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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IMMERSION EDUCATION IN FINLAND

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The Experience of the Implementation of Immersion Education in Finland

The use of immersion education in Finland is under consideration in the article and peculiar features of immersion education are highlighted. Immersion in accordance with the Canadian model was introduced in Finland as a result of Christer and Ulla Lauren of The University of Vaasa coming into contact with the programme in Canada at the end of the 1970s. After the initiative in starting immersion in Finland had been taken by a group of politically active women, immersion has been initiated in several different places in Finland and often on the initiative of parents.

Immersion in Finland is intended for children from the majority group, but there is also immersion in international languages for various minority groups. Early total immersion is the most usual programme in Finland, but in southern Finland there is also early partial immersion. Immersion is usually begun at the age of 3-6 in Finland and continues from day nursery/preschool to grade 9 of the comprehensive school. Adaptations of immersion occur in several different places in Finland and may involve pupils/students of various ages, even adults, for instance at the University of Vaasa.

Research in immersion has been practically focused on at the University of Vaasa, but researchers at other institutes of higher education are also engaged in projects related to immersion and multilingualism.

In the autumn of 2009 there were 958 immersion children in day nurseries/preschools, 2184 immersion pupils in grades 1 – 6 of the comprehensive school and 838 immersion pupils in grades 7 – 9 of the comprehensive school.

Key words: immersion education, bilingualism, total immersion education.

One way of forming a sound knowledge of a foreign language is immersion education that has established its best, first in Canada and then in other countries. The development of immersion programs has led to many approaches to work in schools, the emergence of various terms as a result of a somewhat chaotic immersion education, especially at the initial stage.

The problems of immersion education in Canada engaged Kunnins Jim, lecturer in the University of Toronto, André Obadia (Teacher of Pedagogics at Simon Fraser University, the first president of the Canadian Association of Teachers who advocate immersion studying), Merrill Swain (University of Toronto teacher), Sharon Lepkin (Professor, University of Toronto).

Individual displays of students engaged in immersion programs are studied by Hefni Karin (Teacher at Forest Hlen International School, Indianapolis, USA), Fred Genis (Lecturer at Department of Psychology, University of Mc Gill in Montreal, Quebec (also explores the problems of writing and reading skills in immersion programs), Hasal Sonia (lecturer university Pablo de Olavide, Seviliya, Spain).

Problems of immersion education in the United States were studied by Mike Anderson (University of Minnesota, professor), Nancy Rhodes (Center for Foreign Languages, Washington), Esther de Jong (University of Florida, is especially interested in bilingualism, Donna Christian, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington), Tara Forchen (immersion programs coordinator at the University of Minnesota, USA).

In European countries, the problem of immersion education were explored by Hugo Betens Bedsmor (Distinguished Professor at the Vriyye University, Brussels, Belgium), who studied European models for bilingual education. Muiris Laoire (Institute of Technology, Tralee Ireland), who specializes in the problem of multilingualism, Richard Johnstone (University of Stirling, Scottish Centre for Information and Language). Jason Senoz, Research Methods Department at Education institute, Bilbao, Spain), Maria Klah (Lecturer at University of Liverpool, UK), Ken Williams (School of Education at the University of Wales). Scientific-practical implications of this research problem is a significant theoretical basis for further development of the organization.

The aim of the the article is to analyze the process of the development and immersion education as an educational phenomenon in Finland, singling out specific instructional techniques successfully mastering the technique of reading in a foreign language.

To date, immersion education as an educational phenomenon is widely represented in most countries. There are special research centers at schools that are engaged exclusively in research of immersion education and suggest ways of improvement. In our country, this pedagogical phenomenon starts being intensively investigated within educational theory and history of Pedagogics. It is therefore important to analyze the origin and formation of immersion education in different countries, because each of them gained a kind of experience that can be successfully used by the educational institutions of different levels of accreditation.

General theoretical problems of immersion education are studied David Singleton (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland), Shamot Anna (Georgetown University, USA), Lambert Wallace (Department of Psychology, McGill University (one of the first researchers of immersion in Canada), Russell Campbell (Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Los Angeles, studied in particular a two-way immersion), Pyet Van de Kren (teacher of Dutch linguistics University Vrije, Brussels, Belgium), Vode Henning (Christian University of Cologne, Germany) particularly explores early immersion, Kevin Clark (Institute for Equal Opportunity, Washington, USA), Eugene Mc Kendri (Queens University, Belfast, Northern Ireland) examines multilingualism in Europe. Diane Tedik (Center for Advanced Studies on Language Mastering at the University of Minnesota).

Practical tests were performed by Wayne Thomas (George Mason University, Virginia, USA). Mary Allen (University of Michigan, USA), José Makropulos (University of Toronto, Canada), Douglas Wilms (Research Institute of the University of Social Policy, New Brunswick, Canada).

On the territory of national science interesting scientific exploration within this problem has been made by O. Pershukova, who analyzed comprehensive subjects using a foreign language as a medium of teaching in Europe.

The origin and development of immersion education in different countries are different depending on many factors, including historical, social, economic, geographical and mental. The combination of these factors creates a unique environment for the development of immersion education in a country. Finland is a

country where immersion education has become very popular and is reflected in the national education system.

Officially, in Finland there are two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Historically, for five centuries until 1809 Finland had been a part of the Swedish Empire. The result of these historical events is that today only 5.4% of the inhabitants of Finland considers Swedish their mother tongue [8].

Therefore, in general, Finland can be considered monolingual country. Number of Swedish-speaking population for many years has almost remained unchanged. Unlike Ukraine, in Finland, two language groups stood aside from each other and almost did not mix, but since the 70-ies Swedish-speaking population has almost completely dissolved and became bilingual. So, today almost half of Swedish-speaking citizens marry Finnish-speaking citizens. Thus there appeared preconditions for the formation of bilingual families in a natural way. But schools are monolingual in Finland. This objective fact and understanding the need of many parents in their children's bilingualism were prerequisites for the formation of immersion education in the country in the late 80's and early 90's of the 20th century [2].

The first experience of immersion training in Finland was in Vaasa, where one in four considers Swedish their mother tongue [6]. Initiators of implementation of immersion programs in Vaasa were Krista and Lauren Ula, local university professors who began to study the Canadian experience of immersion education in the late 70s of last century. Later, the initiative group of local women raised the issue of opening immersion school in the local government level [7]. This school has been designed to enable students learn academic subjects not in their native language and, therefore, in the process of schooling the students acquired not only the knowledge of the subjects, but were also provided a high-level studying of the second language that was foreign to them.

The first immersion program was a pilot character and learning began from the age of five. It was introduced in 1987 with 25 students in a class at the initiative of the City Council of Vaasa.

And in the 90's early partial immersion Swedish program was launched in the capital and has since developed into a full immersion program. So now all immersion programs in Finland are early and complete, with the exception of the South, where early partial programs are practiced.

Teachers who work at immersion programs speak both Swedish and Finnish freely. Understanding the meaning of words and phrases is also done non-verbally, via using pictures, gestures, facial expressions, what is given much attention in the process of working with preschool children, because of their natural spontaneity and emotional expression.

At the beginning school classes are conducted in Swedish only, but over time the proportion of Finnish gradually increases and till graduation from school both languages are taught in the same volume. In addition, students simultaneously learn English, German or French, which is a kind of feature of the Finnish education system [1].

The first five years of the development of immersion education were carried out slowly. But in the mid-90s there was an incredible growing interest in learning at schools with immersion programs. The statistics (M. Buss, K. Mard) proves it: in 1999, only 1,900 students enrolled at the school for Swedish immersion program, and another 600 children were working for the same program in pre-schools [2]. To compare we will take the data recorded in 2009. The number of students who were taught by immersion programs in the country has reached 4500, 60% of them are students of the first – sixth forms, and the rest, in equal proportion, are the preschoolers and senior students. And their number will increase because not everyone is enrolled in immersion programs. All in all only 0.5% of all students in Finland is enrolled in Swedish immersion programs, however, this program is defined as optional in the national curricula. [5]

In most cases, parents initiate the opening of immersion programs. This is typical of the country where there is a need in learning Swedish, where a large part of the population speak Swedish. Training usually begins since three to six years and

continues until the ninth form. But there are programs at universities as well, for example, at the University of Vaasa [7].

Immersion education in Finland consists of three phases: pre-school education (3 – 6 years), education in elementary school (1 – 6 forms) and middle school (7 – 9 forms). Typically, children begin to learn by immersion program since five years old, that is, two years before compulsory education. Some schools work with children ranging from three and four years. When the lessons start, kids do not know Swedish, and classes are taught by native speakers or teachers with a very good command of the language.

In the first and second grades 80% of educational material is taught in Swedish. A characteristic feature of Finnish immersion program is that the instructions are given in Finnish, like the Irish system and unlike Hawaiian one where English is introduced only in the fifth form. This uses the principle of one language – one teacher, so lessons in Swedish and Finnish are conducted by different teachers. Schedule of classes provides that 1-2 classes per week children learn things in Finnish. At that the attention focuses on speech and receptive skills, and cultural aspects of language learning permeate all kinds of work [1].

Experience of Finnish teachers showed that the start of lessons in their mother tongue at an early stage of training is highly effective in shaping bilingualism technique. One proof of this is the results of standardized tests in reading Finnish for younger students, which is held at the end of third form. According to the inspection, third-form students perform national standards in reading, or exceed them. These results differ from the results of relevant tests in the U.S. and Canada, where lag in the technique of reading in English in schools of full immersion is noticeable in primary school [4].

Some researchers (Essama L.) indicate the high performance of the technique of reading which were recorded in the U.S. as well, but that was on condition that they did not begin to teach English until the fourth grade. According to statistics, 62% of third-form students performed the state standard in reading, while in Finland this result is astonishing and makes 83% [3]. The key to progress of Finnish teachers

is that direct, nontranslational methods of semantization of lexical items used in the practice of immersion education, help avoid interference of the first language when learning the second one and meet the psychological features of preschool and primary school children. In addition, early native language learning helps determine whether the problems in teaching reading and writing are related to the method of operation, or relating to the problems associated with the mastering of a foreign language. According to some researchers (Bjorklund S., K. Mard), an important characteristic of immersion education in Finland is its focus on the formation of multilingualism rather than bilingualism [1].

In general, it can be concluded that the Finnish educational immersion system is an adaptation of the Canadian experience in terms of the national education system. This borrowing seems quite logical because of the similarity of the language situation in both countries. In Finland, as in Canada, there are two official languages, but one prevails in all spheres of life, representatives of the second official language (Canada – French, and Finland – Swedish) live compactly and in their places of residence a second language (French and Swedish respectively) is dominant. Using immersion education in Finland makes it possible not only to form a bilingual child, but also to educate respect to other cultures and their representatives, to harmonize relations in society, to avoid conflicts on ethnic grounds, and to facilitate further study of other languages.

Research perspective is further exploration of the introduction of immersion education in different countries, causes of immersion programs and their features. Also common features of immersion programs in various countries will be examined. In addition, an important area of future research will explore the possibility of launching immersion education in Ukraine.

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Штифурак А. В.

Досвід використання імерсійної освіти у школах Фінляндії

У статті розглянуто досвід використання імерсійної освіти у Фінляндії, вказані характерні особливості даної освітньої системи. У Фінляндії існує дві державні мови (фінська та шведська), водночас шведська мова використовується лише локально, в місцях компактного проживання носіїв цієї мови. Характерною особливістю є те, що в усі історичні часи двомовність не культивувалася. Цей об'єктивний факт і розуміння багатьох батьків необхідності білінгвізму у своїх дітей стали передумовами формування імерсійної освіти в країні в другій половині 20 століття.

Ключові слова: імерсійна освіта, білінгвізм, повна імерсійна програма.

Штыфурак А. В.

Опыт использования имерсионного образования в Финляндии

В статье рассмотрен опыт использования иммерсионного образования в Финляндии, указаны характерные особенности такого вида образования. В Финляндии существует два государственных языка (финский и шведский), одновременно шведский язык используется только локально, в местах компактного проживания носителей этого языка. Характерной особенностью является то, что во все исторические времена двуязычие не культивировалась. Этот объективный факт и понимание многих родителей необходимости билингвизма у своих детей стали предпосылками формирования иммерсионного образования в стране во второй половине 20 века.

Ключевые слова: имерсионное образование, билингвизм, полная имерсионная программа.

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