

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

This research is in the area of education and focuses on the quality of English language instruction in the primary schools in Bulgaria. The researchers are:

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## **Introduction**

English has become the most important language in most of the world. Prior to 1990's, Russian was the first foreign language taught in Bulgarian schools. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the country found itself with a shortage of English teachers, while many teachers of Russian were unemployed. Thus, the object of the present research is to study the state of English instruction in Bulgarian primary schools, to determine the quality and adequacy of the offerings, and the educational policy implications if the survey indicates that reforms are necessary. The research was conducted at 2 different stages. Our survey instruments were first developed and tested on a small sample of primary schools in Plovdiv and the region. Based on the initial pilot study, we improved and refined the survey instruments prior to applying them to the larger geographic area of the research.

## **The Educational System**

### *General features and structure*

During the last fifteen years when Bulgaria is in its transition period towards pluralistic democracy and a market economy and on its way to the European Union, considerable changes have been taking place in almost all spheres of life, including the educational system.

According to the Law for Public Education of 1991 the compulsory starting age for primary schools is 7 (the optional is 6). The age at which compulsory education ends is 16. The levels of schooling in Bulgaria are: primary education, grades 1-4, lower secondary education, grades 5-7/8 and upper secondary, grades 8-13. Students are assessed according to a 2-6 scale with 6 as the best mark.

### *Special features*

The educational system in Bulgaria has traditionally been organized within the public sector. However, a number of private institutions exist at different levels of schooling. Learning options are provided according to the principle of equal access for all citizens regardless of ethnic and social background as well as residential locality. Education is free at primary and secondary levels in the public sector. Tuition fees are charged for students in higher education. In most schools the school year begins on 15 September and finishes on 15 or 30 June. It comprises two terms in each academic year. Entrance to most of the secondary schools is determined by competitive examinations and students can choose from a number of various types of schools, each offering a different focus (such as mathematics and sciences or foreign languages).

One of the strengths of Bulgarian education is that the school system is capable of providing schooling for the vast majority of children up to the age of 16. Bulgaria has managed to maintain pre-1989 levels of pre-school enrolment (62% of the 2-7 age group), and statistics show that access to grades 1-4 is virtually universal (gross enrolment rate stands at 102%).

One of the main problems, which are of major concern in the Ministry of Education and Science, is the steep decline in birth rates. This means that by school year 2006/7, there will be 31% fewer children in grades 1-4 and 23% fewer in grades 5-8.

### *Administration and governance*

In theory, there are four levels of educational governance: national - The Ministry of Education and Science (MES), regional, municipal and school level. In reality, the regional level, 28 Educational Inspectorates, are branches of the national MES, so that the levels are only three.

The Ministry of Education and Science is entirely responsible for the state policy of education in both the public and the private sector. It has the power to issue regulatory decrees, to exercise control over the activities of all types of

schools, servicing units, and the levels of schooling. Under a new Law on Standards (*General Educational Minimum*, July 1999), the MES is also in charge of setting the school timetable in order to meet state standards, and of overseeing the implementation of the core curriculum in all schools. By law, the core curriculum covers the ‘*general educational minimum*’ and is compulsory for all schools. It covers Bulgarian grammar and literature, foreign languages, mathematics, computing and technology, social sciences and civic education, natural sciences and ecology, arts, culture, physical education and sports.

Educational Inspectorates are, again by law, ‘local subdivisions of the MES’. They are legal entities, but the MES specifies their structure, functions and territory, and issues contracts with inspectors. In addition to a national inspectorate at the MES, Bulgaria has 28 regional inspectorates, with a total of about 700 inspectors carrying out some 20 000 school inspections per year. They oversee the implementation of the state educational requirements and norms. They also review and approve school-developed curricula, school staffing structures, and financial management of schools to ensure compliance with state regulations. The new framework for inspection foresees a strong supporting role for inspectors in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

#### *Financial management*

Financial management is exercised through strictly controlled budget headings and allocations set by the funding authority. Private schools do not receive ‘state grants’. In the public sector school directors have little or no financial autonomy. Services and salaries are provided and paid for by the municipalities. In most cases, they do not permit schools to keep money they raise themselves, e.g. from rentals, on grounds that the school building does not ‘belong to’ the school, nor can extra-budgetary funds be used to raise teachers’ salaries or for the school libraries, for example. Thus, school administrators are skeptical about the reality of ‘autonomous accounts’ for schools. In common

with many other countries in the region, a very high percentage of the budget for education is spent on current expenditures such as salaries (at least 70% nationally) and utilities such as heating (at least 12%), but capital expenditures and investments have been low or non-existent. For example, only 1% is spent on teaching and learning materials! This seriously hinders the introduction of new curricula, subjects and teaching methods into Bulgarian classrooms.

### **Foreign language teaching to young learners in Bulgaria**

The growing need among young people for proficiency in foreign languages in recent years has made the Ministry of Education and Science reconsider its priorities. Teaching foreign languages from an early age beginning at grade 1 in primary schools has become a priority, followed by information technology and civic education.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education and Science initiated a curriculum development project for *Early Foreign Language Teaching (EFLT)*. According to it, a first foreign language (FL1) is introduced in grade 1 and a second one (FL2) is introduced in grade 5. Both first and second foreign languages are taught through to grade 13. The intensity of language lessons of EFLT classes for the primary level is as follows:

Grade	1	2	3	4
FL1	3	4	5	5

For all the other students who do not attend EFLT classes the national curriculum prescribes the following number of FL1 lessons per week:

Grade	1	2	3	4
FL1	No/1	2	2	2

The length of each lesson for grade 1 is 35 minutes and for grades 2, 3 and 4 it is 40 minutes.

Those children who do not study a FL as compulsory from grade 1 can have it as an optional subject if it is included among the schools subject offerings. Parents also have the right to take their children to those schools that offer the subjects in which they are interested. Adults seem to be aware of the importance of foreign languages (especially English) in the present-day and future world and manage to transmit this idea to their children. Statistics show that more than 80% of Bulgarian students choose English as FL1. Thus, schools try hard to meet their expectations. The increasing number of pupils studying English in primary schools is obvious from the following figures:

Year	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003
English	41 770	54 639	69 994	86 784	91 813

Some primary students choose other foreign languages. The most popular are German, Russian and French.

Year	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003
German	6 565	7 946	8 356	9 104	6 991
Russian	8 750	7 371	6 152	5 372	3 822
French	3 338	4 438	4 666	4 887	3 455

Primary students also have the opportunity to attend language courses after their regular lessons in the public schools. This type of language education is usually provided by private language centers, which charge a fee for their services. Their courses are aimed at a wide range of age groups, from young learners to adults. The growing market for private teaching to students of all ages has led to the development of many private schools that offer the entire

range of courses required in the public schools, too. Foreign languages are taught in all these schools and English in most of them.

### **Concept and methodology of the study**

The main concept of the present study is *English language teaching (ELT)*. Particularly, the English instruction carried out in the primary course of education (1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade) by a curriculum, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, which is obligatory for both public and private schools. This gives us the opportunity to compare the results.

Central notion in the research model is the pedagogical experience, because English language teaching is based on the achievements of the pedagogical science and practice. The pedagogical experience is the basis of teaching, especially when the subject of learning is a foreign language, not the mother tongue. It can be defined as a unity of proven and improved in the practice knowledge, skills and habits on the grounds of humanistic motives, leading to a positive result from the teaching process.

Teaching, like any other activity, has 3 different stages. It starts with a set goal or a plan, passes through the work towards its implementation and ends with the achievement of certain results. In our case, the first stage is creating a motivation within the subject (the teacher) for teaching English in a primary school. This motivation is an expression of a subjective need. The second stage is the process of teaching English and the third one is the result from the activity, i.e. the results of the primary students in English.

The scientific literature states 2 main groups of factors, which have influence on the process of teaching and its efficiency. The first group consists of the characteristics within the subject of activity (in our case, the primary school English teacher). The second one includes the characteristics of the teaching environment. Education, length of practice, training and qualification for

teaching, age and sex, psychological factors such as motivation and attitudes are part of the first group of factors. The characteristics of the teaching environment are the following: available equipment and technology, pedagogical literature, textbooks and other teaching materials, scientific conferences and seminars, workload of every teacher, i.e. the annual norm (the obligatory number of lessons) and additional work (jobs).

The main idea of the study is that not all characteristics, related to the personality of the teacher and the environment, have the same significance and influence in the process of English language teaching. Thus, our *general hypothesis* for the first stage of the research was that there are different key factors for the different stages of ELT. Our survey instruments were 2 types of questionnaires – the first one consisting of 18 questions for the teachers in English and the second one - of 11 questions used by the experts in English for lesson observations.

SPSS has been used in processing the empirical data together with:

1. Chi square for the relationship between 2 quality variables;
2. One-way ANOVA of variance for the relationship between quantity and quality variables;
3. Pearson's correlation coefficient for determining the relationship between 2 quantity variables.

## **FIRST STAGE OF THE RESEARCH – PLOVDIV AND THE REGION**

At the first stage we conducted the research in a small sample of primary schools in Plovdiv and the region (the towns of Purvomai, Brezovo and Hisar). On one hand, we were interested in the personality type of the primary school English teacher and on the other, in the different characteristics of the teaching environment that influence English instruction. To achieve our aims, we explored the educational and experience background of the primary English



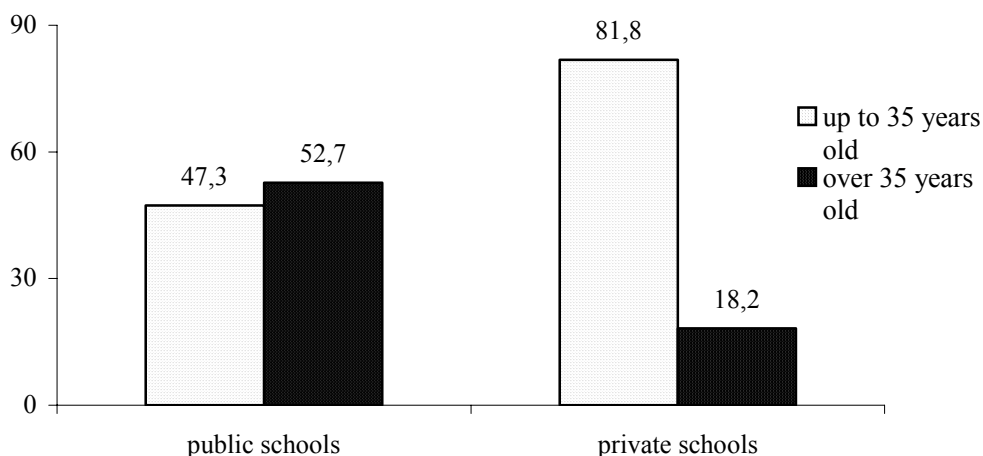
teachers. We looked at factors such as the universities where they have studied, the number of years they have taught. We also examined the equipment and technology, the published materials used by teachers and students and the resources available to them. Our sample was large enough to permit us to draw inferences about English instruction in the primary schools in Plovdiv and the region: 77 teachers have been surveyed – 55 from public schools and 22 from private ones. English lessons in 20 classes – 19 in public schools and 1 in a private school – have been observed (only these teachers gave us permission to attend one of their lessons). The results were subjected to appropriate statistical analyses.

### **Personality type of the primary school English teacher**

The primary English teachers in Plovdiv and the region are mostly women – 94.8% and 5.2% are men. 50.6% have worked as teachers in English for up to 4 years. 57.1% are up to 35 years old.

Private schools prefer young teachers. It has to be mentioned that 81.8% of the teachers in the private schools are up to 35 years old, while the percentage in the public ones is 47.3%.

**AGE OF PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHERS**



When choosing that particular job the primary teachers were guided first by “special interest” in teaching English – 63.6%, and in second - by the feeling of vocation in this occupation – 36.7%. They are highly motivated because they are led by values and ideals and not by external factors such as other’s influence or accidental admittance at university.

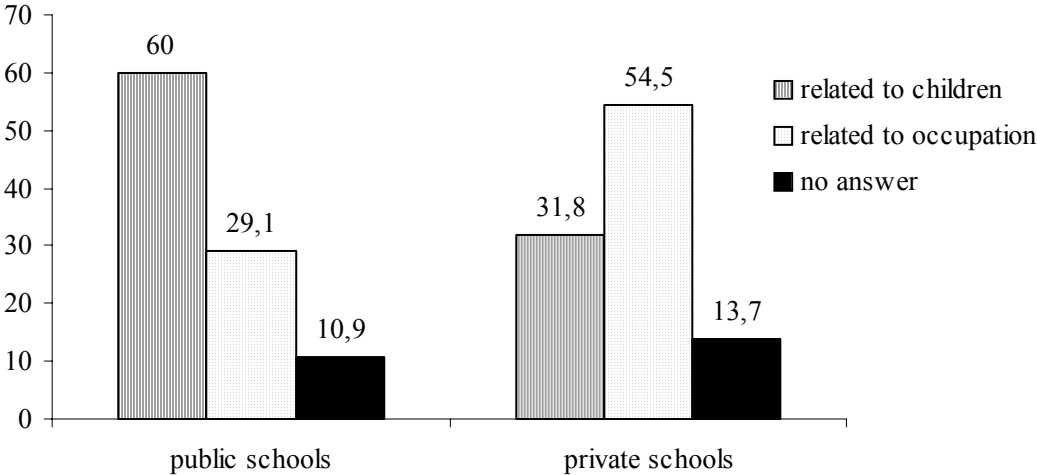
In the hierarchy of professional values of the primary teacher the English language takes the highest place. The most frequent answer to the question “What attracts you to English language teaching?” is the “pleasure of teaching English” – 67.5%, followed by “satisfaction with the results” – 53.2%, “respect, prestige in society” – 45.5%, “contact with students” – 6.5%. The sum is larger than 100% because the teachers have given more than one answer.

The pleasure of teaching English and the satisfaction with the results are factors of personality, while the contact with students and the social prestige are factors of the environment. After the correlative analysis was completed, we figured out that the teachers influenced by both types of factors have achieved higher results in teaching than those attracted only by the pleasure and satisfaction. The average mark from the lesson observations of the first group of teachers is Very good (5), and that of the second one – Good (3.90). It’s possible that professionalism unifying both groups of factors has influenced the result of the activity.

In their work, primary school English teachers rely mostly on qualities related to the rapport with students such as “communicative skills” – 51.9%, “patience” and “tactfulness”. Others (36.4%) rely on their “knowledge” and “experience”. Another part – 31.7% could not answer which personal quality helps them most in the process of teaching. Compared with the private teachers – 31.8%, those from the public sector are orientated to students – 60%, i.e. their relations with the children are of much greater significance to them than their

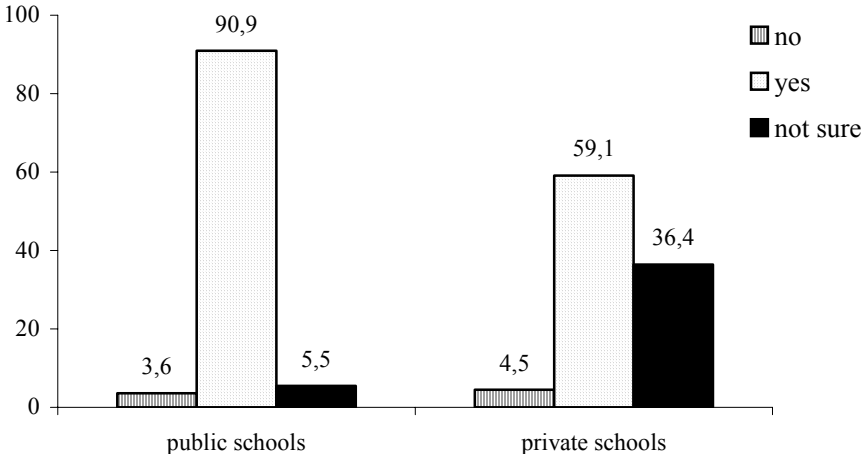
language competence and qualification, for example. That serves as another answer to the question related to values.

**WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY THAT HELPS YOU IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH?**



English teachers’ positive attitude towards the profession can be seen from their willingness to choose it again – 81.8%. Only 3.9% would refuse this opportunity while another 14.3% hesitate. Almost all of the surveyed teachers from the public sector – 90.9% – would repeat their choice, while 59.1% of the private teachers would do it.

**IF YOU COULD CHOOSE AGAIN WOULD YOU BECOME A PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHER?**



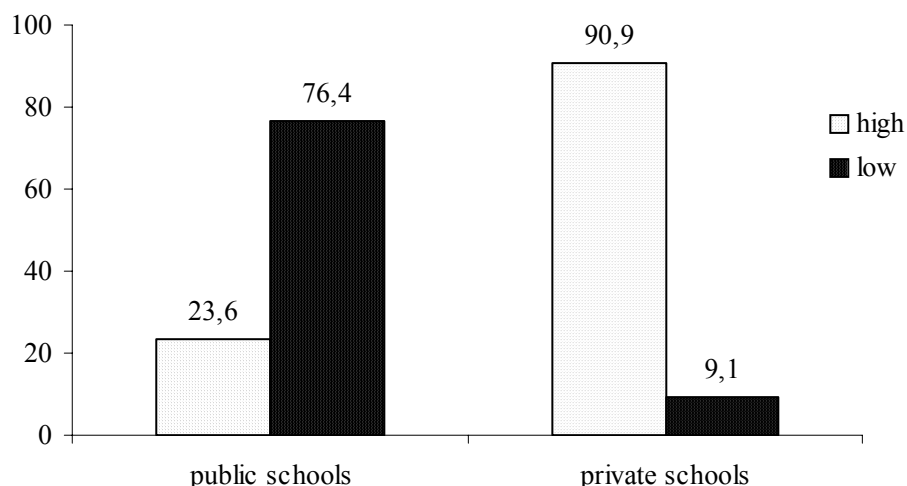
It is possible that some private teachers valued their profession highly because they connected it with greater expectations that were not justified and resulted in disappointment.

As a whole, teachers' level of education is very high – 54.5% have a Master's degree, 42.9% – a Bachelor's degree and 2.6% have only a high school diploma. However, these data conceal a very serious problem of English language education in the public sector. The teachers with a Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy, Russian philology, etc. have re-qualified and now work as teachers in English. After a thorough analysis of questions Q6 and Q7 some important conclusions were drawn in this respect. The different categories of English teachers currently teaching in the primary schools in Plovdiv and the region are the following:

1. Teachers with English as a major who have completed a four or five year university course (English Philology, Pedagogy of Teaching English and Bulgarian)
2. Teachers with English as a minor who have completed a four-year university course (Primary Pedagogy with English as a Foreign Language)
3. Re-trainees or teachers who are graduates in Russian Philology, Primary School Pedagogy, etc. and who have completed a one-year intensive university re-training course aimed at qualifying for English language teaching
4. Teachers who have undergone a three-year course in colleges and are qualified to teach ages 6-14. In most cases they have attended only a short-term English courses. Thus, they are deficient in English language performance
5. Substitute teachers who are usually unqualified. They are mainly graduates of comprehensive schools or foreign language high schools.

Survey results show that 90.9% of the teachers in the private schools are graduates in English philology or Pedagogy of teaching English and Bulgarian, while that percentage in the public schools is 23.6%.

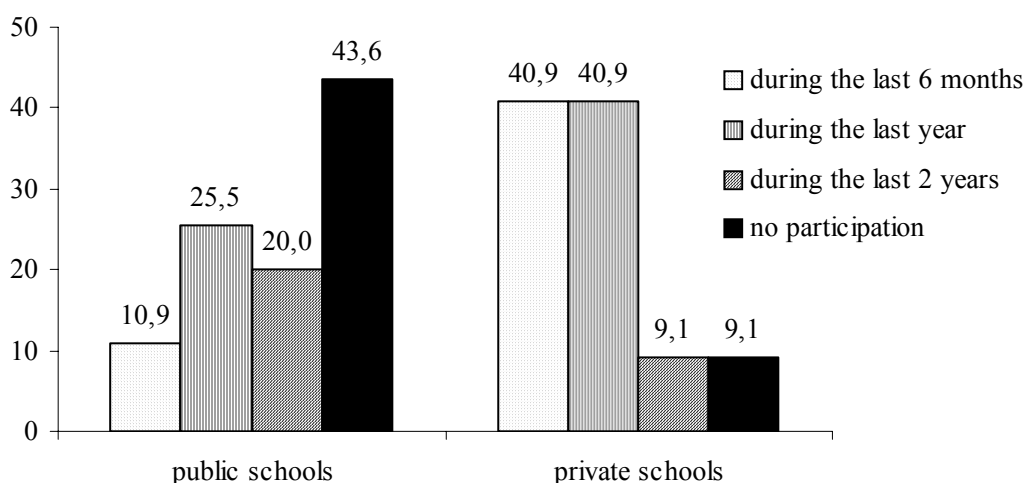
#### QUALIFICATION OF PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHERS



This is probably due to the relatively low prestige of primary education, difficulty of work at this level and to the attractive market offers for qualified teachers.

One third of the primary English teachers in Plovdiv and the region did not participate in seminars or conferences relevant to the English language in the last two years – 33.8%. This includes 24 of 55 teachers in the public sector and 2 of 22 in the private one. 40.9% of the teachers in the private schools and 10.9% in the public ones took part in such forums during the last 6 months.

**WHEN DID YOU LAST PARTICIPATE IN A CONFERENCE,  
SEMINAR, ETC. RELATED TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE?**



We can conclude that maintenance of qualification is typical of the private school teachers but not for those who work in the public sector. This is probably due to the fact that most private schools offer their teachers financial support if they want to take part in professional workshops or seminars outside the school, while the situation in the public sector is far from that.

The essential role of teachers' qualification for the results of education was confirmed in this study, too. The correlation between the average marks of the observed lessons and the level of teachers' education was examined. The work of the teachers lacking in special qualification (those who have not graduated in English philology, Pedagogy of teaching English and Bulgarian or Primary pedagogy with English as a FL) was assessed by the experts as Good (3.90) and that of the teachers with high level of education as Very good (5.40). The teachers with a Master's degree got Very good (4.50) as an average mark for teaching English and those with a Bachelor's and high school degree – Good (3.50).

The length of practice as a routine and experience has influenced the quality of teaching, too. The shorter length of practice is related with weaker results.

The teachers with teaching experience up to 4 years received an average mark Good (3.80) for their lessons; those with teaching experience from 5 to 10 years – Good (4.30); and the lessons of those who have worked as English teachers for more than 10 years were assessed as Excellent (5.50). We did not have enough data to compare public and private sector in this respect (experts were admitted to observe only one lesson in the private sector).

## **Characteristics of the teaching environment**

### *Equipment and technology*

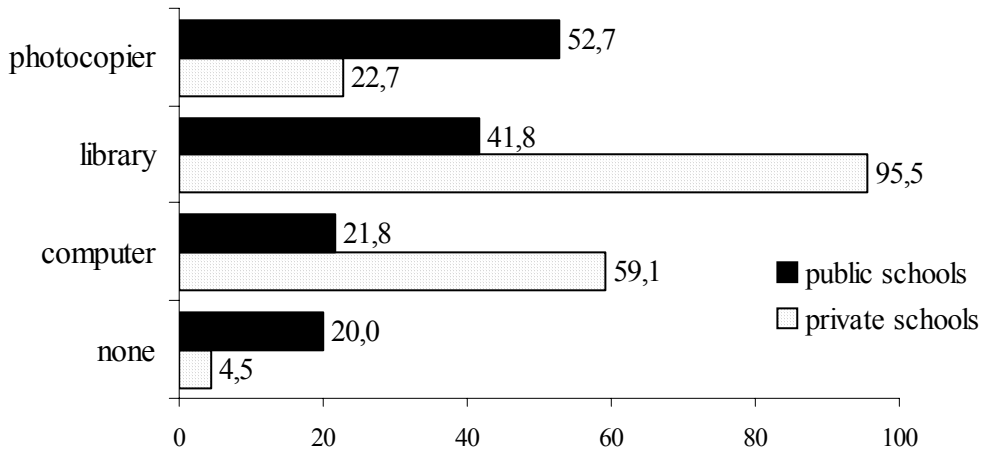
For many years the blackboard was the only aid used by teachers. In today's technological world there is a wide range of modern resources available. Technology provides variety in lessons and makes them more interesting for students. It can help to present ideas in different ways, generate new activities and stimulate discussion. But only if it is available to teachers and in case it is used well.

Survey results show that it is still hard for most English teachers to apply effectively approaches to language learning which involve the use of technology or other sources of information (e.g. TV/video, multimedia, etc.).

The English teachers in Plovdiv and the region can use a library – 57.1%, a photocopier – 44.2% and a computer – 32.5% in their schools. The sum is greater than 100% because the teachers have given more than one answer.

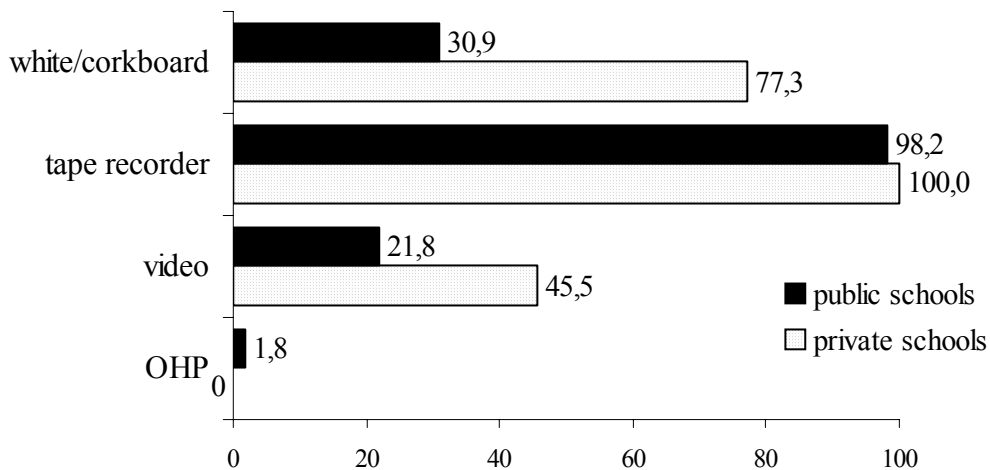
However, there are still some questions of great importance the answers to which we can only suppose: Do English teachers have access to a school library with a comprehensive, professionally adequate collection of books, dictionaries and supplementary materials they need for their teaching? Can teachers use a computer (and Internet) at school any time they need it? How often can the school's photocopier be used for producing materials?

**WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT CAN YOU USE IN YOUR SCHOOL?**



The most common piece of technology that teachers have access to is the tape recorder. Most course books have listening activities and the course cassette is an invaluable resource for the teachers. Other technical aids such as white and corkboards can be found mainly in the private schools – 77.3%. Most of the English teachers from the public schools are left with board and chalk to run the language classes while the needs and demands of students have changed and their expectation as to what they can really do with the foreign language are not met to the full.

**WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT CAN YOU USE IN YOUR LESSONS?**





### *Materials used in ELT*

The Ministry of Education and Science is the only body authorized to approve and recommend a list of international and local textbooks to be used for every grade and type of school. The schools then select among the listed textbooks, which generally fit into three main categories: textbooks written and published locally; international textbooks licensed for publishing in Bulgaria (mainly for higher grades) and original international textbooks offered on the Bulgarian market by representatives of the publishers. Besides the chosen textbooks teachers are free to use any other materials they consider useful and appropriate.

Our survey results show that most of the primary English teachers work with international textbooks – 87%. The other 13% use local ones. Because parents have to pay for the coursebooks they may prefer their children to use those that are not so expensive, if possible. Such are most of the locally published materials. If parents can afford to pay, more course books from internationally recognized publishers (*Longman, Oxford University Press, etc.*) could be used. Nevertheless, in most cases, parents pay for the coursebooks chosen by the English teacher, of course from the list of the approved ones.

Apart from prices there are still other differences between the locally produced and foreign textbooks. The local course books always contain a bilingual dictionary. The grammar sections are, as most English teachers agree, well organized, but in some cases grammar is stressed too much. Some of the local textbooks do not have a separate activity or test book. Their teacher's books do not contain detailed methodological guidance and their audio - cassettes do not contain a variety of listening activities comparable to most international textbooks.

## **Lesson Observations**

### *General Characteristics*

Every lesson is unique and is made up of different stages. English lessons can focus on grammar, vocabulary, reading or writing. They may contain listening and speaking activities and concentrate on introducing new language items or on revision. The actual content of any lesson will depend on what the teacher aims to achieve during the lesson, the students and the teaching situation. However, the following three elements should be present in every teaching sequence, whatever the teaching point: *Engage, Study and Activate*. In other words, it is important to get the students interested in the subject, they need to be introduced systematically to the way that English is put together and finally they need to be given the chance to produce the language. Each lesson should also have clear and realistic aims. Whatever the level of experience, it is of crucial importance that all teachers take the time to think through their lessons before they enter the classroom. Without some kind of planning, a lesson could be just as chaotic and could leave the students with no clear idea of what they were doing or why.

The above-mentioned parameters together with some other characteristics of a language lesson– the way different skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), grammatical and lexical items are presented – were taken into consideration in the development of the questionnaire for experts. Finally, the following parameters were included: teaching and/or doing exercises on grammar and vocabulary, listening, reading, speaking, writing, classroom management and students' performance. They were assessed according to a 2-6 scale with 6 as the best mark. A separate sheet of paper with the expert's comments was also attached to that questionnaire for every observed lesson.

We were admitted to observe 20 English lessons in Plovdiv (17) and the region (3) – 19 in public schools and only 1 in a private school. Observation was

viewed as control over the teacher's work and in most schools (especially the private ones) teachers and school principals were very sensitive to such interference.

Three of the observations were in grade 1 classes (15%), five in grade 2 classes (25%); eight were in grade 3 (40%) and four in grade 4 (20%). The average number of students in a class was 23. Fifteen of the observed classes (80%) were following the EFLT curriculum. The course books used were mainly international (95%): *English Together, Longman* (75%) and *Bravo, Heinemann* (20%). In only 1 of the observed lessons students used a local course book: *Dominoes, Lettera*. The teachers of the observed classes had different qualifications in English. More than a half (55%) were re-trainees; others (30%) were graduates in English Philology Primary Pedagogy with English and the rest (15%) – in Primary Pedagogy with English.

There were blackboards, enough desks/tables and chairs in all the rooms. Tape recorders were available for most of the lessons.

### *Conducting the lessons*

The experts assessed five of the observed lessons (25%) as excellent. In 80% of them the teachers were philologists and they all had a lesson plan prepared in advance. These lessons were conducted mainly in English. Their content was at a language level appropriate for the students, the aims were realistic. The teachers presented new grammar and vocabulary in familiar structures and clear context, using varied materials and aids (pictures, flashcards, etc.). They personalized language work, elicited where possible, they didn't just 'lecture'. Students were given a lot of opportunities to use a wide range of English as naturally as possible (e.g. in games, role plays, etc.). They participated actively and the teachers encouraged and praised them. For example, one of the teachers rewarded correct answers with a sticker – "Well done!" or "You're the best!". The teachers often changed activities and types of interactions (e.g. individual,

pair, group work), thus keeping students engaged and interested. These teachers also managed to adapt to the specific needs of the students (shy, too slow/fast, etc.) and paid a lot of individual attention. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed. At the end of the lessons the teachers highlighted again the main points, thus giving the students a clear sense of achievement. In general, the teachers' linguistic competence was excellent, they were committed to finding new and innovative ways to make language learning more effective, satisfying and enjoyable.

Very good was the average mark for 30% of the lessons. Most of the teachers were primary ones who have undergone re-training qualification courses in English (66%) and half of them had a written plan for the lesson. Most of the characteristics present in the 'excellent' lessons could be observed here, too. The teachers had the materials (pictures, tape recorder, etc.) prepared in advance. They used 'warmers' to get the students ready to study and work in English and revised things they would need during the lesson. Most of them used different types of activities and interaction to achieve their aims. However, in some of these lessons the teachers preferred the grammar-translation method as a 'safe' way to check students' understanding rather than comprehension questions, for example. Sometimes they spent too long writing on the board with their backs to the class. In other cases, they over-corrected students which kept some of them for attempting to use the language for fear of making errors. The highest experts' mark for the 'very good' lessons was on students' work – Very good (5), while the lowest was on developing speaking skills – Good (4).

Another part of the observed lessons (35%) was assessed as good. For most of the teachers (86%) English wasn't their major. Some were graduates in Primary pedagogy with English; the others were re-trainees. None of them had a written plan. In most of these lessons neither extra materials were used nor tape recorder. Students were given too many words (and transcriptions) even without drilling (repeating the words chorally or individually). Teachers' instructions

and questions were not clear and precise, too much unnecessary explanation in Bulgarian was used. Some of the activities were continued for too long and the children lost interest. Most of the teachers worked only with certain students, usually the best ones, leaving the others silent and passive throughout the lesson. A great number of teachers did not correct errors properly. Moreover, they themselves made some grammatical, lexical and pronunciation mistakes. In most of these lessons students stood still behind their desks all the time and so did the teachers. Thus, they could neither pay individual attention to students, nor use different types of interaction. Generally, these were lessons dominated by grammar and translation, the teachers taught children about the language rather than how to use it. The students' performance got the highest average mark in this group of lessons – Good (4), while the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and speaking the lowest one – Fair (3).

Only two of the observed lessons (10%) were assessed as fair. Both teachers were re-trainees. Neither of them had a lesson plan. They did not manage to motivate students. They worked only with the best children – very few in each class. The others were not involved in any kind of meaningful communication in English. The students mainly read and translated both the lesson and the instructions. The teachers wrote the new words on the board without asking the students to repeat them and even without pronouncing the words themselves. The students read whole exercises without any comments or correction of mistakes on the teacher's part. Too many language items were presented at once. The students were not given enough opportunities to listen to correct English before being asked to speak (if asked at all!). The language used for classroom management was Bulgarian. There was no smooth transition between the different parts of the lesson. The timing of the activities was poor. There were no visible signs of interest and involvement on the part of the teacher and students. The teaching of grammar and vocabulary in both lessons was marked as poor (2).

## SECOND STAGE OF THE RESEARCH

### Concept and methodology

The research at the second stage aimed at studying the state of English language instruction in the primary schools (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade) in both public and private sector in Bulgaria. Thus, we set the following goals:

- 1) To make a socio-psychological profile of the primary school English teacher;
- 2) To describe the different factors which have influence on the process of teaching;
- 3) To analyze the differences in the teaching process in the public and private schools;

As it was mentioned above, two groups of factors are known to exist from the scientific literature, which influence the process of teaching and its efficiency. The first group consists of the characteristics within the subject of activity (in our case, the primary school English teacher). The second one includes the characteristics of the teaching environment. The main idea of the study is that not all characteristics, related to the personality of the teacher and the environment, have the same significance and influence in the process of English language teaching. Thus, our *general hypothesis* here was the same as for the first stage of the research, i.e. that there are different key factors for the different stages of ELT. Thanks to the reviewers' comments and the survey findings from the first stage of the study, we formulated 3 more hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The main factor, which determines the orientation towards teaching English, having in mind the modern psychological idea of motivation, is the needs of the activity, which turn into needs of the person.

*Hypothesis 2:* Teaching depends mostly on the level of methodological skills and pedagogical experience. Among the many competing characteristics under this hypothesis, we have chosen teacher's qualification in English.

*Hypothesis 3:* In providing the conditions for efficiency at the previous two stages, there is also provided the high level of the third stage – the result from English language teaching.

Prior to applying them to the larger geographic area of the study, we also revised our survey instruments to respond to reviewers' comments. Our team is grateful to the reviewers for offering suggestions that enabled us to improve the research methodology. At the second stage, the survey was conducted with a questionnaire of 25 questions. SPSS has been used in processing the empirical data together with:

- 1) Chi square for the relationship between 2 quality variables;
- 2) One-way ANOVA of variance for the relationship between quantity and quality variables;
- 3) Pearson's correlation coefficient for determining the relationship between 2 quantity variables.

The verification of the hypotheses was confirmed at 0.05 or 0.07 significance level.

The statistical data from 2003 show that the schools offering primary education in Bulgaria are 2503 (out of 2720 in total), having 325,885 pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Because of the irregular distribution of pupils in the schools in the towns and villages, the present sociological excerpt has been formed in proportion to the number of pupils and is based on the following factors:

- 1) Geographical regions;
- 2) Types of settlements;
- 3) Types of schools.

This concerns only the excerpt on the public primary schools.

Bulgaria is divided into 6 geographical regions: 1) North-West with district town – Vratsa; 2) North Central with district towns – Pleven and Rouse; 3) North-East with district towns – Varna and Targovishte; 4) South-East region with district town – Yambol; 5) South Central region with district towns - Plovdiv, Pazardzhik and Haskovo; 6) South-West region with district towns – Blagoevgrad and the capital city – Sofia.

Under ‘a type of settlement’ we understand: a capital city, a town – district center, other town - municipal center and a village.

The types of schools that offer elementary education (1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade) are the following:

- 1) Primary school (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 2) Basic school (1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 3) Combined school (1<sup>st</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> grade).

The excerpt regarding the private schools is very detailed, i.e. all private schools in the examined regions have been included in the survey. 16 schools out of 59 in the country have been included in the total. The other private schools are not subject of the study, because they do not offer English language instruction in general or there are no such classes in the elementary course of education (1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade). The excerpt regarding private schools corresponds to the one that has been planned for the public schools. The survey was held in a total of 117 public schools in the following types of settlements:

- 1) The capital city - Sofia – 15 schools
- 2) Towns – district centers – 42 schools
- 3) Other towns-municipal centers – 28 schools
- 4) Villages – 32 schools.

The total number of the surveyed private schools is 16, out of which 10 are located in Sofia City, 1 is in the town of Plovdiv, 2 are in the town of Varna, 1 is in the town of Haskovo and 2 are in the town of Blagoevgrad. In this case the



excerpt is of representative character regarding the private schools and it is comprehensive in view of the regions where the survey was held.

### **Socio-psychological profile of the primary school English teacher**

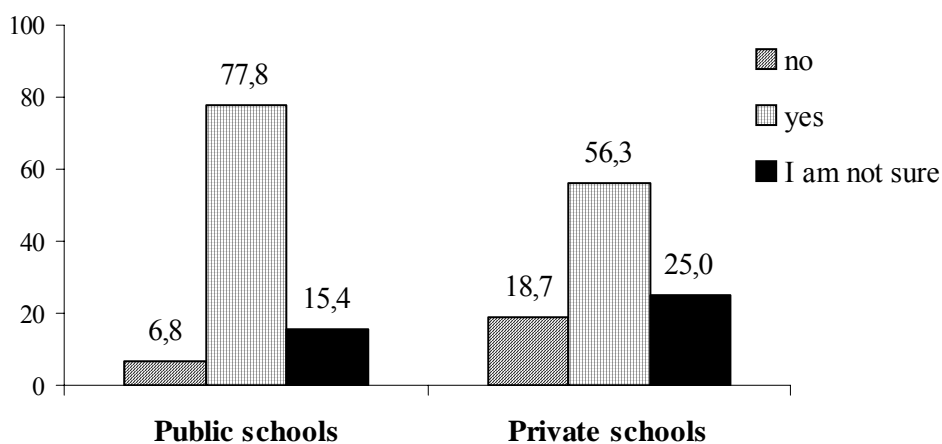
The verification of Hypothesis 1, treating the reasons for the orientation of the teachers towards teaching English, calls for finding a correlation between their motivation and the results of the pupils. This hypothesis was confirmed after a certain correction. The theoretical model and the adopted idea of motivation gave us grounds for that. In the case with the surveyed teachers, motives are the key factors but not these for the choice of a profession; they are rather those motives for remaining in the profession. The next correlation explains the confirmation of Hypothesis 1. By the question “If you could choose again, would you become a primary school English teacher?” there is sought a correlation between the results of the pupils and the disposition of the teachers towards their profession. It was found that the teachers who have a positive attitude towards their work are more successful in teaching – their pupils have a total result above Very good 5 (students in Bulgaria are assessed according to a 2-6 scale with 6 as the best mark). The students of those teachers who would not choose again to work in a primary school have achieved lower results – up to Very good 5.

While motives are internal dispositions, which determine the attitude, motivation is connected with evaluation and control. In our case, the teachers have made an evaluation of their career and they have updated their choice. Thus, the motives for choice of a profession turn into motives for remaining in the same profession. Primary school English teachers’ positive attitude towards their job can be seen from their willingness to choose it again – 72.5%. Only

8.3% are not motivated to repeat their choice and another 16.5% show indifference.

Interesting is the correlation between the positive attitude of the private and state-employed teachers: 56.3% of the teachers in the private schools and 77.8% of the teachers in the public schools would make the same choice of profession. It is possible that the high criteria, which the teachers in the private sector should meet, are connected with more responsibilities and difficulty of work at this level, which influence their attitude towards teaching. The lower percentage of teachers from the private as compared to the public schools in this case can also be due to the other attractive market offers for them.

**IF YOU COULD CHOOSE AGAIN, WOULD YOU BECOME  
A PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER?**



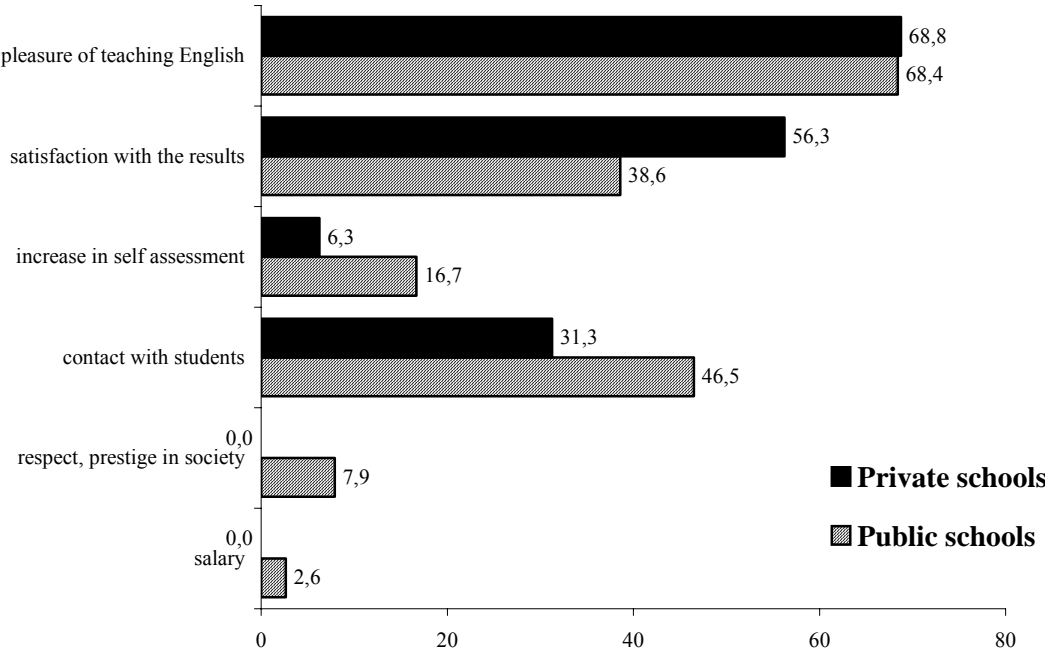
The study of the motives showed that for 62.4% of the teachers the most significant factor for their orientation towards teaching is the “special interest” in the language, i.e. a rational choice has been made. The second important factor, which was indicated by 30.1% of the teachers, is the feeling of vocation in this occupation. Both private and state-employed teachers have the same motives for choosing the teacher’s profession. For 90.2% it is a personal need and only for 9.8% it is due to external factors such as family, friends or accidental circumstances – “I was enrolled to study this major” (Question 12).

The “pleasure of teaching English” makes the profession attractive to 68.5% of the surveyed teachers, while the “contact with students” – for 44.6% of them. These answers are followed by the “satisfaction with the achieved results” – 40.8%. The sum exceeds 100%, because more than 1 answer was given.

The teachers from the private schools like their profession mostly because of the “pleasure of teaching English”, indicated by 68.8% and the “satisfaction with the achieved result”, indicated by 56.3% of them.

The teachers from the public schools, which have been attracted by the “pleasure of teaching English”, are of the same proportion – 68.4%, but the “contact with students”, indicated by 46.5%, is of greater importance for them than the results.

**WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING?**



It can be concluded that the factors of psychological nature have more influence on the motivation of the primary school English teachers – they have been indicated 162 times of a total of 232 choices – compared to the factors of

environment such as salary, social prestige and contact with pupils, which have been indicated 70 times.

We could summarize that the attitude of the English teachers towards the specific subject of teaching is of high value. Teachers are led by a special interest in English and the pleasure of teaching it. In support of this statement comes also the fact that 69 (73.4%), out of 94 re-qualified teachers, have chosen English among other possibilities. Only 26.6% 'were forced' to orientate towards teaching English, i.e. that was the only opportunity for them to remain working as primary teachers.

The English language prevails over the other foreign languages in all primary schools – in 92.3% of the public and in 92.5% of the private ones.

In the public schools parents submit requests about what language they prefer their children to learn from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The interest in English is the greatest and that is why it is preferred to the other foreign languages.

Thus, we can state that not only the teachers in the primary schools set a high valuation on the English language; this is also valid for most of the parents. The belief that English will open new horizons for the children has become part of the philosophy of life of the Bulgarians.

With the question "Which is the most important quality that helps you in English language teaching?" we expected to receive an answer to the dilemma that most teachers are faced with in their job: orientation towards the pupils or orientation towards the subject (the language). The primary school English teachers are rather orientated towards the pupils. In their work, 43.9% of the surveyed teachers rely mostly on qualities such as "communicative skills", "patience" and "tactfulness" which are related to the rapport with students. 24.2% are orientated towards the school subject and rely on their knowledge and language competence, self-discipline and organizational skills. 12.1% combine both and 19.7% did not answer this question.

The ability to communicate with students serves as basis of the pedagogical practice. This was also confirmed from the present research. The primary teachers have judged that the pupils need more their love and attention rather than their language competence. The orientation of the teachers in both private and public schools is the same regarding this issue.

The primary school English teacher belongs to the group of “young adults”, which has a higher potential for work – 82% are up to 40 years old. 34.6% are between 20 and 30 years old and 47.4% are between 30 and 40 years old. 18% of the surveyed teachers are above 40 years old. The average age of the teachers is 33.8 years. In the private sector it is 32.5 years and in the state sector – 35.1 years.

Most of the teachers are women – 94.7%. The men are merely 5.3%.

The results from this survey show that the primary school English teacher does not seek support from syndicates. Only 26.3% are members of a professional union. In the private schools they are only 6.3%, and in the public schools – 29.1%. In fact the syndicates in Bulgaria do not have influence on the private sector. The teacher’s professional union within the Confederation of the Independent Syndicates in Bulgaria has strong positions, but most of its members are teachers from the public schools only.

### **The process of English language teaching**

The second hypothesis points to the qualification of the teachers as a major factor in the process of teaching. This hypothesis was confirmed at a 0.07 significance level.

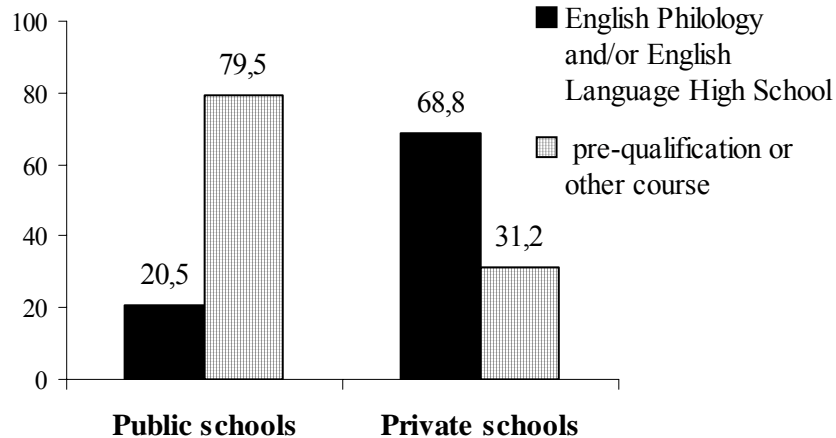
The major part of the primary school English teachers – 70.7% are re-trainees, i.e. teachers who are graduates in Russian Philology, Primary School Pedagogy, etc. and who have completed a one-year intensive university re-training course aimed at qualifying for English language teaching. In the public

schools such teachers are 79.5% of the surveyed ones, while in the private schools they are 31.2%. This fact could be explained by the high criteria in the process of selection of teachers in the private sector (e.g. they have to pass tests and interviews for professional suitability), while the teachers in the state sector are in most cases appointed only by their diplomas. Moreover, the appointment through personal connections still has influence in the selection of teachers in the state sector.

The correlation between the students' results and the level of teachers' qualification in English was examined. The teachers, who have studied at an English Language High School or have graduated from a university majoring in English Philology, achieve higher results in the process of education. Their students' marks are above Very good 5. The teachers with re-qualification train their students at a lower level – up to Very good 5. Out of all teachers, these who have university degree in English Philology are 20.3%, and those who have also graduated from an English Language High School are 6%, i.e. only 26.3% of the surveyed teachers have the best possible qualification in the language. It should also be considered that the educational statute of English Language High Schools in Bulgaria is very high. There is also a difference in the qualification level of the teachers in the private and in the public schools. In the private sector, 68.8% of the English teachers have graduated from an English Language High School and have a degree in English Philology, while in the public schools the teachers with such qualification are only 20.5%.

Thus, it can be concluded that the qualification structure of the private schools is better than that of the public ones. The intensive re-qualification courses cannot achieve the quality of the specialized training in the English Language High Schools or in English philology.

### WHAT QUALIFICATION DO YOU HAVE IN ENGLISH?



Out of all the teachers (35) who are graduates from English Language High Schools and have a degree in English philology, 40% have improved their qualification in English by obtaining extra certificates or diplomas. 14.3% of them are working in the private sector and 25.7% in the state sector. All of them are aware that professional development is an on-going process and it matters. However, there is no annual budget line for that and thus the MES has few mechanisms to influence its content and quality.

Another effective way of keeping up-to-date with new ideas and techniques, upgrading your skills or advancing your career is the participation in conferences, seminars, courses, etc. related to English language teaching. During the last 6 months and 1 year 54.9% of the surveyed teachers have taken part in such forums, while during the last 2 years – 6%. Quite disturbing is the fact that a great number of teachers have never attended such seminars, workshops, etc. – 39.1%. In almost all the cases that is due to financial difficulties (teachers have to pay themselves for expenses). They cannot also easily get paid leave or find substitutes. Moreover, teachers are not motivated to attend courses or take part in seminars, etc. because there is no system of incentives (salary differentials between ‘levels of qualification’ are very low).

The essential role of teachers' qualification as a factor of the personality that influences the process of teaching was also proven by the correlation between the participation of the teachers in professional forums and the results of the students. The teachers who have attended such forums teach their students better than those who have not. The classes of the former have an average result above Very good 5, and of the latter – up to Very good 5.

After a detailed analysis of the seminars and conferences attended by the surveyed teachers we specified 2 groups by the factor “organizer of the forum”: 81.4% of the teachers have participated in Bulgarian events, most often organized by the Ministry of Education and Science, and 18.6% have taken part in international events, most often organized by the British Council.

It turned out, that the length of practice as an English teacher is not a factor in the process of ELT, because it does not correlate to the result of the pupils. Survey findings show that 35.3% have worked as primary school English teachers for 1-2 years; 28.6% – 3-5 years; 19.5% – 5-10 years; 16.6% – 10-30 years. Most of the teachers have teaching experience of 1 year. The short length of practice in English language teaching is due to the young age of the teachers, as well as to the re-qualification (re-trainees have longer length of practice in their majors, not as English teachers), which is the probable reason this factor does not influence the process of teaching.

There is a difference between private and public schools regarding the length of practice above 5 years. More than half of the teachers in the private sector – 56.3% and 1/3 of the teachers in the public schools – 33.3% have worked as primary school English teachers for more than five years.

In general, the educational level of the surveyed teachers is high – 95.5% have a Bachelor's and/or a Master's degree, and the rest of them – 4.5% have graduated from an English Language High School or a three-year college. We did not find a correlation between the educational level of the teacher and the results achieved by the pupils. Thus, regarding English language teaching, the

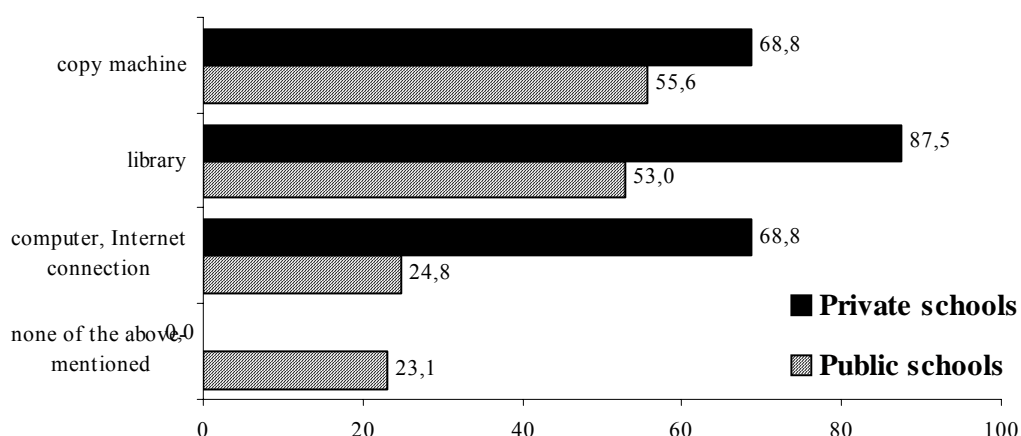


educational degree is not a factor. Possible reasons for that are the various specialties of the teachers, as well as the re-qualification courses. The pedagogical experience and skills in many cases do not depend on the level of education.

The preparation of the teacher for the lesson is an important stage of the process of teaching. Survey results show that primary school English teachers most often rely on the textbooks and the methodological manuals (indicated by 93.4%). Fiction and periodicals are less used – 51.6%. A small number of teachers use audio/videocassettes and Internet while preparing for the lessons – 19.7%. The total of the percentages is higher than 100, because more than 1 answer was given.

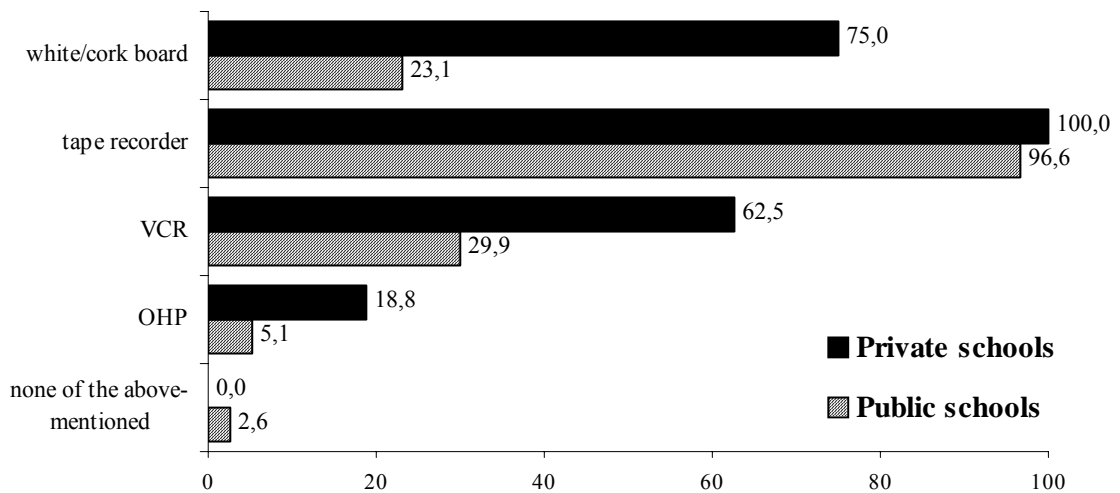
Equipment and technology are directly connected to the teaching process. They provide variety, help to present new ideas and activities or stimulate discussion. One fifth (23.1%) of the schools, and those are only public ones, do not have any available technical equipment. 57.1% of all schools have libraries and use copy machines. Public schools are mostly provided with copy machines – 55.6%, while in most of the private ones – 87.5% – there is a school library with a comprehensive, professionally adequate collection of English books, dictionaries, etc. 24.8% of the state-employed and 68.8% of the private teachers can use computers with Internet connection in their schools.

**WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT CAN YOU USE IN YOUR SCHOOL?**



The most frequently used type of equipment during the English lessons is the audio tape recorder – indicated by 97% of the surveyed teachers. There are white or corkboards in 29.3% of the schools. Here, there is a great difference between the two types of schools: 75% of the private schools and only 23.1% of the public ones have such boards. Similar is the situation regarding VCRs: in 62.5% of the private and 29.9% of the public schools teachers have video equipment at their disposal. Overhead projectors are rarely used in the teaching process.

#### WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT CAN YOU USE IN YOUR LESSONS?



From these results it is evident that the private schools are better provided with technical equipment. It is due to the available financial resources. As it was stated above, the public schools charge no admission fees for their students. They rely mostly on gifts (from parents, sponsors etc.), because the budget allotted by the Ministry of Education and Science is insufficient.

Theoretically, the remuneration motivates a person to do a certain job. Teacher's work is evaluated by using different criteria in both private and public schools. The pay-roll system has been introduced in the public schools. Teachers who are on the staff have to cover an annual norm of at least 400 lessons. We have no single-meaning information for the mechanisms of payment at the private schools. We assume that teacher's educational background, qualification,

length of practice and annual norm of lessons are some of the major factors that are taken into consideration when assigning the salaries in both public and private sector.

The average monthly salary in Bulgaria is 280 levs, i.e. approx. 175 USD. Survey results indicate that 7% of the primary school English teachers receive a salary that is up to 150 levs (approx. 95 USD); 36.4% receive a salary between 150 and 250 levs; 54.3% - between 250 and 350 levs; 2.3% - between 350 and 450 levs. Their average monthly salary is 235 levs. The average salary at the private schools is 287.50 levs, and at the public schools – 182.90 levs. It is worth mentioning that in the public sector the difference in the salary of a beginning teacher and one with the highest qualifications is no more than 50 levs or approx. \$ 30 per month! Such small differentials are also symptomatic of the very low payments available to Bulgarian teachers. They cannot be sure that even such a salary will arrive on time. Thus, we have no intention to draw any other conclusions regarding this issue.

103 out of 133 of the surveyed teachers answered the question concerning their norm. This is the working time within one month needed in order to receive the pay-roll salary. Most of the primary school English teachers, 64.1%, have annual norm above 400 lessons; 13.6% of them have a norm in the range 200-400 lessons and another 22.3% – up to 200 lessons. It is evident that 1/3 of the teachers do not cover the full norm of classes. Probably, that is one of the reasons for their lower salaries.

84.2% of the primary school English teachers work only at one place. The rest 15.8% have one or more additional jobs. It is not clear from the answers of the surveyed teachers whether the second/additional job is pedagogical or of different character. It is a common practice for the Bulgarian teachers to give private lessons at home no matter in which sector they are employed. Thus, we suppose that not only the teachers with lower norm of classes (up to 200) supplement their income through other work.

## **Results of the teaching process**

In order to prove the third hypothesis we have to take into consideration the results from the previous two stages. As it was stated above, if there is strong motivation and high professionalism, there are expected to follow good results from English language teaching.

The teachers proved to be highly motivated for teaching the language. We can state that the weaknesses in the process of teaching have been overcome, because the results are good enough. In 76.7% of all the classes of the surveyed teachers the average result in English for the first school term is above Very good 5.00, and in the other 23.3% – up to Very good 5.00. The average result for both public and private schools is Very good 5.20. By using Chi square we found that there exists a correlation between the two types of schools and the results the pupils have achieved. The average result in the private schools is Very good 5.40, and in the public schools – Very good 5.00.

The primary students from both types of schools have the following results in English:

- Up to Good 4.50 – 16.7%
- From Good 4.50 to Very good 5.50 – 67.5%
- From Very good 5.50 to Excellent 6.00 – 15.8%.

In the private schools there is no average result below Very good 5.00. In 69.2% of the classes the primary students have marks within the range Very good 5.00 – 5.50, and in the other 30.8% – from 5.50 to 6.00.

In the public schools, 18.7% of the classes have average results in the range 3.50-4.50, 67% – between 4.50 and 5.50 and another 14% between 5.50 and 6.00.

The students' results in the public schools are lower than those in the private schools, but they are by no means poor. These are very good achievements for

primary students who have not learned basic grammatical and lexical concepts in their mother tongue yet.

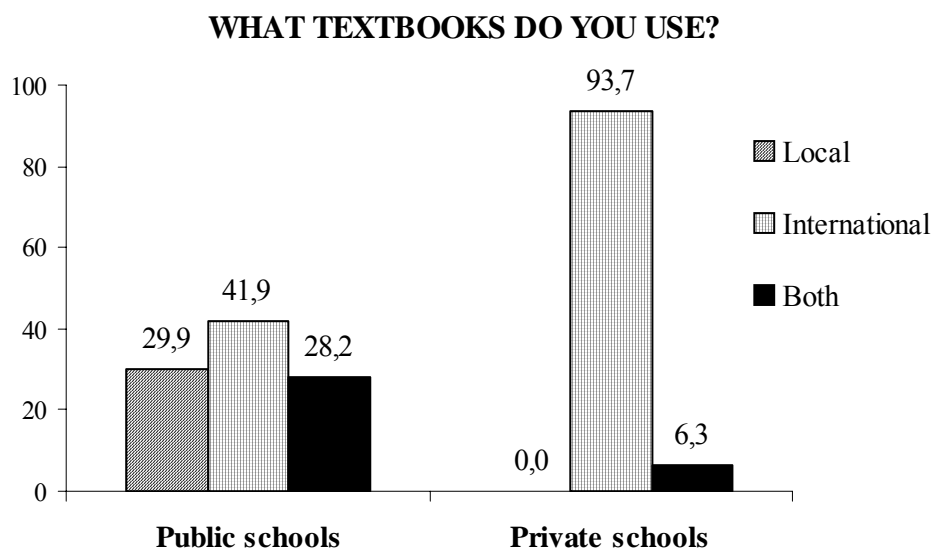
As expected, the results of the pupils in the private schools are higher, because they are mainly influenced by the qualification of the teacher and the available equipment.

The results of the teaching process do not depend only on the above-stated factors. The methodology of teaching, which is set in the textbooks, is as much important. The Chi square analysis showed the correlation between the used textbook series and the average result of the pupils. Those students who are taught by international textbooks are more successful (with results above 5.00), while the others (with results up to 5.00) use local textbooks.

48.1% of the teachers work with international textbook series, 26.3% – with local ones and 25.6% use both types of textbooks.

In the public schools in 41.9% of the cases teachers use international textbooks, in 29.9% – local ones and in 28.2% – both types.

In the private schools 93.7% of the used textbook series are international, and only 6.3% of the teachers use both local and international textbooks.



The obstacles, which prevent the broader use of the international textbooks, are of financial nature – parents cannot afford their higher price as compared to the locally published ones.

Our survey findings indicate that the type of settlement also has an influence on students' results. The pupils from the district towns and the capital city are more successful than those from the smaller towns and villages. The former achieve results above 5.00 and the latter – up to 5.00. We assume that a possible reason for these findings is that teachers with higher qualifications work in the district towns. There they have better access to information and modern technical equipment. Moreover, it has to be mentioned that private schools have been established only in the district towns.

According to a requirement of the MES, the number of students in a given class in the primary course of education cannot be less than 16 and more than 24. Based on the assumption that teaching results are higher when the ratio of teachers to total students is high and the number of students a teacher has is low, we examined the average number of students a teacher has in a given class. The above-mentioned correlation was not confirmed from the survey findings.

There are up to 16 students in a class in 93% of the private and in 20.9% of the public schools. Only in one private school the teacher has classes with 16-23 students, while this is the case in 59.1% of the public schools. There are also primary classes with more than 24 students. These are only in the public schools – 20% of all.

52.7% of the surveyed teachers have classes with 16-23 students, 29.8% – up to 16 and another 17.6% – more than 24 students. The major part of the primary school English teachers – 29 (the mode) – work with 20 students in a given class.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research focused on English language instruction in the primary schools in Bulgaria in both public and private sector.

On one hand, we were interested in the personality type of the primary school English teacher and on the other, in the different factors that influence English language teaching. Thus, we explored the educational and experience background of the teachers and their motivation to do this particular work. We also examined the available equipment and technology in schools, the published materials used by both teachers and students. We conducted the research in a sample of both public and private primary schools in the country. The main survey instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions. The results can be briefly summarized in the following way:

The primary school English teachers 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 key factors in the first stage of the teaching process (creating a motivation for teaching English) are the characteristics related to teacher's personality – the interest in the language and taking the profession as a personal vocation. The main characteristic in the second stage (the process of teaching, itself) is the language qualification of the teacher. The third stage (the results of the teaching process) depends on the previous two stages. It is also influenced by the characteristics of the environment – the teaching materials, the available equipment and technology, etc. It was proved in the present study that teachers' qualification, its keeping and improvement are also of great importance for the level of teaching. They depend not only on the personal efforts of each teacher, but rather on the staff policy of the schools and the Ministry of Education and Science.

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 success of English language teaching depends on both of them. Survey results show the following in this respect:

1. 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.).

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. The monthly remuneration of the teachers in the private schools is higher with approximately 100 levs (approx. 65 USD). Our survey results proved no influence of the material stimulation on the motivation of the teachers, although such dependence exists in theory.

5. The results of the students in the private schools are higher. This proves that better conditions lead to higher achievements.

Thus, we can conclude that English language teaching in the private schools outclasses the one in the public schools by all surveyed criteria. In our opinion, one of the main reasons for that is the insufficiency of financial resources for the public schools.



## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

We believe our research findings provide valuable and up-to-date information on the state of English language education in the primary public and private schools in the country. It will be beneficial for government officials, the Ministry of Education and Science, and other decision makers for reviewing policies and institutional structures and developing new strategies and initiatives that determine how primary school English teachers are trained, supported, monitored and motivated at all levels. The results of this study will also be useful to universities, colleges and language schools, and should help them to tailor their programs for training English teachers. By disseminating the report as broadly as possible, participating schools, as well as those not participating in the survey, will be able to compare their situation with that of other schools. Hopefully, this will induce those schools that fall below the average of the population to strengthen and improve their programs. The findings can be published both in English and Bulgarian in specialized journals and relevant newsletters. The data from the study can act as a benchmark against which future progress in English language teaching can be measured.

On the basis of the research results, concerning ELT in the primary schools in Bulgaria, some recommendations can be made. These are designed to be of use for national policy makers, The Ministry of Education and Science, together with the teacher training institutions and educational inspectorates. In our opinion, 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. A way to support the teachers is to offer them financial aid for participation in

- professional workshops and seminars, for example. Teachers need more opportunities to maintain their skills and knowledge of ELT and to share with others their experience of language teaching and learning
- improve the salaries and status of the primary school English teachers. A reduction in the teaching force, wherever it is possible, combined with a better career structure for remaining teachers would save money and improve teachers' professional and financial status. Moreover, salaries should be assigned considering first of all teacher's qualification in English rather than length of practice and annual norm of lessons
  - provide incentives – both in terms of salary differentials and career progression – for graduates with high qualifications in English to enter the teaching profession
  - reappraise the traditional funding schemes for the schools and develop a new, flexible and decentralized model, thus giving school authorities more freedom in using the money available. Moreover, 'state grants' should be calculated on a basis taking into account not only the 'needs' but also the 'merits' of each school, i.e. to reward good performance or sanction schools with bad results
  - improve teaching conditions by providing more up-to-date audio-visual aids, English books, dictionaries and other teaching materials for the school libraries
  - collaborate in educational renewal policy projects funded by NGOs. English language teaching can be facilitated and supported a lot by organizations such as the British Council, IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language), Optima - the Bulgarian Association for Quality Language Services, etc.

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