THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “NEW GENERATION SCHOOL TEACHER” PROJECT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF UZHHOROD NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract**. One of the key fundamental changes in Ukrainian education made in the past five years is transforming foreign language teacher education system in Ukraine. The rationale behind the reform is training the 21st century teacher who is regarded as the key figure capable of leading the educational reform. Since it is impossible to develop 21st century skills and competencies such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, a sense of innovation, etc. without teachers possessing those skills and competences by themselves, the teaching profession acquires paramount importance and calls for radical changes in teacher training sector. Since the ratification of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in 2014, ongoing education reforms in Ukraine have resulted in launching the “New Generation School Teacher” project jointly initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British Council Ukraine. Its primary focus is transformational change in the initial foreign language (English) teacher education system in Ukraine and establishing Pre-Service Foreign Language Teacher Training (PRESETT) Curriculum in Methodology for Bachelor’s level. The current paper addresses the main features and issues relating to the implementation of the “New Generation School Teacher” project within the context of Uzhhorod National University (English Philology department). Since the piloting start of the project in September 2017, there have been reported many positive developments in initial foreign language teacher training at the English Philology department relating to students’ and teachers’ learning outcomes. The Project has had a favourable impact on teaching practices of the whole department. The issue that needs to be addressed is the organization of school practice.

**Keywords**: teacher, teacher training, PRESETT, school practice

**Introduction.** Since gaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine has been making deliberate efforts to renew its education system across all the levels. Yet, the key fundamental changes in Ukrainian education have been made in the past five years following the ratification of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in 2014. The new Law ‘On higher education’, which was put into effect in September 2014, provides necessary legal mechanisms for ensuring university autonomy, academic freedom and quality assurance in higher education. The new framework law “On education”, which was adopted in September 2017, introduces fundamental structural and content changes aimed at building an efficient system of school education in Ukraine capable of providing ‘the proper quality and lifelong learning opportunities’ for every learner [2, p. 83]. The New Ukrainian school starts on September 1, 2018 bringing into action the long awaited education reform. Moving away from rote learning and memorization, the New Ukrainian school aims at creating ample opportunity for every learner to develop the 21st century key competencies including communication, digital competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, and critical thinking [3].

One of the top priority areas for changes in the educational sector is the teacher who acts as an agent of educational reform. Teachers play a vital role in achieving desired learning outcomes in terms of the 21st century skills. 21st century learners need 21st century teachers who have ‘a radically broader and more sophisticated set of competences than before’ by themselves [5, p. 5]. In this context, the teaching profession acquires paramount importance and calls for radical changes in teacher training sector.

In 2013, in response to ongoing education reforms in Ukraine and demands of the 21st century society the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in collaboration with the British Council Ukraine launched the “New Generation School Teacher” joint project which aims at introducing transformational change in the initial foreign language (English) teacher education system in Ukraine and establishing Pre-Service Foreign Language Teacher Training Curriculum in Methodology for Bachelor’s level.

This paper outlines the main features and issues relating to the implementation of the “New Generation School Teacher” project within the context of Uzhhorod National University.

**“New Generation School Teacher” project**. Initially launched by eight Ukrainian universities and institutes in 2013, the Project was reported to have been implemented in ten universities and to be joined by another seven universities by October 2017 [6].

The elaboration of PRESETT Curriculum for trainee teachers of English within the framework of the Project was preceded by the Baseline Study conducted from March 2013 to February 2014. It was aimed at examining the current situation of pre-service foreign language teacher education in Ukraine, identifying the major problems and finding out ways of solving them [4]. According to its findings, the average proportion of hours allocated to the methodology component within traditional Bachelor’s degree programmes is less than 4%. What is more, the course of methodology proved to be theoretically loaded with little or no connection to practice and widely delivered in Ukrainian [1, p. 2].

The new PRESETT curriculum has been designed taking into account all the recommendations of the Baseline Study with a clear focus on methodology as the key component in teacher education. It is composed of 6 modules covering three years of study (starting with year two through year three and finishing in year four) in comparison to a traditional methodology course lasting for one or two terms.

Most of the content areas of methodology of foreign language teaching such as teaching four basic skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing), planning, teaching language construction (grammar and vocabulary), classroom management, etc. have been reconceptualised in line with the main principles of communicative language teaching. Key innovations in terms of content relate to considering issues of second language acquisition, the development of learner autonomy, catering for SEN, planning for CPD, working with materials, etc. [4].

In addition to the new content, the course in English Language Teaching Methodology follows new approaches and uses new modes of delivery. The basic principle of delivery of the course is theory through practice which is achieved by means of workshops with traditional lectures and seminars being abandoned for good.

One of the most positive innovations brought about by the PRESETT curriculum is introducing school practice as its integral part in all three years of the course delivery. This way teacher training inside a university is directly linked to teaching practice in school classrooms where students have the opportunity to learn first by observation, then by performing as teacher-assistants and finally, in the last module, by practicing as teachers themselves. Maximising school-based training allows universities to provide trainee teachers with valuable hands-on experience so that teacher graduates entering the teacher profession are equipped with both knowledge and skills.

**“New Generation School Teacher” project**: **piloting at Uzhhorod National University**

The procedure of joining the project and implementing it from the beginning of an academic year (September 1) involves a few steps: applying to the manager of the project at the British Council Ukraine, making changes to the curriculum in order to allocate the necessary number of hours to the Methodology course and building a team of teacher educators who will undertake a professional development training delivered by the British Council Ukraine.

Uzhhorod National University belongs to the so-called classical national universities in Ukraine. The University applied for joining the “New Generation School Teacher” project in the spring 2017. The implementation of the project started in September 2017 (2017-2018 academic year) at the basis of the English Philology department (the faculty of Foreign Philology). One of the qualifications that has been granted by the English Philology department to its graduates is “Bachelor in Philology, Teacher of English, German/French”. According to the curriculum, the course in Methodology of foreign language teaching comprising 75 hours in total has been delivered in the fourth year followed by a three-week school practice. The main modes of its delivery are lectures and seminars.

According to the PRESETT Curriculum teacher training starts in year two and lasts for three years. According to Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (No 871 dated by August 12, 2015) “On conducting a pedagogical experiment on the methodological training of trainee teachers of English” a university decides on the number of groups to take part in the experiment. Hence, necessary changes to the curriculum must be made only for the groups participating in the experiment.

It was decided that one academic group of students (24 students) subdivided into two study groups would participate in the experiment. As a result, there are two academic groups of second-year students studying according to different curricula (one group is experimental and the other – a control group).

Table 1 shows the major differences in the list of courses delivered to the two groups according to the curricula. The courses that are delivered to the groups are marked with a tick (√). If there is a difference in the number of credits or hours, the number of credits (and total hours) is indicated (e.g. 11, 5 (345) – where 11, 5 shows the number of credits allocated for the course, 345 – the total number of hours).

Table 1

Comparison of the courses delivered to the control and experimental groups

of second year trainee teachers of English

according to the traditional curriculum and the new PRESETT curriculum

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Courses** | **Control group** | **Experimental group** | **Control group** | **Experimental group** |
|  | Semester 3 | Semester 4 |
| Introduction to literature studies and theory of literature | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| History of world literature | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| English (Practical course) | 11,5 (345) | 9 (270) | 9,5 (285) | 8,5 (255) |
| Basics of research and analysis of literary text | √ | √ |  |  |
| Psychology (Age psychology included) | √ |  |  |  |
| Practical course in German/French | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Linguistic area studies | √ | √ |  |  |
| English phonetics |  |  | √ | √ |
| History of English |  |  | √ | √ |
| Science of law |  |  | √ |  |
| School practice |  | 2,5 (75) |  | 2 (60) |
| Methodology of teaching English |  | 3 (90) |  | 4 (120) |

The Table shows that the main differences concern the courses Psychology and Science of law which are delivered to the control group; and methodology of teaching English and school practice which are delivered only to the experimental group. In addition, there is a difference in the number of credits and hours allocated to English (practical course): the course which is delivered to the control group has a little more hours. The rationale behind the changes is as follows: 1) most of the core courses directly contributing to the qualification “Bachelor in Education, teacher of the English, German/French language and literature, teacher of world literature” have not been changed in terms of credits and hours; 2) since methodology is delivered in English and in the form of workshops based on pair and group work activities, students get ample opportunity to interact in English, which promotes the development of their level of the English language proficiency; 3) the PRESETT curriculum comprises topics that are covered in the course in Psychology in different modules, e.g. psychological factors in language learning, teaching young learners, etc.

The Project is implemented by a team of professionals at the English Philology department. Initially, 6 teachers of the department attended the Teacher Development Summer School (01-07 July 2017) delivered by the British Council Ukraine. This was followed by a series of dissemination events at the department and by more teachers attending the Teacher Development Winter School (21-27 January 2018), which resulted in building a team of teacher educators directly involved in implementing the Project at the department.

At the piloting start, teachers and students were provided with a set of materials dealing with the Project and its core documents. Regular meetings of the experiment team members at the department and meetings with students participating in the experiment enable monitoring the piloting of the project and identifying achievements and issues to deal with. So far, there have been reported many positive developments. Most students find the course very interesting and challenging. They enjoy the basic modes of its delivery; their active involvement in different group work activities (discussions, presentations, projects, etc.) has enhanced the development of their language skills and critical thinking. All the students participating in the experiment provided favorable reports on their school practice and were very enthusiastic about completing their school observation tasks.

The Project is also highly beneficial for teachers. Those teachers who are actively involved in the experiment are responsible for planning and designing methodology sessions. Although they find preparation time- and effort-consuming, it is beneficial when measured against the outcomes: by designing new sessions teachers develop professionally. Methodology workshops delivered within the framework of the experiment are regularly attended by teachers who are not involved in the project. This kind of dissemination has already resulted in changing the way other courses are delivered by the faculty: classes have become more interactive and student-centred.

Yet, there are some issues which need to be addressed. There is a lack of communication between university teachers and mentors supervising students at school. Since school mentors do not receive any payment for supervising students, they agree quite unwillingly to work with students. In such situations it is very difficult to choose the best school teachers to act as their mentors. Due to the lack of information about the project at schools, some teachers feel anxious about students filling in observation checklists in their classes.

**Conclusions***.* Although the piloting of the “New Generation School Teacher” joint project of the British Council Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine is still on, it is obvious that the project has already made positive changes in the pre-service language teacher education in Ukraine. The implementation of the project within the context of Uzhhorod National University has been favourably evaluated by all the participants of the experiment. The Project has contributed to the development and transformational change in the teaching practices of the entire English Philology department. The main issue which needs to be addressed concerns the organization of school practice. It is advisable that the government should provide financial payment to the school mentors and run a publicity campaign for the project involving all the levels of Ukrainian education system.

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