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THE PROBLEM OF MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION (YAKUT EXPERIENCE)

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the problem of multilingual education in the context of situation in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). Through the clarification of main notions, the model of multilingual education developed now in the Sakha Republic (the largest region of the Russian Federation) is discussed. It is revealed that the model is based on “Western” approach in educational practices and characterized by the systematic integration of the teaching of languages into the educational system. It is concluded that the model is aimed at achieving functional bi- and multilingualism – effective mastering the second and third languages using bi- and multilingual education – and built on parity bilingualism (native-state languages) and in-depth study of foreign (English) language.

Keywords: multilingual education; multicultural education; cultural diversity

The development of a pluralistic language policy aimed at creating a multilingual education and society is caused by large-scale multi-channel contacts between peoples in the political, socio-economic, cultural life of the modern globalizing world. On the basis of the integration of cultures and peoples, the world cultural and educational space is intensively developing and expanding the boundaries of the interaction of a multicultural society. Such a society represents different national, ethno-linguistic, religious communities - with different beliefs, style of thinking and behavior, value systems, moral norms, and traditions. The world community today unites efforts to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity in a changing world, to achieve harmonious multilingualism and multiculturalism with the goal of convergence and spiritual enrichment of peoples - regardless of place and country of residence, type and level of education.

The idea of creating a global strategy for multilingual and multicultural education is becoming an important element of language policy in a number of countries. As the researchers note (Tishulina, 2006), the appeal to the developing resource of multicultural education as an integrative characteristic of a personality, that determines successful adaptation to the conditions of the multicultural environment, is

associated with the solution of important tasks. They are: formation of ideas about the cultural and ethnic diversity of the world, the importance of the diversity of cultures for the development of civilization and education of tolerant attitudes and behavior, respect for the right of people to preserve their language and cultural identity in the multi-ethnic environment.

The multifacetedness and ambiguity of the phenomenon of multilingualism and multiculturalism as an object of science causes the emergence of a multitude of interdisciplinary approaches. However, the very idea of multilingual multicultural education arises in society not in isolation, as some artificially invented theoretical construction, but acts as part of a certain ideology. The term “multicultural education” originally reflects the ideals of cultural pluralism in the field of education. In the “International encyclopedia of education”, published in Oxford, the term “multicultural education” is understood as “a pedagogical process in which two or more cultures that differ in terms of linguistic, ethnic, national or racial characteristics are represented” (Husén & Postlethwaite, 1994: 3963).

As is known, globalization is not only new technologies and the scale of trade, economic and financial ties, but also politics that serves certain interests, gradually penetrating all spheres of social life, among which the problems of education and upbringing of the younger generation play an important role. The transition to “globality” is an objective tendency of the development of civilization in both socio-economic and cultural-educational terms, and the task of the world community is to use its capabilities in solving vital problems of mankind and minimize its negative aspects and the consequences (Zhukovsky, 2003: 4). At the same time, a language turns into a lively and flexible system: on the one hand, there is an orientation toward the use of a single language of communication, familiarization with one leading culture; on the other – the desire to preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world, intercultural communication, and the dialogue of cultures. These two tendencies are interrelated, mutually complementary, ensuring universal progress of the world community.

Modern interpretation of multilingualism as “a description of the possibilities of one person to function in different linguistic environments” (Smokotin, 2007: 28) includes a variety of types of multilingualism in different countries.

The term “multilingual education”, adopted in Resolution of the General Conference of UNESCO, means “use of at least three languages, namely the native language, regional or national language and the international language, in education” (1999: 8). Multilingual education is seen as a tool for teaching a particular person, whose goal is the development of multilingual competence.

Modern strategies in the field of multilingual education are based on international normative documents, including the “Ljubljana Recommendations of the OSCE” (2012), the “European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages” (2000). They note that, in a broad context, multilingual and multicultural education contributes

to the equal and active participation of representatives of all ethnic communities in economic, social and political processes; the development of cultural diversity, intercultural interaction, and tolerance; the preservation and development of diverse identities. In Western countries, the search for an optimal model of multilingual and multicultural education has been achieved over several decades and is recognized as one of the effective means of reaching agreement among people from different races, ethnic and social groups. Teaching the students about the “other” cultures, understanding the common and special in the traditions, way of life, cultural values of the peoples is aimed at the importance of education and upbringing of students in the spirit of respect for other cultural systems. As the priority directions of the language policy, the principles of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and the anthropocentric character of the system of national education are based on the intercultural paradigm. At the same time, the primary methodological principle of humanizing the multilingual educational space of the modern world is the priority of the native language, which, while actively adapting the languages of other peoples, is strengthened in its richness and uniqueness.

One of the convincing examples of the desire of the modern world is to preserve multilingualism as coexistence in society of several languages is the linguistic policy of European countries that proclaimed the requirement to convert linguistic diversity into an instrument for mutual enrichment and mutual understanding. The concept of bilingual and multilingual multicultural education by means of native and second language is successfully introduced, based on the preservation and support of all minority languages in Western Europe: a) the languages of the linguistic majority and the linguistic minority; b) language, which is considered the official language of the state, and the languages of ethnic groups; c) native and foreign languages. In accordance with the language policy of multilingualism conducted by the Council of Europe, diversification and intensification of language learning is proposed as the main goal of education: from the first year of study in Europe the study of any of the main Western European languages begins, after 5 years – the study of the second language and after other 4 years – study of the third language. At the same time language training is conducted at a level ensuring fluency in at least two foreign languages. The training is not an end in itself, but a means of familiarizing trainees to the culture of their neighbors in the European home.

“Western” approach in educational practices and multilingualism is characterized by the systematic integration of the teaching of languages into the educational system. The choice of models of multilingual education, first and foremost, meets the goals and objectives of the educational policy: models, aimed at reviving the native language, – creating favorable conditions for the normalization of the use of language, reviving it as an official and written language (for example, the state languages of the former Soviet republics); models, aimed at mastering the majority language - preserving and protecting the language of the community (for example,

bilingual programs for the Sami in Finland); models, aimed at achieving functional bi- and multilingualism – effective mastering the second and third languages using bi- and multilingual education (trilingual schools in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) with training in Yakut, Russian and English).

For instance, the model of education that corresponds to the main promises of time in part of multilingual education is now being developed in the Sakha Republic (the largest region of the Russian Federation).

Actually, this is a model of multicultural education, specificity of which is its multilinguality. At the same time, the choice of languages is built in triad: native language (ethnic language), Russian language (state language), and foreign language (English). Multiculturality is conceptually built as well: it goes up from the ethnic (native) culture through regional and Russian (state) cultures to the world culture.

As a result, the model becomes a triad in the standard form - “Region-Russia-World”. The model is built on the basic principle of functional multilingualism based on parity bilingualism (native-state languages) and in-depth study of foreign (English) language. The development of the model also requires a special, sufficiently innovative, organization of the educational system on the basis of the appropriate principles, technologies and techniques.

According to the model, the initial stage of multilingual education in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) is widespread preschool educational institutions with a multinational structure. In such multiethnic kindergartens, the common basis of education and training is the mastery of Yakut and Russian speech, teaching of Basic English, formation of the foundations of civic identity and world outlook, and moral development. In order to foster trusting, friendly relations between children of different nationalities there different events dedicated to the Republican festivals (conversations, classes, exhibitions, quizzes, performances) are held. There are circles of folk dances, Yakut national outdoor games, where children get acquainted with the culture of the indigenous people of Yakutia. The culture of his/her land becomes the first step in the child’s acquaintance with the riches of world culture, knowledge of universal values.

The next stage of multilingual education in Yakutia is an eleven-year school, represented by the primary (classes 1-4), the basic general (classes V – IX), and the complete general (classes X – XI) levels.

In a school, multilingual education is built on the principle of parity bilingualism.

In connection with this, in schools of Yakutia as a language of instruction and study, two functioning state languages (Russian and Yakut) are used.

This approach combines the preservation of the fundamental educational and upbringing functions of native people’ language with a specific role of the Russian language, which becomes a medium in the functioning of the native language and an effective catalyst for the dialogue of cultures.

The methodologically sound correlation between the languages of instruction and study is the most important component of multilingual education. It expands the individual picture of the world, arming a person with a set of sociocultural codes corresponding to a complex design of identity. In this direction, teaching part of the subjects in a native language (non-Russian), and others in Russian language is justified.

It is supplemented by a different correlation of the languages of instruction at different educational levels. The native (non-Russian) language is given more attention at the initial stage of education: all subjects are given in their native language, Russian is studied as a subject. At the intermediate level the main language of instruction gradually becomes Russian, and native (non-Russian) language passes to the category of languages of study.

In addition, the study of the Yakut language as a state language by pupils of different nationalities becomes the way of their familiarization with the culture of the indigenous people of the republic in which they live. And study of foreign languages contributes to admission to the cultures of many countries and peoples.

Language education according to this multilingual model is organized in close connection to literature and other philological subjects. In addition to the basic course of teaching of Yakut, Russian and English, the complex of additional measures, directed to improving the teaching of foreign languages is proposed.

These are distribution of new textbooks, creation of multilingual internet projects, holding forums of young linguists, opening of summer linguistic camps, and holding multilingual contests.

This correlation of the languages creates conditions for the harmonious self-determination of an individual in cultural and civil dimensions set by sociocultural orientations of modern education.

In the context of modern globalization processes the study of the rich positive experience in the field of multilingual education, accumulated in countries in which multilingualism is legislated (Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, etc.), as well as in the countries where the influx of immigrants is forced to get used to another culture (USA, Germany, etc.), is of great importance for the further methodological development of multilingual education in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) to find ways to multilingualism and multiculturalism, taking into account: the language human rights; equality in communication; linguistic and cultural pluralism.

NOTES

1. UNESCO Resolution 30 C/12: Implementation of a language policy based on multilingualism in the world (1999) Retrieved from unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001185/118514r.pdf

2. Ljubljana recommendations on the integration of diverse societies, OSCE. (2012, November 7). Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/ru/hcnm/111071?download=true>
3. European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages (2000). Moscow: Norma-Infra.

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