in a secondary school in particular. Laws of Ukraine “On Education”, “About general secondary education”, “On Higher Education” have been adopted. Presidential Decrees on “Immediate Measures to Ensure the Functioning and the Development of Education in Ukraine”, “On urgent measures to ensure the priority development of education in Ukraine”, the “Concept of the State Language Policy in Ukraine”, the state educational standards “Primary General Education” and “Basic and Complete Secondary Education” have been introduced. According to the state educational standards, FL curricula for general education institutions have been developed, several series of teaching FL kits were published by such authors as Sklyarenko (1998), Karpiuk (2012), Nesvit (2012), Parshikova (2012), Klymenko (2012), Redko (2012) and others. Attempts to improve the FL teachers’ qualification have been taken; summer language camps for students have been organised; years of a certain FL were launched. An external independent evaluation of the students’ learning outcomes has been implemented. Competitions for the best FL teacher became annual, for example, the contest “Teacher of the Year – 2017” was announced. In 2015, the national language learning and promotion initiative “Go Global” was launched.

“National Strategy for the Development of Education in Ukraine for the period from 2012 to 2021” has been approved, which envisages the reorientation of the education priorities from the state to the individual, the gradual democratisation and humanisation of the educational process, the pedagogical philosophy as a whole, that is, on European humanistic values and dimensions (Ukaz Prezydenta Ukrainy, 2013). Despite the achievements mentioned above, the quality of secondary schools education in general and FL education, in particular, remains unsatisfactory. This has led to the need for a new secondary education reform.

The aim of this paper is to analyse and characterise the ways of improving the quality of the FL education in the context of the secondary school reform in Ukraine, launched in 2016.

Methods

The aim of this article was obtained through these scientific methods (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2011): comparison and system analysis of methodological sources, generalisation and conceptualisation, generalisation of positive experience of the FL training in secondary school, observation of the educational process and reflection, testing the school-leavers, data collection, monitoring of the Ukrainian secondary schools official sites.

Results and discussion

In 2016 the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine published “The new Ukrainian School. Conceptual principles of secondary school reform” (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016). This document (further – the Concept) explains the ideology of changes that need to be implemented in school education. The main argument for change, according to the document, is: “the Ukrainian school does not prepare a person for the successful realisation of his/her personal potential in real life; a radical reform is

required” (p. 4). We guess that this fully applies to FL education. Extrapolating the general shortcomings of secondary education mentioned in the concept, *we formulate the key problems of training FL*: the way of teaching foreign languages in contemporary Ukrainian schools does not motivate children to learn a FL. National textbooks on FL leave much to be desired. FL teachers use mostly outdated teaching methods. A low social status and low salaries demoralise FL teachers. They lack real motivation for personal and professional growth. The digital distance between FL teachers and pupils is growing. Many FL teachers are just not able yet to research problems in teaching a FL using modern methods, to work with large data arrays, to make and present conclusions, to collaborate online on educational, social and academic international projects, and so on. The main conclusion: a reform in secondary school FL teaching is needed. Scientific publications on the FL education issue in the aspect of the secondary school reform in Ukraine, as far as we know, are not yet available.

As for the issue of the FL intercultural education, the projects implemented by the Council of Europe and the European Centre for Modern Languages take on a special place among scientific publications in this area. Let us recall the most relevant for our study problems investigated in the last decade:

- (1) linguistic diversity & plurilingual education (Beacco & Byram, 2007);
- (2) majority languages in multilingual settings (Boeckmann, Aalto, Abel & Lamb, 2011);
- (3) plurilingualism and pluriculturalism in content-based teaching (Bernaus, Furlong, Jonckheere & Kervran, 2011);
- (4) regional/minority languages in bi-/plurilingual education (Cortie et al., 2011);
- (5) framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (Candelier et al., 2012);
- (6) language of schooling in the context of diversity (Aalt et al, 2015);
- (7) pluriliteracies approach to teaching for learning (Meyer, Coyle & Halbach, 2015);
- (8) plurilingual whole school curricula (Hufeisen et al, 2015);
- (9) plurilingual and intercultural learning through mobility (Egli et al., 2015);
- (10) competences for democratic culture (Barrett et al., 2016).

Analysis of the aforementioned publications reveals that the main purpose of training a FL at the present stage is the development of the intercultural (communicative/FL) competence. This gives grounds to state that the problem of FL training in secondary schools in Ukraine in terms of the new education reform remains understudied and needs further research.

According to the Concept, the new curricula and programmes in FL for primary, lower secondary and higher secondary school have been developed. Before analysing the programmes, let us recall the key terms. “Competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context” (Barrett et al., 2016, p. 24). And intercultural (communicative/FL) competence “is considered as the ability to use a plural repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources to meet communication needs or interact with other people, and enrich that repertoire while doing so” (Beacco et al., 2015, p. 10).

According to the updated programmes for grades 1– 4, the main purpose of studying a FL in primary school is to develop pupils’ communicative competence, which is provided by linguistic, speech and socio-cultural experience, consistent with the age-old possibilities of junior pupils (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2017 a, p. 1). At the end of the 9th grade, the main purpose of learning a FL is to develop pupils’ communicative competence, the basis for which include communicative skills, formed on the grounds of language knowledge and skills. The development of communicative competence depends on sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge, skills and abilities that ensure the entry of the individual into another society and contribute to his/her socialisation in a new society (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2017 b, p.1). The purpose of FL training in secondary profile school is to develop students’ FL communicative competence – the ability to communicate in oral and written forms within the spheres and themes defined by the programme for each profile (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2017c, p. 1).

From our point of view, these goals are not fully correlated with the Council of Europe recommendations and the general concept of the educational reform. In our opinion, according to the philosophy of the new school reform, stated in the Concept, the aim “learning a FL” should be replaced with the aim “intercultural FL education” (IFLE), and the aim of teaching should be the development of “intercultural foreign language competence”. In addition, the practical objectives of teaching FL in different types of schools may vary. For example, in primary school it should be “development of the foreign language communicative competence”, and in higher secondary one – “development of the intercultural foreign language competence”. In our view, the implementation of the IFLE will contribute to the abilities of the school graduates stated in the Concept (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016, p. 6):

- a fully developed all-round personality, capable of critical thinking;
- patriots taking an active role, acting according to ethical principles and capable of making responsible decisions, respecting the dignity and the rights of people;
- innovators, able to change the world around them, develop economy according to the principles of sustainable development, who are competitive in the labour market and enjoy lifelong learning.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the objectives of the IFLE implementation are to be correlated with the general goals of secondary education. Analysis of the new FL programmes (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) allows us to state that at present no complete correlation of goals is observed.

In the Concept nine key elements of the new school formula are also presented (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016, p.11-12). Let us analyse them from the perspective of the IFLE implementation:

1. *New educational content-based on enabling the competencies necessary for successful self-fulfilment in society.* Regarding the implementation of the IFLE, we should talk about the development of the intercultural foreign language competence.

2. *Motivated teaching staff who enjoy freedom of creativity and professional development.* As for FL teachers, they must be motivated first and foremost, due to labour market demand for specialists with intercultural foreign language competence. A creative teacher can only be prepared by a modern university and a highly skilled professor in FL teaching methods. Currently, the training of FL teachers causes significant complaints. We consider that the developed draft standard of training specialists in subject specialisation “014.02 Secondary education (language and literature with the language indication)” does not correspond to the above-mentioned Concept of school reform and international requirements (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2017 d). Thus, the Standard states that the graduate “has techniques of bilingual and integrated language and professional education, didactics of multilingualism and the methodology of parallel studying the related languages, the methods of work in a heterogeneous (mixed) educational environment” (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2017 d, p. 9). Among the 11 identified skills included in the normative content of training, possession of the methodology of developing the intercultural foreign language competence is not mentioned at all. Regarding teacher qualification improvement, it should become regular and multi-vector (participation in methodological international seminars, webinars, international methodological conferences, etc. and not only at teacher’s expense. Of particular importance is internship abroad. Volunteers who come to schools in Ukraine will not fix the matter.

3. *A cross-cutting educational process that informs values.* The educational component of the IFLE must be implemented at all stages of the secondary school education and based on the national values and values of the country which language and culture are studied and the values of the mother tongue and culture if they are different from the national. Decentralisation and effective administration will bring real autonomy to schools. In the aspect of the intercultural foreign language competence implementation, autonomy is particularly important in the choice of teaching technology; textbook, handbook or tools for language teachers and teacher trainers; but not in terms of educational standards, curricula, training content, etc. Due to the lack of the state requirements for professional methodological training of FL teachers, the amount of this training in the majority of universities has been minimised, which leads to a decrease in the quality of specialist preparation.

4. *Teaching based on the partnership between the pupil, the teacher and parents.* We consider this demand to be important in organising the educational process, given that the overwhelming majority of parents have an interest in mastering the intercultural foreign language competence by their children and raise high demands on the teacher, but they do not master a FL and cannot help the student.

5. *A focus on pupil’s needs in the educational process, i.e. child-centred education.* In the aspect of the intercultural foreign language competence development, the focus should be on the level of the psychological components of this competence development (ability, readiness and willingness to participate in intercultural communication within the most common areas and topics of communication and self-development in the further mastery of foreign-language communicative activities in accordance with their own challenges and needs).

6. *A new school structure that allows mastering the new content and acquiring life competencies.* The IFLE should be implemented at all stages of secondary school in volumes that are in line with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). One lesson per week in the first class, as provided by the current secondary school curriculum, is a waste of time.

7. *Fair allocation of public funds that ensures equal access to quality education for all children.* A high-quality IFLE may require more finances than other types of training. Language instruction abroad, students' rest in language camps, etc. are desirable.

8. *A contemporary educational environment that will provide necessary conditions, means, and technology for education of pupils, teachers, and parents, not only in the premises of the educational establishment.* The current social situation in Ukraine makes it possible to create such a foreign-language educational environment (educational FL Internet sites, TV FL programmes, discussion FL clubs, international projects, resource centres of foreign publishing houses, etc.).

9. *The use of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in the educational process and management of educational institutions and educational system should become a tool to ensure the success of the New Ukrainian School.* Applying ICT in IFLE should be widely used in classroom and homework for performing various types of FL activities.

The Concept also pays great attention to the development in students the key competencies for lifelong learning. Recall that key competencies are those that everyone needs for personal fulfilment, development, an active role in the community, social involvement, and employment, and that can secure personal attainment and self-actualisation throughout life (Recommendations of the European Parliament, 2006).

In our opinion, the primary focus in the process of the intercultural foreign language competence development should be on the development and improvement of such key competences (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016, p.10): communication in the national language (and mother tongue, if different); communication in FL; ICT and digital competencies; lifelong learning skills; sense of entrepreneurship; cultural awareness; environmental awareness and healthy lifestyles; social and civic competencies. Moreover, we consider it rational to differentiate the named competencies into obligatory and facultative at different stages of secondary education.

Research of the new FL programmes for primary, lower secondary and higher secondary school allows us to state that the key competencies have remained to some extent beyond the attention of their compilers (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrayiny, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). These competencies should be roughly distributed to specific classes and described in more detail in the programmes.

Finally, in order to implement the IFLE into secondary school, the teacher must be purposefully prepared. Currently, universities do not provide an appropriate training: there are no educational standards and national programmes on the methodology for the IFLE implementation. We believe that three standards are needed: teacher training for primary school, teacher training for lower secondary school and teacher training for higher secondary school. We support the idea that the educational standards “should be aimed less at measuring and ratifying progress than at defining competences which universities promise to teach all students, in accordance with their right to a good education (basic standards). Standards can also be based on the average results which most students can achieve (normal standards)” (Beacco et al., 2015, p. 30). The main recommendations of the Council of Europe on this issue should be taken into account in the process of preparing new standards and training programmes for the future FL teacher.

Conclusions

During the years of independence in Ukraine, many promising initiatives have been taken in the field of education in general and in teaching FL in particular. But not high enough students' learning outcomes led to the need of introducing a new secondary education reform. In 2016, a new reform aimed at training a fully developed all-round personality was launched. The main provisions of this reform are set out in the document of The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “The Conceptual Principles for the Secondary School Reform”. These principles became the basis for the development of the new Law of Ukraine “On Education” (Supreme Council of Ukraine, 2017). According to the Concept, the FL programmes have been updated, the analysis of which has shown that they are not fully consistent with both the basic idea of the Concept and the recommendations of the Council of Europe on language education. New educational standards and IFLE programmes are needed. In addition, new standards and programmes for teacher training for primary, lower secondary and higher secondary schools are desirable.

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