

OLGA MISECHKO¹**Teaching Foreign Languages to Young Learners in Ukraine: Pages of History**

This article represents a brief overview of the history of early language education in Ukraine. It starts with the period of the Russian Empire, when skills in foreign languages were valued as a mark of a privileged social status and an integral part of the liberal arts education curriculum in gymnasiums. Then it goes on with the primary language education of the Soviet period, starting with the late 1940s when the idea of an 'early-start' in teaching foreign languages to young schoolers was introduced on the state level, and first schools with a number of subjects instructed in a foreign language were set up. It also focuses on the experimental teaching of foreign languages to 4-6-years-old children in the 1960s and 1980s. The author completes with the account of changes in the early language education in Ukraine in the post-Soviet period, when this practice became regular in primary schools. Issues of training teachers of foreign languages for kindergartens and primary schools are also shortly covered.

1. Introduction

Teaching foreign languages to young and very young learners is not a novel idea in Ukraine. Today, it develops from the perspective of lifelong learning and integration into the European education system.

Proofs can be found in many policy-making documents. The Law on Education adopted at the dawn of the post-Soviet history of Ukraine in 1991 proclaimed interconnection of the national educational system with the education of other countries. In the following years, foreign language acquisition was perceived as an important educational objective. A great practical role of getting familiar with the culture of the target language countries was emphasised. Therefore, scientists, methodologists and teachers faced the task to provide new aims, conditions and strategies for improving the process of teaching and learning foreign languages as a means of intercultural communication.

The draft of a new national concept of teaching foreign languages in Ukraine published in 1994 put forward the proposal to start teaching a foreign language in kindergarten, as well as to teach two or more foreign languages at school (Концепція, 1994). It defined the principles

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of designing educational programmes for different age groups and ways to implement them in life.

Since 2001, the language policy-making documents are following the key points of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The National Doctrine of educational development signed by the President of Ukraine in April 2002 confirmed the priority of integration of the national education into the European and world educational areas, and claimed that “the state establishes a system of continuous linguistic education, which ensures the mandatory acquisition of the state language by Ukrainian citizens, the ability to master the native (national) and practically use at least one foreign language” (Указ, 2002). As a part of this policy, the tendency for early language learning has gained a huge acceleration in recent times in Ukraine. Alongside high contemporary topicality of the issue of early language teaching and learning in Ukraine, it grew out of centuries-long practices.

2. Early language learning as a mark of a privileged social status at the period of the Russian Empire

At the beginning of the XVIII century, it became a fashion in rich and aristocratic families of the Russian Empire to invite native speaker tutors and governesses to teach children European languages, especially German and French. Communication with a native speaker was considered the most natural way to learn a foreign language. Typically, children and their tutor/governess stayed isolated in a separate part of the building where most of their daily lives proceeded, so that they were exposed to a foreign language since their very early years. There was even a requirement to the tutor/governess not to say a word in Russian. Thus, “a natural” target language setting was artificially created. Very often, the foreign language was used as the language of communication between the family members. This way, children acquired perfect native pronunciation, skills in oral speaking, reading and writing. In not so rich aristocratic families, mothers taught foreign language for their own children. A possession of one or more foreign languages since childhood was an important social indicator of aristocratic origin, good upbringing, and fine manners.

In 1730-1740s, new educational institutions – private pansiones for offsprings of the noble families – started to open in big cities of the Russian Empire. The owners or headmasters of the pansiones were mostly French or German. Foreign languages (usually French) became an important part of the compulsory education in these educational institutions since 7 years of age. Children, teenagers and young adults were trained to use elegant and refined spoken and

written language to produce favourable impression at the dancing balls or at different social events for the aristocracy.

Learning foreign languages was extremely popular in the process of educating girls in private mansions or at home. In the so-called Institutes of noble girls – closed schools of secondary educational level that were set up at the expense of noble societies or individuals – French or German were taught starting from the earliest age and occupied the central place in the curriculum. The first educational institution of this type for girls in the Russian Empire – the Smolny Institute – was opened in 1764 near St. Petersburg. In Ukraine, the Institutes of noble girls were founded in Kharkiv (1812), Poltava (1818), Odessa (1829), Kerch (1836), Kyiv (1838). For example, at the Poltava Institute, French and German were used as the language of instruction at the lessons of Russian and world history, geography, mythology, French literature. The training was conducted in groups, according to the popular then Lancaster system. Due to the intensive practice in foreign languages for 9 years (since the age of 8-10), girls received sufficient training in order to make their living as home tutors or teachers (Первая, 1900).

Since the very beginning of the XIX c., in just opened gymnasiums – 4-year general educational institutions of secondary level for boys – foreign languages (Latin, German and French) constituted an extensive in volume and educational value part of the curriculum. Without knowledge of these languages, future university students would not be able to listen to and understand lectures in academic subjects delivered by professors invited during the first decades of the XIX c. mainly from abroad.

In 1828, the period of schooling at the gymnasiums increased to 7 years, and old-Greek was added to the list of foreign languages. The classics (Latin and Greek) were referred to as the major subjects and alongside mathematics were defined as the most reliable foundation of learning and the best way to raise and strengthen the moral virtues of boys. Latin started from the first year of schooling, and Greek – from the fourth. Intensive reading and translation of pieces from the literature and history of antiquity provided the learners with cultural values of the ancient world, as well as historical and geographical knowledge. Of the two modern languages, German was taught from the first year of studying, French – from the fourth. Thus, in their first year of gymnasium education, 10-year old boys studied three languages – Russian, Latin and German simultaneously. The number of weekly language hours varied, increasing at the peak of the popularity of classic gymnasiums in the 1870s (*Table 1*).

Languages studied in different types of gymnasiums	School curriculum 1828			School curriculum 1864									School curriculum 1871			School curriculum 1872			
	Classical gymnasiums			Classical gymnasiums with Greek and Latin			Classical gymnasiums with Latin only			Real gymnasiums			Classical gymnasiums			Real gymnasiums			
Classes																			
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	Prep. class	I	II	III	I	II	III
Russian	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	4	6	4	4	4	6	5	4
Latin	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	6	-	-	-	-	8	7	5	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-
German	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	-	-	3*	3*	6	6	4
French	-	-	-	*	*	*	-	2	2	3	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	4**	4**

* one of the languages was chosen by the pupils

** any other foreign language, besides French, could be taught

Table 1. Number of weekly language classes at the early stage of gymnasium education

Source: Alyoshintsev, 1912; Konstantinov, 1947

From their first days at classical gymnasiums, boys at the age of nine or ten were given grammar books written in Latin or German, and were required to learn the material by heart. From time to time, teachers organized question-and-answer sessions in a foreign language. Learning both classics and modern languages gradually turned into cramming grammar rules and vocabulary units just to translate texts or sentences. Gymnasium teachers of languages were mostly foreigners who did not know the Russian language well enough to provide translation into Russian. Spoken skills were not trained at all (Столетие, 1905).

In real gymnasiums and gymnasiums for girls that started to open in the second half of the XIX century learners were provided with more practical skills in modern languages necessary for business contacts (real gymnasiums) or social life and further employment of a home teacher (girls' gymnasiums). The growing practice of international business, commerce and travel communication lead to the development of new methods of teaching foreign languages, aimed at mastering skills of spoken language. In the Russian Empire, such methods became very widely used for teaching modern languages to young learners in real gymnasiums and girls' gymnasiums, while they never were officially recognised in classical gymnasiums.

Interestingly, despite vast in volume and major in educational value importance of foreign languages in the system of primary and secondary education in the Russian Empire, there have never been any higher educational institutions for training teachers of modern foreign languages. Philological faculties of universities took care only of academic preparation of gymnasium teachers of classics. In teaching modern languages, native

speakers predominated in both state and private schools. Only at the very beginning of the twentieth century, first departments of Roman-German philology appeared at the Russian Empire universities, which took the responsibility of training teachers of modern languages (French, German, and English) to substitute native-speakers.

3. Educational paradigm shifts of the Soviet epoch

After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the centuries-old tradition of learning foreign languages since childhood has turned these languages in the eyes of the working class and peasantry into a sign of belonging to the privileged social strata. Some leaders of public education in Russia and Ukraine considered the study of foreign languages as a bourgeois relic (Временное положение, 1919 г.). Articles appeared in the press that denied the role of foreign languages in the new society. They kept insisting on incompatibility of the study of foreign languages with the principles of the new school for the proletariat and peasantry. As a result, foreign languages became not necessary in the school curriculum and gradually disappeared from it in Ukraine.

Meeting the growing need in western technologies and specialists for huge industrialization of the Soviet economy, a campaign “Foreign languages – to broad masses” was organized in 1927, popularizing learning foreign languages among young engineers and workers. A series of decrees was issued, aimed at improving language education standards in institutions of higher learning and comprehensive schools. Among the most significant was the Central Committee of the Communist Party Decree “Concerning the Instructional Programmes and the Regime of the Primary and Secondary School” (1932), which recognized “the necessity of providing every secondary school graduate with the knowledge of a foreign language” (Про навчальні, 1947). Since then, the creation of various options in language education has begun at a steadily increasing pace.

When in 1932 foreign languages joined a list of compulsory school subjects again, they did not return to primary school up to 1946. The study of foreign languages (German, French, and English) started in the first year of the secondary school (4th grade). During that time-period, first Institutes of foreign languages were organized in the Soviet Union that set off regular practice of training non-native teachers of foreign languages instead of using foreign native-speakers for language instruction. This practice still dominates in Ukraine.

After World War II, the Soviet Union began actively considering the issue of improving the teaching of foreign languages in general and of introducing the early start of language learning in particular. This issue was forced by poor results of contacts with both enemies and allies shown by Soviet military men and civilians during the war. The growing geopolitical tension of coming “cold war” that started in the late-Stalinism period between the countries of the Eastern block and the Western world turned the issue of nation-wide literacy in foreign languages into a matter of national security (Pavlenko, 2003).

In 1947, the Council of Ministers resolution “On improving teaching of foreign languages in the secondary school” announced new priorities in foreign-languages education. Teaching one foreign language was emphasised obligatory for all schools (despite previous official intentions this demand could not have been fulfilled before because of lack of teachers, especially in rural schools). The network of pedagogical institutions for training teachers of foreign languages was significantly expanded (Misechko, 2008). Spanish joined the list of foreign languages at schools. The ratio for languages studied in urban schools was initiated: 45% of schools with English language teaching, 25% – with German, 20% – French, 10% – Spanish (Про поліпшення, 1947). The issue of early language learning was raised. The initial stage of learning a foreign language was allowed to move into the third form (if there was a sufficient number of teachers), i.e. it became possible to start teaching foreign languages in a primary school. For the first time, schools opened with teaching of a number of subjects in foreign languages where the study of a foreign language began in the second form. Overall, this resolution became a breakthrough in the development of early language learning in the Soviet Union.

First textbooks for early language learning were designed by domestic authors, published in Moscow or Leningrad, and disseminated throughout the Soviet Union. The content and illustrations in the books followed the ideological trend of using foreign languages for propagandistic purposes. On the one hand, they reflected the realia of the post-war reconstruction, glorified the Soviet values, holidays and history. Among the first words in the vocabulary of schoolchildren in their first year of studying a foreign language there were many ideologically coloured units. For example, such neutral words as “tie”, “star”, “pioneer” were associated in the English textbook in both context and picture with a Soviet pioneer as a member of mass organization for children operated by the Communist Party, a Soviet pioneer tie or a red star as communist symbols (Godlinnik, 1947). Meanings of the words “map”, “flag” were explained through illustrations of the map and national flag of the Soviet Union. For the topic “We are Reading”, the word “slogan” (not “a story”, or “a fairy-

tail”, or “a poem”) was introduced into kid’s vocabulary as a usual option for reading in sentences like “This is a slogan”, “Ann is reading a slogan.”, “They are reading a slogan.”, “Who is reading a slogan?” (op. cit., p. 69). Typically, 9-year-old kids in their first year of studying the language had to read, translate, say and write down ideological slogans like “Long live the Red October!”, “Long live the First of May!”, “Long live the Soviet Union”, “Long live our Great Leader Comrade Stalin!”, “We love our Great Leader Comrade Stalin!”

On the other hand, in the period of late Stalinism, primary school language textbooks did not provide any objective information about life in the West. As a Russian researcher M. Mayofis (2014) traces it, while in the 1930s the foreign language was positioned as a means of communicating with like-minded people abroad – communists and socialists, in the late 1940s Soviet children who studied a foreign language lost an imaginary foreign counterpart with whom they could, at least theoretically, join the conversation. Looking for possible reasons of the fact, the researcher reflects on the deep distrust of the Soviet leaders of that time to everything foreign, especially to what had to do with the English-speaking world.

In the academic year of 1948/49, learning a foreign language from the 3rd form became compulsory not only for schools in regional centres, but for all secondary schools of the Soviet Union, and continued through the 7th-10th forms, which resulted in five-eight years of exposure to the language. Thus, the ‘early-start’ of teaching a foreign language (English, German, French or Spanish) to 8-9-years-old was expected to become widely introduced into school practice. The English language that got ever-widening popularity challenged the priority of German. Although the introduction of Spanish into secondary schools in 1947 (not in 1955, as J. Ornstein (1958) wrongly stated) was supported in terms of pre-service teacher training and instruction materials, it seemed to be not very successful at this historic stage. According to statistical data on teaching foreign languages in schools in Ukraine, in 1952/53 a. y. Spanish was taught in 100 classes in big and small towns (in 75 third forms, 22 fourth forms, 2 fifth and 1eighth forms), making total of 3,562 students (Відомості, 1952/53). However, at the beginning of 1956/57 it was not taught in any classes at all (Додаткова, 1956-57).

Whatever promising the prospects of foreign language education in the Soviet Union were, there was a critical shortage of qualified language teachers. Therefore, a five-year plan for training school teachers for 1949-1955 was developed. However, both the existing and planned teacher-training institutions did not suggest any special preparation for language teachers of primary schools. There were no special academic subjects, course-books or other

resources that would dwell on peculiarities of teaching young learners. A significant disadvantage of pre-service teacher-training was the lack of a differentiated consideration of the content and methods of teaching at the elementary, middle and high school-levels.

Meanwhile, so-called “specialized schools” were initiated which would offer intensive instruction in a foreign language since the 2nd form with two-three times more weekly language lessons than in regular schools and a number of subjects taught in the target language at the senior school level (8th-10th forms). In the second half of the 1940s, the first schools with intensive course in English were opened in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv based on male secondary schools (in 1943-1954 separate schooling for boys and girls was in practice in the USSR). In 1956, schools with intensive course in German appeared. Such schools used to give more profound practice in language starting with the primary level, and a big part of their graduates would enter institutes or faculties of foreign languages for professional language study. However, from some documents found in the State Archive of the Russian Federation it becomes clear that the state authorities and educational establishment were seriously worried by what they called ‘a very big danger’ in the organization of these schools that came from closer exposure of schoolchildren to the literature, history and other cultural artefacts from the country of the target language (Mayofis, 2014, pp.181-182). The greatest fear was of a possible negative impact of the target language and culture on Soviet children who appeared in a privileged position as compared to their fellows from regular schools, as they got closer and not always amenable to ideological control access to information about the Western world.

In the middle 1950s – early 1960s, on the new socio-political background of “Khrushchev's thaw” and the revival of international contacts between the USSR and the outer world, some major changes were introduced into language education. In 1961, the resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR “On improvement of learning foreign languages” delayed the initial stage of teaching a foreign language in regular schools until the fifth form – middle school. However, this resolution allowed organizing special groups for foreign language classes in kindergartens and primary schools (on the wishes of the parents), designing educational programmes, textbooks, books for reading, audio- and video-resources, and developing methods of teaching foreign languages in these groups. It declared also expanding the net of specialized schools with intensive language instruction.

The Soviet applied linguistics finally turned its face on the needs of early languages learning at pre-school and primary school age and actively set about the development of language learning syllabus and teaching aids. Some scientific experiments on teaching

foreign languages to pre-schoolers and primary school children started. One of the organizers and participants of such an experiment in six kindergartens and several primary schools of Leningrad that began in academic year 1957/58 and lasted for 4 years reported that about 1,800 kids (5-10 year-olds) were exposed to experimental teaching of French, English and German (Чистякова, 1962). The main aim of the experiment was to clarify certain regularities in a foreign language acquisition by preschool and early school children and to determine the most effective methods of instruction, in particular methods of work on pronunciation, assimilation of the grammatical structures and vocabulary. Language classes in kindergartens took 20-30 minutes, and were conducted three times a week. In schools, children had two or three extra-curriculum classes that lasted 45 minutes each. The major results confirmed that children were most successful in mastering pronunciation habits through imitation drills and attained new sounds better not isolated but in word chunks or phrases. Besides, positive impact of pronunciation exercises in a foreign language on pronunciation habits in kid's mother tongue was traced. In terms of lexical habits, the experiment proved that 5-6-year-olds could learn up to 6 new words on a topic at one class, which made 250-300 new words in a year. The researchers also concluded that kindergarten kids learned new grammatical forms in lexical patterns quicker and reproduced them more correctly than schoolchildren. Although rich in outcomes and inferences, the experiment was seriously hampered by absence of specially prepared resources for teaching young and very young learners.

In general, scientific articles published in the late 1950s-early 1960s in the only specialized journal on teaching foreign languages in the Soviet Union – “Inostrannye yazyki v shkole” (“Foreign languages at school”) – claimed that the theoretical background of early-start language teaching methodology in the country was insufficient and scarce (Бим, 1962). That is why, teachers-practitioners had to gain new knowledge through practice, often making mistakes, learning from their own experience, and sometimes losing enthusiasm. From the report of a schoolteacher from Lviv (Ukraine), who began to teach children English from the first form in 1957 (Арыпова, 1959), we get to know that, under the program of the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR, primary school children had to learn 200 words in the first form grouped according to topics “Our class”, “About myself”, “My day”, “The seasons”. The teacher mentioned that she used only oral forms of work, including games, because learners were not supposed to read or write in a foreign language in the 1st and 2nd forms.

Since 1978, the initial stage of learning a foreign language at regular schools returned to the fourth form that was the last year of the primary school. The number of specialized schools with intensive instruction in a foreign language from the 2nd form, especially English, was constantly growing.

Traditionally, all the school course-books for teaching foreign languages in the Soviet Union were designed and published in the Russian Federation, in Moscow or Leningrad, and then spread to all the other Soviet Republics. In Ukraine, the first national experimental course-books for studying English in the 4th form appeared only in 1983.

Early start in teaching foreign languages became again the subject of concerned discussion among researchers, teachers, and parents in the late 1980s. The previous experience of the 1960s-1970s proved that systematic exposure of children to specially organized language learning classes could produce positive results even in the absence of authentic foreign language setting. So, in September 1987, a large-scale educational experiment was launched in the Soviet Union on teaching foreign languages to four-year-old kids in kindergartens and to six-year-old primary school children (Иностранний, 1987; Первые шаги, 1988). In Moscow kindergartens and schools, the study of four languages was organized – English, German, French and Spanish; in Leningrad and Sverdlovsk – of three languages (English, German, French), in Voronezh – of Spanish. This time, special manuals and guidelines were developed for the experiment. To participate in it, teachers got special in-service training at the teachers' retraining courses. The experiment focused on developing motivation for learning a foreign language, communicative skills, and abilities to solve simple communicative tasks independently. Teachers were using a lot of language games, rhymes, songs, dances, colouring and drawing tasks that allowed repeating new vocabulary, speech patterns, phonetic and grammatical elements. The experiment showed that children did not get tired of lessons; most of them successfully coped with the language material, understood teacher's guidelines and could speak on basic topics. In addition, parents reported that children continued to play language games at home with their toys, which indicated the growing interest of children of this age to using a foreign language.

However, the results of the experiment had not given then a clear positive response to the question of whether the early learning of foreign languages should become a widespread practice. During the discussion that followed in 1988 (Первые итоги, 1988), two opposite viewpoints met face-to-face. Proponents of one of them appealed to positive social, historical, pedagogical and psychological arguments and to the results of the experiments at home and abroad in favour of continuing the research on content and forms of early language learning.

While the supporters of the opposite viewpoint rather doubted that early language start could solve the problem of increasing the efficiency of foreign language acquisition at school. They suggested that the majority of primary school children were not ready for early exposure to foreign languages, and insisted, instead, on increasing the number of weekly language lessons at the middle and upper school-levels.

The discussion had no formal ending because in 1991 the problem of early language learning turned into the issue of education policy of separate independent states formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

4. Early language teaching practice in Ukraine since 1991

In August 1991, exercising a release from the constraints of the past Soviet Union policy of self-isolation, Ukraine started to build new communication strategy with the world. The previous role of Russian as a major tool of international communication was substituted by other world languages. It happened to a greater degree because of the negative association of Russian with the Soviet past and the artificially enforced domination of the language over native languages of other ethnic groups in the USSR. Thus, other languages, particularly English, were welcomed as a counterbalance for the former negative experience with the Russian language. Conceptual changes were made in both native and foreign language education.

In the field of early language education, the 1990s marked a transition period from experimental teaching to mass practice of studying foreign languages (English, German, French, and Spanish) in primary schools. In the process of updating the content of school education, researchers began increasingly to turn to the experience of Western European countries in this area. One of the first documents in which an attempt was made to combine domestic and foreign experience in language education was the draft Concept of teaching foreign languages in Ukraine (Концепція, 1994). Particularly, the Concept put forward the proposal to start teaching foreign languages at preschool age, and to teach two or more languages at school.

A new national school programme adopted in 1995 declared gradual introduction of learning a foreign language into the basic curriculum of the 1st or 2nd year of schooling up to the 11th year. This graduality was determined by the need to prepare the relevant specialists and instructional materials. The first year of learning a language was seen as a special

propaedeutic course (2 classes a week), during which 6-7 year-olds had to obtain initial habits and skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing so that they would be ready to master the basic course in the target language. The main emphasis was placed on the psycho-physiological characteristics of young learners, involuntary memorization of educational material, and use of games, songs, lyrics, poems, music, facial expressions, gestures, movements, sound imitation. Teachers were equipped with much better theoretical platform, technical and visual aids, teaching sets and additional teaching materials. For the first time, they were allowed to use different resources, besides the designed inside the country textbooks, and to go beyond the officially offered syllabus and increase the learners' vocabulary through studying additional topics.

During this term, the programme of training pedagogical staff for teaching foreign languages in kindergartens and primary schools were discussed and implemented for the first time. The appropriate training of qualified specialists for efficient age-specific teaching languages to young (please, specify what 'young' means) and very young learners (please, specify what 'very young' means) became an important issue. The previous strategy of using graduates of the foreign languages faculties who were qualified as secondary and upper secondary school teachers to carry out the language classes to kids, turned out inefficient. The problem was that their educational qualifications did not meet the requirements of pedagogy and methods of elementary education and its specifics.

The practice of using teacher-training colleges in the 1990s to educate junior specialists in pre-school and primary school education with the right to teach a foreign language did not succeed because of non-compliance with state regulatory requirements for a teacher of a foreign language. It turned out that primary school teachers exposed to a foreign language competences and methodology through few specially designed courses experienced many educational constraints in their professional practice, and, therefore, not very willingly engaged in teaching the language. That is why progress in introducing foreign languages to all primary schools was very slow.

Since the beginning of the XXI century, teachers are trained in Ukraine in two specialties: "pre-school education" and "primary education" and a foreign language is added to the specialization, too. Thus, they can get qualifications that sound "Organizer of preschool education. Mentor of preschool children. Teacher of Foreign Language in Kindergarten "or "Organizer of Primary Education. Primary school teacher. Teacher of Foreign Language at Primary School ". The pre-service training in the field of early foreign language education is carried out in three types of higher education institutions:

- (1) in 41 pedagogical colleges, which prepare primary school teachers or preschool teachers with the right to teach a foreign language;
- (2) in pedagogical universities (linguistic institutes);
- (3) at the faculties of foreign philology of the classical universities (a total of 37 universities /institutes).

However, the required number of language instructors is still not satisfied because of financial unattractiveness of the teaching profession and the constant outflow of specialists with high language performance from schools to other areas of professional self-realization.

In the 1990s, teaching foreign languages in Ukraine was significantly facilitated by a start of active cooperation with Western educational and cultural institutions in the field of target language education. Different forms of collaboration were launched: opening of language resource centres; introduction of authentic language textbooks and instruction materials; initiation of language courses and summer language camps; promotion of information on the best teaching methods; exchange of secondary school and university students and language teachers; training programmes and internships; establishment of teacher-to-teacher links, etc. International partnership in language education and access to the authentic language teaching resources have fostered the practice of early language learning both in state and private educational institutions.

The 2001 school syllabus in foreign languages claimed the term of language study from the 2nd till the 12th form. It also introduced competence-based approach and recommendations of the Council of Europe on plurilingual language education at various language acquisition levels. The methodology of teaching and learning foreign languages focused on the purposes of intercultural communication. Pragmatic orientation of the new strategy determined the goals and content of learning from the standpoint of preparing for communication with native speakers and working with authentic sources of information (Nikolayeva, 2004). This general strategy of teaching a foreign language was included into the new State Standard of basic and complete secondary education adopted in 2004. Moreover, it has also decisively shuttered the outdated mode of studying the mother tongue in Ukraine as a knowledge-based system, and turned it into a dynamic process of acquiring communicative competences.

In 10 years' time, the State Standard of Primary Education (2011) approved the obligatory study of a foreign language from the 1st form in all types of general educational institutions. According to this Standard, the curricula of all regular primary schools in

Ukraine include 1 lesson of the first foreign language per week in the 1st form and 2 lessons in the 2nd-4th forms. In specialised schools, there are 3 weekly lessons in the 1st-3rd forms and 4 lessons in the 4th form. The level of language knowledge at the end of primary schooling has to correspond to level A1, as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This State Standard emphasises on taking into account cognitive abilities and needs of pupils of primary school. It determines the content of primary education as based on common values and principles of science, multiculturalism, secular education, systematic and integrative training and education on the principles of humanism, democracy, civic awareness and mutual respect between nations and peoples in the interests of the individual, family, society and state.

A Concept for the teaching of a second foreign language (Red'ko et al., 2004), and corresponding school syllabi were developed. Therefore, in the 2005/06 ac. y., compulsory study of a second foreign language since the fifth form (to 10-11 year-olds) began. However, practical implementation of this good intention of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine did not live up to its expectations. In many schools, especially in rural districts, there was serious lack of teachers qualified in two foreign languages. That is why, in schools where English was studied as the first foreign language pressure on parents in choosing a second language was reported in mass media. Parents were forced to "voluntarily" choose Russian or a language of national minorities inhabiting the territory (Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Moldavian, Slovak and some others) instead of French or German. In the summer of 2014, after extensive public discussion, the Ministry approved changes to Typical Curricula for the 5th -9th forms that were supported by teachers, pupils and parent communities. In particular, the compulsory study of a second foreign language from the fifth form in schools where the conditions for this were not yet available (absence of a teacher, etc.) were cancelled (Міносвіти, 2014). At the same time, for educational institutions where there was adequate personnel, instructional and methodological support, and most importantly – the desire of children and their parents, – a variant of typical curriculum has been developed, which allowed studying two foreign languages.

Meanwhile, the choice of foreign languages has become broader in recent times because of greater variety of qualified professionals. The last few decades have witnessed growing interest in the teaching of English to different age groups in Ukraine. According to data published in 2015, English is studied by 91% of schoolchildren (Англійська 2015). German occupies the second place. The third position belongs to French. The next in popularity is Spanish or Italian. Some students choose the Chinese language.

Today in Ukraine, bringing very young children into contact with foreign languages is fully recognized as a facilitating factor of faster language learning, development of skills in mother tongue and better performance in other areas. Early language education for the sake of naturally motivated language development of a child is provided also as an option for pre-schoolers in kindergartens or pre-school educational centres. It has become a real catch at different private courses for early development of a child since 3 years of age, that significantly raises commercial attractiveness of such courses. Researchers of the problem of an early language start in a kindergarten setting (Шкваріна, 2007), stress that this problem should be solved only in the interests of the child, so that studying the new language would be an interesting process of discoveries and cognition and not a source of negative emotions; and would positively influence the formation of personal culture without causing physical and mental fatigue.

5. Conclusions

This paper has tried to show that early foreign language education in Ukraine has a long and waves-like history that has led to accumulation of a vast experience and practical insights into the issue. The various contemporary patterns and practices of early language education evoke multiple ideas and history can provide support for many of them.

Today, Ukrainian teachers of foreign languages are striving to overcome the Soviet syndrome of isolation from the outer world and to assimilate into the community of practice where languages serve as a powerful tool of communication and intercultural exchange. It is a good sign that early language learning is recognised in the country as a significant engine of forming positive attitudes towards other languages and cultures.

Historical traditions of language education in Ukraine and far-reaching changes in the patterns of language use throughout the world make us think about the importance of creating more contexts for an early foreign language learning, besides 1-2 language classes a week. Using the foreign language as the medium of instruction in other school subjects or as a means of real communication for other school/kindergarten purposes or activities is one of possible contexts that are still waiting for implementation in Ukraine.

Early language learning is also a very strong question of the true interest of state authorities and sustainability of the state policy in language education that may contain either the seeds of defeat or the potential for advance.

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