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THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE UKRAINIAN AND ITALIAN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS: THE CASE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The article aims to analyze elementary and secondary school systems in Italy and Ukraine for the English language teaching. The analysis has been done owing to the results of the questionnaire of English teachers of both countries. The experience of teaching in both countries, as well as the propositions of improvement, mentioned by teachers of in the questionnaire, are analyzed in the paper. The comparative analysis of the educational and teaching process; the organization of school life and learning/teaching process; equipment supply in the schools; the qualification of teachers and the methodology they use while teaching languages; syllabuses and the duration of lessons and breaks have been done. The other significant goal of the paper was to provide the professional opinion of the teachers from both countries about the benefits and drawbacks of the presented school systems. The result of the questionnaire and research pointed out to a statement that the combination of both school systems, introducing and adjusting benefits to the peculiar features of a country's educational system, could have a positive effect. To improve school system one should investigate school systems of other countries, compare and single out benefits, introduce and adjust them to the features of the school system of a particular country.

Key words: school system, elementary school, middle school, English lessons, Italy, Ukraine.

Метою статті є аналіз систем початкових та середніх шкіл Італії та України з точки зору викладання англійської мови. Аналіз був зроблений завдяки результатам анкетування вчителів англійської мови обох країн. У дослідженні проаналізовано досвід викладання в обох країнах, а також пропозиції щодо вдосконалення, зазначенні викладачами в анкетах. Порівняльний



аналіз навчально-виховного процесу; організація шкільного життя та процесу навчання/навчання; постачання обладнання в школах; кваліфікація викладачів та методика, яку вони використовують під час викладання мов; складені програми та тривалість уроків та перерв. Іншою важливою метою роботи було надання професійної думки вчителів обох країн щодо переваг та недоліків представлених шкільних систем. Результати анкетування та дослідження вказували на твердження, що поєднання обох шкільних систем, впроваджуючи та пристосовуючи переваги однієї та іншої шкільних систем, може мати позитивний ефект. Для вдосконалення шкільної системи слід досліджувати шкільні системи інших країн, порівнювати та виділяти переваги, впроваджувати та пристосовувати їх до особливостей власної.

Ключові слова: шкільна система, початкова школа, середня школа, уроки англійської мови, Італія, Україна.

Introduction. The Ukrainian school system is currently in the process of active reformation. Recently, the Ukrainian Government adopted new rules and methodology of teaching in elementary school. These actions included teacher-training courses; elaboration and publishing new books and workbooks for students and teachers, the creation of an informative Internet resource for teachers and parents called «New Ukrainian School», implementing inclusive education into the Ukrainian schooling system, improving methods of evaluation of elementary students etc.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Education pays much attention to the learning and teaching foreign languages in schools and universities. The role of a foreign language has become crucial in modern Ukrainian society. At Ukrainian schools, students learn two foreign languages, starting from elementary school. New modern methodologies are introduced in the process of a foreign language teaching as well as new materials and teaching methods.

In this context, it is important to study the experience of educational systems of developed countries and to compare with Ukrainian one to see the advantages and disadvantages of it. Italy is a country with highly developed economics and GDP, entering G7 and EU. It has well developed educational system that meets the European standards. According to PISA research, Italian government spend around 87 000 USD per student from the age 6 to 15, which is average in the OECD countries. The Italian school system has well-equipped classes with highly qualified teachers. Owing to this fact, Italian pupils showed good results in PISA evaluation in 2018 being on the 33rd place out of 70. Catherine Edwards (2016) in the paper «Italians study more than their peers but do worse at school» mentions that Italian students spend almost 50 hours a week to learn, but do not show good results. Unfortunately, Ukraine that year (2015) was not taking part in the list of the PISA evaluation countries. The results of the PISA of the Ukrainian school system are due to be published on December 3, 2019. Therefore, it was decided to choose the Italian educational system for this comparison.



Methodology. The materials for the research were obtained during the six-week internship in the Istituto Comprensivo di Albinasego, Padova, Italy. The internship took place in November-December 2015. The subject conducted was the English language for students of the elementary school and secondary (middle) school. The age of children vary from 6 y.o. to 15 y.o.

The other internship, necessary for comparative analysis, took place in Comprehensive school № 2 of Zhovkva, Lviv region, Ukraine in March-April 2016. The subject conducted was the English language for students of the elementary and secondary (middle) school. The age of the children was from 6 y.o. to 15 y.o.

The following research methods were used during the research: analysis and observation in order to experience the educational systems and analyze their advantages and disadvantages; comparative and descriptive methods were used to compare the two educational systems and describe them; evaluative and hypothetically-deductive method – were used to determine positive and negative aspects of both schools systems.

The teachers of both countries were presented the other country's school system and then asked to give their opinion concerning the practical advantages and disadvantages of the presented school system and their own one and compare them. There were 8 Ukrainian and 7 Italian teachers from elementary and secondary schools. They were asked the following questions anonymously:

- Having been presented the Italian school system, what are advantages and disadvantages of the system? Express your thoughts.
- What are the advantages of the Ukrainian school system towards Italian?
- What are the advantages of the Italian school system towards Ukrainian?

Thereafter, the questionnaire sheets were gathered and analyzed thoroughly. The answer results of the teachers from both countries mainly included such school spheres as: teaching and educational process; equipment supply; organization of school life; syllabuses; qualification of teachers and methodology of teaching.

While having internship in the Ukrainian school, teachers shared information about the ongoing process of the Ukrainian school reforming. The very process takes place particularly in the elementary and secondary schools. However, there is no totally new creation of the system of education, syllabus or schedule. The process of reforming lies mainly in the sphere of methodology of teaching and educating students; introduction of inclusive education and promoting the usage of new equipment and Internet resources, they mention.

The Ukrainian school is divided into three main parts:

- Elementary school (6-9 years old students);
- Secondary or middle school (9-14 years old students);
- High school (14-17 years old students).

The syllabus contains the following school subjects: mathematics; chemistry; biology; physics; languages; painting; music; physical education; history; literature etc. Lessons in each school last 45 minutes. The lessons start at 8:30 every morning in the whole country from Monday to Friday. There are 15-20 minutes breaks between lessons and students have from 3 lessons (elementary school) to 7 (high school) a day. Thus, mainly, students are in the school from 8:30 a.m. to around 3 p.m.



There are no clear assessment criteria of students work in elementary school. This has been presupposed by the reform introduced recently. However, teachers can put marks in middle and high schools. Students receive semester and year mark for the studied subject and at the end of the school, there is EIE (External Independent Evaluation), which is obligatory for all students, who want to study in Universities. There are both, obligatory subjects to pass at the EIE and selective, chosen by students. There is a teacher's journal, where teachers put marks, lesson theme and students attendance. Students of the elementary school can play with LEGO, supplied to schools recently.

While observing the English lessons in the Ukrainian elementary school, it should be mentioned that they are organized in a form of playing. Students use different colour cards and paintings. Teachers show them cartoons in English, learn poems and songs, rarely, organize excursions. The books that are used are mainly from Great Britain publishing houses. However, teachers can give different hangouts for students. They receive homework after each lesson and teachers are trying to control it the following one. The amount of homework differs: elementary students receive less than middle and high school students. Marks are put in the students' diary. Teachers of the English language give middle and high school students tests or control works. It should be noted that currently, the role of the English language is increasing in the Ukrainian educational system. The final English test at the External Independent Examination (EIE) is currently obligatory. The final English test is worked out at the B1/B2 level.

The Italian educational system is different from the Ukrainian one. This concerns the duration of lessons and breaks; syllabus or educational plan; methodology of teaching; equipment used for teaching etc. The lessons in Italian school last two hours. Time of a lesson is divided into two parts of one-hour duration and a short break between them. Students of the elementary school study, starting from 8 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. They have three breaks during which they can play, eat and talk to each other. The teachers supervise and help them with everything. There is one main lunch break, during which they can have lunch. Italian students can have lessons on Saturday as well. The lessons are taught in the way of playing with students, simultaneously supervising and keeping the order. Students perform different activities during learning process i.e. they can paint different pictures; make applications; cut necessary pieces; paint pictures etc. Great attention is paid to the visual methods of teaching. The results of children's work can be seen in the corridors and their classrooms. It should be mentioned that the Italian school is well equipped. Almost every classroom has an interactive board where teachers show different visual and audio materials.

Italian teachers have laptops in each classroom, where they have an electronic journal of attendance. Teachers fill attendance of students, marks and lessons themes in the journal. Parents have access to the journal online and see the progress of their child. The Italian elementary school is equipped with LEGO as well. Children can play and make different buildings during breaks. Italian teachers use mainly English publishing books for teaching English. They are constantly attending different courses of teaching methodology development, which is supported by the state, local



government and universities. Italian schools actively participate in the international exchange programs, which allows them to have at least one foreign visiting teacher in a year. The secondary or middle school in Italy is almost the same as it is in Ukraine. Students perform different activities according to their students' books and often have tests for evaluation.

Discussion. There are both, advantages and disadvantages of the Ukrainian and Italian elementary and secondary school. However, before beginning the discussion; it should be mentioned that these terms (advantages and disadvantages) are only the opinion of the author. This opinion was based on the ideas of both, Ukrainian and Italian teachers, expressed in the questionnaire during the internship. The Italian teachers were presented the Ukrainian school system and its organization and the same was done vice versa in Ukraine. Then these teachers expressed their opinions of each educational system. These ideas concern the ways of improvement of both educational systems and through what it can be made.

The first issue is the organization and duration of lessons and breaks. It should be noted that teachers of both countries agreed that the two-hour lessons are too long for elementary school children. Italian colleagues agreed that in this case, the 45 minute lessons are better and more effective. The same ideas were mentioned concerning breaks. Italian teachers mentioned that one hour break is too long for children since they relax too much and it is hard for them to get involved in the learning process again. However, short-time classes are not always good. Stacey Joyner and Concepcion Molina (2012) mentioned that 90 or 120 minutes classes, organized into block schedules showed good results in the US schools. However, the block schedule and classes of 90-120 minutes showed not that good result in language learning.

According to the PISA test in 2015, Italian students spend almost 50 hours a week for learning and doing homework. Meanwhile, Ukrainian student spends around 55 hours a week say Svitlana Oliynyk (Світлана Олійник, 2018) and Lesia Moskalenko (Лєся Москаленко, 2017). However, better results can be achieved by spending less time, for example, Finland with 36 hours, Germany 36, Japan 41 etc.

Faez Farahnaz (2011) mentions that teaching of the English language in Italian elementary school is mainly done by the general teachers, who have not received special education in teaching foreign languages. On the contrary, Ukrainian elementary school requires the degree of teaching foreign languages, especially under recent reforms. However, there are still general teachers in Ukrainian elementary schools who teach English. It is also worth mentioning that Italian students begin studying English from the first year, which makes them one of the earliest among the EU countries. The same situation is with Ukrainian students, who begin studying English since first years. Italian school devotes one of the highest numbers of hours to learning a foreign language. According to Faez Farahnaz (2011) the approximate amount of hours, dedicated to the learning foreign languages in Italy is 17,2% out of all teaching time. However, approximately 59% of Italians admit that they do not know any foreign language.



The next concerns the equipment in the classroom and lessons taught using different modern technological means. Ukrainian school is behind Italian, concerning the equipment in schools. Teachers in Ukraine can seldom use projectors and laptops, however, this depends on a school. The journal of attendance in a Ukrainian school is in paper form and parents can see the success of their child only when they come to school. However, there is an increasing tendency in using laptops and Internet resources while teaching English in Ukraine. There are very few special courses for Ukrainian teachers aimed at increasing the use of electronic devices and internet resources in the process of teaching. On the contrary, Italian schools are well equipped. There are electronic boards almost in each classroom together with laptop and internet access. Teachers have to fill in an electronic journal of attendance and put marks there. Italian parents can see via the internet the success of their children. Italian Ministry of Education tries to implement and train teachers to use different electronic and internet means of teaching. The ideas of the teachers of both countries concerning the use of internet resources and modern equipment in teaching were the same i.e. children are more interested and learn material easily, when teachers use modern devices. This is especially related to elementary school since children like watching cartoons and teachers can show them different vocabulary learning cartoons. According to the PISA report, Italy in 2015 is around the average in the innovation in educational measurement. Ashvini Joshi (2012) states that using multimedia with interesting for students topics can increase their vocabulary in a foreign language as well as language structures. The Internet increase students' motivation and interest, thus facilitating the learning process. The other scholar, Xiahong Xu in his paper (2017) stressed on the importance of the usage of multimedia in classrooms «Multimedia teaching has many advantages of that it is convenient, vivid informative and interesting, can greatly improve the efficiency of teaching» (ibid., p. 187). However, the scholar mentions some drawbacks of the multimedia using, among them he distinguished: reducing teachers' skills; poor quality of software; aimless use of multimedia in teaching; lack of interaction etc. He emphasized on the correct balance between the use of multimedia and traditional teaching.

The methodology of teaching the English language is mainly the same in both countries. Teachers mainly use specially designed English language books, composed according to the level and age of pupils. They agreed that such kind of books is best for students. Even Ukrainian EIE is designed according to the types of exercises in these books. Italian teachers try to use more overhead projectors, electronic boards and laptops in their teaching process. The only difference is that Ukrainian middle school students tend to write more tests and control works than their Italian peers do. However, it depends on the English language teacher. The other difference between both school systems is the organization of school life. Here it means the selection of the class mentor among students, cleaning class after lessons, purchase of the books and feeding of students. Ukrainian students, while learning, choose the monitor of the class among themselves. This is peculiar for middle and high schools and in rare cases in elementary school. The duties of the monitor are to be representative of a class at different school meetings and events. However, currently the role of a class monitor has decreased and even some classes do not choose one.



Ukrainian middle and high schools students, in rare cases elementary school, have to clean classrooms after lessons. This issue is common in Ukrainian schools. The procedure looks as follows: one or two students once a day clean classroom after lessons, for the next day the next students are chosen. They usually swipe floor, wipe the blackboard and take away rubbish. The rest, mop the floor, does a cleaner. Italian students do not usually do this in their school. Sometimes a teacher can ask students of the middle school to wipe the board and to prepare equipment for lessons, however cleaning classroom is a rare case.

The next difference is in books and meals supply. Ukrainian schools receive books directly from the Ukrainian government and parents do not need to buy them. However, books of the English language students have to buy themselves, since they are published mainly in Britain. Nevertheless, all other books, published in Ukraine, schools receive free. Children take these books in the school library at the beginning of the school year and submit back at the end. On the contrary, Italian parents have to buy books for all subjects by themselves. The similar situation is in the sphere of students feeding. Ukrainian school receive money for meals from the government. However, these costs are allocated only for elementary students. Middle and high school students buy meals themselves or take food from home. Italian parents pay a certain amount of money for each meal students to eat in both, elementary and middle schools.

Conclusions. It cannot be said that any school system in the world is best and correct. However, it should be mentioned that some of them have more benefits than others. School systems of all countries have both, advantages and disadvantages. The evaluation of a school system can be done only by evaluating students success i.e. the result of the process of learning in a school. While reforming a school system in a country, it would be better if one took only advantages of each school systems in the world and apply to the realia of a country the reforming is done in.

Ukrainian school can take a lot from Italian and implement into its own practice. One of the best examples is creative work of students during lessons, results of which are then displayed in the school corridors. Not only students can benefit from observing their own results and ones of other students, but this can improve their creativity as well. The other beneficial feature that can be taken from Italian school is that parents can monitor online the results and educational process of their child. This is crucial, since parents will be aware of the educational and learning process and its results done by their child. The other factor that could be beneficial for Ukraine school system is the constant trainings and developing of teachers' skills using modern resources of teaching and learning. This is crucial factor since currently the usage of computers, smartphones and other devices not only can facilitate teaching process for teachers, but also provide them abilities to use different modern techniques of teaching. Concerning the comparison of the abovementioned school systems, it should be mentioned that the combination of both of them could give a positive effect. It is worth stating that much depends on a teacher and his personality, how he treats and educates students. Both school systems have great and talented teachers, who are trying to do their best, regardless of obstacles and difficulties they face in their work daily.



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