

V International Forum on Teacher Education

System of Foreign Language Education in the USA and Russia: Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The authors consider key concepts in the system of language education in both Russia and the USA and analyze the language education programmes for secondary school students. In our research, we identify the factors that caused the reforms in the system of school education in the United States. These factors include the process of globalization associated with the change to the information society; the demography of the country; social demand; as well as variety of university associations, which set standards for professional teachers training programmes in higher educational institutions. These factors become popular in other countries as well as in Russia. The research reveals the main issues of effective implementation of bilingual and multilingual programmes in US schools from different perspectives. At a personal level, we do agree with the point of view of prominent American educators, that the activity, and, as a result, academic success vary from student to student. In a class, groups of students can differ significantly from each other, despite the existence of a single multilingual programme. In a school, the effectiveness of some schools in training multilingual and multicultural students with almost the same cultural background in identical learning environment is worth studying. Finally, in a broader sense, the effectiveness of the implementation of the bilingual and multilingual program is measured at the level of the municipal administrative body of education. Researchers are also interested in the content of the language studied. It is obvious that the basis of the content of education in the multilingual class is the study of language and culture. The main problem is the interaction of these two basic concepts in education.

Keywords: English as foreign language, English as second language, multilingual education, multicultural education, the USA.

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Published by Kazan Federal University and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2019 (V International Forum on Teacher Education)

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Introduction

1.1. Issues

The beginning of the XXI century is marked by the crisis in learning a foreign language. According to Willey (2007) the variety of foreign language speakers in the USA has increased significantly over the past decade. New standards in teaching a foreign language contributed to a change of the traditional monolingual approaches. To date, the system of education in the USA is based on personalized curriculum, which takes into account needs and abilities of every student. The aim of the approach is to develop a competitive person ready to participate in social, economic and political life of the country.

The reasons for modernization of the system of education in the USA can concern different areas in the development of the country. The first factor that can cause changes is globalization or technological progress. The change to the informative society sets standards for professional teachers training programmes in higher educational institutions.

The demography of the country has had a tremendous impact on training teachers. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are becoming major problems in foreign language studying. The US Department of Education is forced to amend Elementary and Secondary Education Act identifying new ways for the development of education:

- expanding access to education for migrants, children with disabilities, national minorities, rural students;
- improving school programmes for students whose native language is other than English (Banks, 1995).

The third factor is a great amount of university associations taking part in the formation of professional standards of specialists' training in higher education establishments of the country. Besides that, they deal with particular academic subjects, the development of students and the revealing of their personal peculiarities. These associations take part in the analysis and development of qualifications and competences for teachers of different subjects depending on the students' age.

For example, The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) deals with foreign languages teachers of all level of proficiency. This association helps teachers to improve their knowledge by promoting scientific works that impacts the development of language teaching and learning, ensure teachers that their profession reflects racial, language and ethnic diversity of the society.

As for the TESOL International association, which is focused only on the teachers of English as the second language, it provides members with teaching material, and gives the opportunity to exchange the experience with other members. Every teacher is to attend professional development courses to advance their knowledge.

A distinctive characteristic feature of the American system of higher education that influences teachers' training is the conception of an entrepreneurial university based on the student's choice of the educational programme. According to Ropke (1998), a university has to demonstrate entrepreneurial motives of the structure, the staff and students have to advocate entrepreneurial issues, cooperation between the university and environment must lead to a structural conjugacy of the university and region.

It contributes to the attraction of more literate and competent students.

It should be said that similar factors are common for other countries, for Russia in particular. It draws the attention of scientists to the case study of the reforms in education, implementing new standards in practice, training teachers, analyzing curriculum in the USA. The experience of bilingual education in the United States is valuable and can be used in Russia to teach students English as a foreign language.

On the way to the education modernization one may face some difficulties. These difficulties were discussed by Chubb and Moe (1990) in one of their articles. They came to the conclusion that it would be difficult to change the existing “unhealthy system”, because the US secondary education system had never been reformed. In their opinion, the reorganization of the means of public control such as the legislative authority, an electoral cabinet and the system of teachers’ employment are irrelevant to the efficient education. Another researcher, Binder, considered that easing some regulations and requirements would not lead to fundamental changes because of a close relation of different branches of educative policy such as financing, staff certification, teachers’ continuing professional development and etc. It is impossible to reorganize one sphere without the reorganization of others. In 2001 in order to support foreign language learning the US government adopted a legislative act referred to as No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind Act was aimed to raise the level of academic progress among children belonging to ethnic minorities. One of the measures to improve education was to conduct at state schools annual examinations equal for all students and the compulsory assessment for teachers as well.

No Child Left Behind Act claimed annual testing of LEP students on the level of English proficiency. Such testing designed the study of common English including all the peculiarities of its units. For instance, in the State of New York in order to check the level of English proficiency schools tested students by means of the following tests: Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R) and English as a Second Language Test – for advanced and intermediate students. Annual testing required the rise of learning results.

However, NCLB Act didn’t answer to all expectations of the government. So, in 2015 The Every Student Succeeds Act was signed, replacing the previous one. It is considered to be more flexible to students’ assessment and gives more freedom to schools and states to choose educational policy of their own. The main gap in NCLB Act (as the lawmakers consider) was too much testing during the school time. The ESS Act doesn’t exclude assessment at all, but breaks annual testing into three or four smaller tests.

The policy of education in the Republic of Tatarstan is defined by the intensification of global challenges.

New strategic orientations involve changes in the requirements for the level of proficiency in a foreign language, the improvement of its quality, identification of new approaches to the content and the organization of the material, the use of accurate and diverse forms and types of assessment.

To achieve the goals some steps should be taken. They are the following:

- updating the content and improving the quality of foreign language education in schools of the Republic of Tatarstan by expanding multilingual environment and using innovative programmes in foreign languages;
- implementation of an integrative model of language education on the basis of multilingual education;
- formation of integrative interdisciplinary modules on a foreign language and humanitarian subjects will significantly enhance the socio-cultural orientation of the school foreign language education;
- development of the innovative aspect of teaching a foreign language.

1.2. Characteristics of the multilingual class (USA)

A multilingual class in the USA is characterized by polyethnicity or the balance between the use of the native language and English. According to the American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages,

90 % of the language spoken in class is a foreign language or L2 (ACTFL , 2010). The study conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics shows that 79% of high school teachers and 81% of middle school teachers use a foreign language (English) more than half a lesson, and only 58 % of primary school teachers use a foreign language to explain grammar rules and practice speaking in class (Rhodes, 2011). Levine (2011) made a research. 600 college students and 163 teacher participated in it. The data was compared with those already known. He concluded that the ratio of using a foreign language and a native language depends on a teacher. Teachers in a multilingual class usually speak more than students do. They may change the language to the native one, if it is needed, using it to explain grammar.

According to The Modern Language Association data the number of US college and university students studying foreign languages has never been greater than now.

Nowadays the most wide spread language among American students is Spanish followed by French, German, Japanese, Chinese and Italian. Such rare or exotic (if the expression can be tolerated) languages as the American Sign Language, Arabic and biblical Hebrew are becoming more and more popular than years ago.

However, in spite of a foreign language study propaganda, this aspect of teaching and learning activities doesn't have enough nation-wide development in the US yet. Only seven of fifty states included foreign languages in the compulsory curriculum for students aged 6 to 12.

The analysis of the effectiveness of implementation of bilingual education programmes can be considered both from the perspective of every level singled out above and as an interaction of all the levels as well. For example, at a personal level, it is necessary to study the needs and abilities of every student with regard to the successful implementation of bilingual and multilingual programme. One of the key questions that bothers most teachers throughout the country is: "How do children overcome difficulties in studying and learning languages?" The main purpose of every teacher in class is to identify successful teaching methods and create proper conditions for effective implementation of a programme. The issue of training the teaching staff, the quality of selected educational programmes, the number of students and the language component is the responsibility of a school.

The external factors, which can influence on the implementation of the educational policy, are social, economic, political and cultural contexts. The economy of the area, for instance, plays an important role in it, since schools are sponsored by the local taxes payed by citizens. It is clear that the efficiency of the education policy will be higher in the wealthiest districts. This assumption may be proved by the highest scores on the final attainment tests, a variety of disciplines included in the curriculum, high class attendance, good intraschool relations, adequate self-esteem of students, tolerance in teacher-student and student-student interaction, high level of labour and moral education of students (Bennet, 2010).

Krashen (2003) proves that bilingual education cannot lead to poor student performance, on the contrary, it can help to bridge gaps in knowledge. Krashen (2003) concluded that among all migrant students, Hispanics perform lower than others do. As a percentage of the failure rate, 30% of Hispanic students underachieve, compared to 8.6% of non-Hispanics and 12.1% of Afro-Americans. The researcher notes that those who has attended a bilingual education programme fail less, since the programme imposes strict requirements on students, which lead to higher standards of proficiency in English for academic purpose.

Only the interaction of all the above-mentioned aspects can lead to the best results of acquisition of the programme.

Problem Statement

The study is relevant due to fundamental changes in education caused not only by economic and social development of some countries, but also by the processes of internationalization and globalization of education. The USA is a multiethnic and multicultural country, active reformer of the system of education, which has both positive and negative outcomes. Therefore, the attention of scientists from all over the world is drawn to the study of the experience of the country in this area.

Teaching foreign languages in the Russian Federation is approached from a new perspective. This aspect is reviewed as the basis for effective implementation of the system of education. Over the last decades the system of teaching foreign languages has overcome great challenges. Results of the reforms in the Republic of Tatarstan are analyzed by researchers and practitioners.

To date, in the Republic of Tatarstan, the issue of language preservation is strongly emphasized. In this regard, the government implements native language preservation programmes all around the country.

The importance of learning foreign languages in the Republic of Tatarstan is determined by external factors. The Republic is expanding its international links and closely collaborates with foreign countries. It entails the need to learn foreign languages. At the same time, the Republic of Tatarstan is characterized by cultural diversity and historical heritage.

The influence of the process of globalization in the republic affects not only the economic field, but also the cultural and linguistic environment of the residents of the Republic of Tatarstan. Foreign culture and language are inevitable part of life integrated by the tendency to westernization, which influences many aspects, especially education.

The experience of foreign countries in the modernization of education in accordance with new challenges plays crucial role in the development of the national policy on education. A key task for the republic today is to build a model of a continuous foreign language education. This aspect requires new approaches and techniques.

Research Questions

Our study considers following research questions:

- What steps should be taken in education policy to provide better achievement results?
- What are principle points of successful teaching English as a foreign language?
- Is there a relationship between the system of foreign language education in Russia and the USA?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study is to analyze and identify the effectiveness of multilingual school education in the USA and the Russian Federation (the Republic of Tatarstan, in particular).

Basic theoretical principals of our study were established with the help of the analysis of the works by Bennett (2010), Kearney (2016), Kramsch (2014), Parmon (2010), Seredina, Pomortseva, & Morozova (2016) and others, which are devoted to the study of effective English as a foreign language teaching methods.

Research Methods

To provide well-grounded conclusions on the status of the problem of foreign language learning in the USA and Russia, the following theoretical and practical methods were applied to achieve the solution of the research problem:

- a descriptive method for observation and classification of the investigated material;
- a system oriented analysis of literature as well as government and non-government official papers, codes, plans and reports on the problem.

Findings

The implementation of multilingual education in the Republic of Tatarstan is characterized by great changes caused by the challenges of integration to the global community. In our research we analyzed the steps, which are taken by the local authorities and institutions to provide effective implementation of multilingual programmes. They are:

- Multilingual education can be effective due to the introduction of the second foreign language;
- The number of schools with the German and French languages learning can expand thanks to English as Second Foreign Language Learning;
- The government should consider learning school subjects on the multilingual basis in some innovative schools.
- Popularization of educational projects aimed at increasing the motivation of young people to learn foreign languages.
- In this regard, High School of Foreign Languages and Translation of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University annually holds Total dictation in English. The project attracts potential incoming students. In 2017 12 500 students took part in it. In 2018 the number participants enlarged to 28 000 from 73 regions of Russia.
- Ensuring continuous monitoring of the level of proficiency of secondary school students in a foreign language.
- Increase in research among students. Foundation of a scientific club in schools for students. Methodological and scientific help for schoolteachers on the bases of the university.
- In the High School of Foreign Languages and Translation (KFU) the implementation of this aspect is held from 2000. The school provides the organization of work at conferences, school Olympiads, forums, etc.
- Improving the programme of work with gifted students. Development of new integrated courses that expand the school curriculum. The Republican Olympiad Center of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tatarstan provides great assistance in this work.

Today the policy of education is focused on the implementation of the second foreign language learning in school.

The second foreign language in our schools is not a new phenomenon. Within the framework of general education, it is studied by more than one hundred schoolchildren of the Republic. The study of the second foreign language in primary school is most often carried out by educational institutions as additional education, both paid and free (Baker, 2008).

We became interested in the question and conducted a survey among secondary school students. Most of the respondents have been studying a foreign language from the 1st – 4th grade. 94% of them

studied English as foreign language. Most of them face the barrier in holding communication. The respondents study the language via drilling the vocabulary, reading texts and making dialogues. 30% of the participants recon they get enough knowledge at school to use it in their future profession. Almost all of them would like to study the second foreign language.

The first research on the effectiveness of the bilingual educational programmes dates back to the late 1970s. Zappert and Cruz (1977), Troike (1978) and Dulay and Burt (1974) concluded that migrant children and parents in the United States prefer bilingual education programmes to monolingual ones. Dutcher (1998), August & Hakuta (1997) also analyzed the problems of bilingual education.

However, the problem of the effectiveness of bilingual education programmes remains disputable throughout the decades. Division of politicians into two opposing groups still exists. Some politicians argue that bilingual education does not promote integration into the bilingual environment, causing poor performance of English Language Learners. It is believed that this educational policy leads to a low level of proficiency in English and cause social and economic inequality of society according to the language. In this regard, in the early 1980s the bilingual education policy in the United States has been reformed.

Research by Baker (2008) was focused around two questions: 1) Does Transitional Bilingual Education lead to high English language proficiency level? 2) Does Transitional Bilingual Education lead to high performance in disciplines other than English? Their approach to bilingual education was aimed at identifying academic performance level. Personality traits that could be formed as a result of education like self-esteem, positive attitude to work, tolerance for minority languages, values, morality, socialization were not considered. A professor of State University of London Willig (1985) and the members of American Psychological Association criticized the results of their work. They concluded that the research had a narrow range scales. The researchers were interested in Transitional Bilingual Education programme, which caused assimilation and integration. The problem of individualization of the programme was omitted.

An alternative and sound way to analyze the research data is a meta-analysis (Rolstad). This method calculates the number of advantages and disadvantages of the study.

Willig (1985) is a founder of a statistical approach of meta-analysis in bilingual education. It is based on provisions developed by Baker (2008), which concern the assessment of bilingual education programmes in the United States. Because of the meta-analysis, Willig (1985) came to conclusion that “bilingual education programme leads to better performance” (Baker, 2008). Students achieved good results in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and mathematics. Testing was conducted in English – a non-native language for students. The disadvantage of this approach is that the data obtained was presented as general conclusions.

Another important research in the history of the US multilingual education, that was being held over a period of 8 years, is the Lamus (2008) research. There were three different multilingual programmes under study: Language immersion, Early Exit Bilingual Education (using mother tongue in the basic course) and Late Exit Bilingual Education (10% of English vocabulary is actively used in the nursery school and further education is held in the English class).

During the period of the investigation the academic progress of more than 2300 Spanish-speaking preschoolers and school students were under the analysis in New York, New Jersey, Florida and Texas.

Investigation results differed from each other depending on the program of education. There were no significant differences up to the third grade. To the sixth grade those students who were taught according to the Late Exit Bilingual Education Programme showed better results in Mathematics, English, and Reading in English than the participants of other programmes. Lamus (2008) concluded that

elementary education given in mother tongue didn't prevent students from the English language learning, on the contrary, it helped them be up with their agemates in English, Mathematics and Reading.

Portes and Rumbaut (2014), the researches in the sphere of Social and Education Sciences, argue that migrant students who keep the knowledge of two languages and stay in touch with native culture are academically more successful and socially adapted than their agemates who move towards only the English language learning.

Such scientists as Swain & Lapkin (1982) as well as California State Department of Education studied and analyzed the Immersion Bilingual Education Programme. The results of their investigations are still relevant. They are reflected in the work of Johnson & Swain (1997).

The analysis proved that the Immersion Bilingual Education Programme students managed to raise their competence in both languages. However, being bilingual does not necessarily mean only functional usage of two languages. The negative aspect of this program is that lots of students speak English only at school and do not do it at home. They are quite competent in English but do not try to speak English in society. We explain that fact by the absence of spontaneity and natural communication in the second language as well as the lack of cultural opportunities of active and meaningful usage of the second language. Theoretically, the Immersion Bilingual Education Programme is aimed not only to educate bilinguals but to enlarge the cultural horizons of students and to introduce them to the second language culture and values.

Another programme controlled by the government by means of local educational institutions or centres providing educational services is The Migrant Education Programme that includes approximately 45000 migrant students among a number of students attending public schools that amounts to one million people. The Migrant Education Programme aims to help overcome difficulties dealing with move house, cultural or language barrier, social isolation and others. This work let them succeed in studies and even find a job in the future.

Educational grants upon this programme are given not to every migrant student but to those defined as "a migratory child" according to the academic programme regulations.

Multilingual academic programmes let students study in both languages: English and their mother tongue to the same extent. English as a Second Language programme implies mostly studying in English till the moment their knowledge advances considerably. In order to participate in academic activities with the whole class students take a preparatory training course (a part-time academic day). English Language Immersion Programmes are frequently used, but as a rule stay useless for the English language learners. These language immersion programmes imply classroom activities for non-English speakers only in English. They are widely-spread in such states as Massachusetts, California and Arizona.

One of the most debatable issues in studying foreign languages is interaction between culture and language. In some educational institutions of the USA language studying is considered as drilling grammar rules, memorizing topics and active vocabulary. This way of studying is not distinguished as the efficient one due to the barrier to communication. A student who finds himself/herself in an unfamiliar environment can hardly use the vocabulary drilled in class because of the anxiety he/she feels in communication with strangers. The other approach to multilingual education is an information exchange. It is based on the idea of bridging languages and cultures. The approach is conceptualized as the most productive way of studying languages. A student can understand the use of language in different contexts. It can be of two types: genre-based and literacy-based (Allen & Peasani, 2010).

Conclusion

Having analyzed the American experience in the formation of teaching we can emphasize several principles of a successful teaching based on culture:

□ A successful result expectation principle. Students must be able to understand and foresee the expected result. A teacher in his/her turn motivates students to study, focusing the attention on the important role of education in the multicultural and multipolar world.

□ A cultural competence perfection principle. If the education process is organized correctly, students will continue to develop their competences basing on the given knowledge in the sphere of cultural interrelation. Many migrant students associate school with the place where they have to restrain themselves because in lots of American schools the attitude towards the representative of ethnic minorities is apprehensive. According to Sabirova (2015) a teacher must be able to use the peculiarities of a child's native culture as a teaching tool. Thus, an academic curriculum is formed in accordance with students' knowledge and cultural experience.

The experience of multilingual education in the USA is valuable for our country. It can be used in Russia to teach students English as a foreign language.

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