

# **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BULGARIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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## **NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

The present study is in the area of education and focuses on English language teaching (ELT) in the primary schools in Bulgaria.

Prior to 1990's, Russian was the first language taught in Bulgarian schools. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as the emphasis in language education shifted, large numbers of Russian teachers were found to be redundant, while a shortage of English teachers rapidly developed. Thus, the object of the research is to study the state of English instruction in Bulgarian primary schools, to determine the quality and adequacy of the offerings, to compare public and private schools in this respect and make recommendations, if necessary, to education policy makers.

To achieve these aims, the study examines the personality type of the primary school English teachers, their professional and financial status. It also explores their educational background, length of practice, qualification in the language, age and sex, personal factors such as motivation and attitudes to their job. Moreover, it examines the adequacy of incentives (teachers' income and opportunities for development) to retain these teachers in the profession. The research discusses the different characteristics of the teaching environment that influence English instruction: the equipment and the published materials used in the process of teaching and learning and the available technological resources. It looks at the ratio of teachers to students, the extent of other foreign language courses and similar factors.

The research has 2 different stages. The survey instruments are first developed and tested on a small sample of primary schools in Plovdiv and the region. 2 types of questionnaires are used – the first one consisting of 18 questions for English teachers and the second one – of 11 questions used by the experts in English for lesson observations. At this stage, 77 teachers are surveyed – 55 from public and 22 from private schools. English lessons in 20 classes – 19 in public and 1 in a private school – are observed.

At the second stage, the study is conducted in all 6 geographic regions of the country in 117 public and 16 private schools. The main survey instrument is a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions.

The outcomes can be briefly summarized in the following way:

- The primary school English teachers in Bulgaria are pedagogues, oriented to the children, led by a special interest in English and getting pleasure from their work. Their motivation to get involved in teaching is easily projected as a motivation to remain in the profession. The willingness to continue working the same job correlates to the higher results of teaching.
- The differences between the private and the public schools can be systematized in two main directions: related to the qualification of the teachers and to the available technical equipment. The findings indicate that:

- the private schools have appointed three times more teachers, who have an English Language High School diploma and a degree in English Philology, than the public schools. This qualification is higher than the others (re-qualification courses, etc.)
- the private schools are better equipped than the public schools. Two thirds of the private schools have copy machines and Internet connection. Almost all of them have libraries, supplied with dictionaries, books and other teaching materials in English
- three times more classrooms in the private schools are equipped with cork and white boards, and two times more classrooms have VCRs as compared to the public schools
- the monthly remuneration of the teachers in the private schools is higher with approximately 100 levs (approx.\$65). Survey results prove no influence of the material stimulation on the motivation of the teachers, although such dependence exists in theory
- the results of the students in the private schools are higher. This proves that better conditions lead to higher achievements

Thus, it can be concluded that English language teaching in the private schools outclasses the one in the public schools by all surveyed criteria.

On the basis of the research results, concerning ELT in the primary schools in Bulgaria, some recommendations can be made to national policy makers. They should:

- give high priority to providing professional development courses. Review the present and develop new strategies and initiatives for keeping English teachers' qualification up-to-date
- improve the salaries and status of the primary school English teachers
- provide incentives – both in terms of salary differentials and career progression – for graduates with high qualifications in English to enter the teaching profession
- develop new funding schemes for the schools that should be beneficial for the quality of teaching and learning
- improve teaching conditions
- collaborate in educational renewal policy projects funded by NGOs (non-governmental organizations).