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## EFFECTIVE WAYS OF ENGLISH LEARNING: SWEDISH EXPERIENCE

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### ЕФЕКТИВНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО ВИВЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ: ДОСВІД ШВЕЦІЇ

**Abstract.** The article aims at analysis of the peculiarities of modern language education in Sweden at all educational levels. Today, almost all countries of the world are aware of the importance for the population of knowing the English language in the context of globalization, development of science and technology, business and social sphere. But not all countries can equally succeed in this. The article provides an analysis of socio-historical conditions and factors that contributed to the spread and implementation of English as the main language of international communication in Sweden. The problems and prospects of its further development and improvement in the light of the Swedish experience are studied. The article defines the approaches that characterize the process of implementing the English language in Ukrainian society and its prospects.

**Key words:** English learning; language education in Sweden; the English language implementation; mass media educational role.

**Анотація.** У статті розглянено особливості сучасної мовної освіти у Швеції на всіх освітніх рівнях. На сьогодні майже всі країни світу усвідомлюють значущість для населення володіння англійською мовою в умовах глобалізації, розвитку науки і технологій, ведення бізнесу та соціального розвитку. Але не всім країнам вдається робити це з однаковим успіхом. У статті подано аналіз соціально-історичних умов та факторів, які сприяли розповсюдженню й імплементації англійської мови як основної мови міжнародного спілкування у Швеції. Досліджено проблеми та перспективи подальшого її розвитку й удосконалення у світлі шведського бачення. У статті визначено підходи, які характеризують процес імплементації англійської мови в українське суспільство та його перспективи.

**Ключові слова:** вивчення англійської мови; мовна освіта в Швеції; імплементація англійської мови; освітня роль ЗМІ.

**Introduction.** In recent years, foreign language adult education in Europe has become particularly relevant due to the desire of the world community to unify international scientific experience; response to the intensification of migration as well as to the socio-economic challenges of globalization. In conditions of enhanced intercultural interaction, knowledge of a foreign language becomes an important tool for dialogue between peoples. The positive experience of Sweden's national foreign language strategy is confirmed by the demand among students wishing to study and do internships in this country.

Foreign experience is considered to be a valuable source of information in identifying leading trends in the educational process while searching the ways to modernize the domestic system of adult education. Special attention is drawn to foreign language training

in adult education in Sweden. In our opinion, the experience of Sweden will help determine the action plan needed for Ukraine to maintain the interest of the population in learning foreign languages; creating an informal language environment; improving the system of financing foreign language education, which would motivate the adult population to continuous self-improvement and create conditions for professional growth.

The analysis of the language situation with the implementation of the English language in Sweden proves that it is ranked among the countries with a high level of English proficiency. According to the EF EPI report on the ranking of countries in terms of the level of English as a foreign language, Sweden has been recognized for several years in a row as the country in which the population speaks English as a second language better than anyone else in the world.

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This fact is explained by the fact that the population of Sweden wants to communicate with the whole world in this way. It is also known that both Swedish and English belong to the Germanic language family [6].

There is even a form of combination of both languages spoken in the country, called *Swinglish*. As a result of such combinations, so-called local variants of the English language are formed. The country broadcasts many television programs in English without translation, other media resources are also published in English, not to mention the Internet, business and industry, where communication takes place exclusively in English. School education also focuses on teaching and learning English as a key subject.

**The aim** – to identify the factors of effective foreign languages training in Sweden and to implement Swedish experience into Ukrainian educational system.

**Theoretical framework.** It is interesting to turn to the historical origins of the phenomenon of mastering the English language by Swedes. Until the 19th century, in addition to the local dialects, the official languages in Sweden were Latin (after the introduction of Christianity) and French, which was spoken by the aristocrats in the 18th century and used by the courts. With the development of industry, the resettlement of the local population to cities, and the introduction of education, the Swedish language (Standard Swedish) appeared and began to strengthen. At the same time, a large part of the population emigrated to the United States, and thus the contacts of the Swedes with the English language began, which continued after the Second World War. The process of the spread of the English language in this country was facilitated by all those issues that contributed to its global spread. But in addition, in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, in connection with other migration processes, namely, immigration waves of other nationalities to Sweden, the status of English as a language of international communication increased in the country. The country's government is in the process of choosing to recognize the status of English as a foreign, second, or trans-cultural communication language [3].

Therefore, at the beginning of the XXI century, residents of Sweden are known for their success in mastering the English language. Nowadays, in Sweden, English is gradually becoming something like a second native language, so much so that it is the first among foreign languages. Not everyone in Ukraine communicates in Ukrainian (in the case of Russian-

speaking citizens) with the same ease with which an average Swede switches from Swedish to English. In 2012, the Swedes took first place among peoples who speak English as a second language (best speakers of English as a second language) in the whole world. There is an interest in the abilities of Swedes in foreign languages [3, 6].

We consider that the Swedish success is determined by the factors influencing the process of learning English as a second foreign language. The first argument that comes to mind when considering this question is the similarity of languages. English and almost all Scandinavian languages, with the exception of Finnish, belong to the Germanic group. That is, they come from a single ancestor and still retain many common features.

The second argument is the education system. The Kingdom of Sweden has always been considered a pioneer in the field of education, allocating 7.8 % of the gross national product to education. By introducing compulsory primary education for all citizens in 1842, Sweden took an important step towards eradicating illiteracy and subsequently becoming one of the most educated nations in Europe. Although Sweden's education system has undergone a number of major changes over time, the main goal of education in Sweden has remained largely unchanged: from an educated nation to an economically powerful nation. The most important reforms in the Swedish education system were carried out after the Second World War in response to the educational reforms of other leading European countries, such as Great Britain, Germany, France, etc. At that time, enjoying the status of neutrality, Sweden quickly restored its industrial potential and became economically stronger compared to its European neighbors, who were involved in the war, and, accordingly, more attractive to emigrants from other countries. At the beginning of the 50s of the last century, the Swedish Parliament reviewed the national situation in the country and was forced to call it multinational, which made changes in the educational sector in order to provide all citizens of the country with proper school education. Today, the number of languages that are native to immigrants in Sweden, along with the indigenous Finnish and Sami national minorities, reaches 200. Taking national and cultural diversity into account, the Swedish government has defined its national language policy with the aim of eliminating the inequality of access to education between different sections of the population. As a result of numerous debates on this issue, it was decided to

choose English as a compulsory foreign language at all levels of education [5].

Along with the introduction of 8 years of compulsory education in the 1950s and 9 years in 1962, the Swedish Parliament not only introduced equal access to education for all strata of the population, but also enabled the youth of Sweden to gain a wider range of knowledge and the opportunity to further to study at the university. Since 1962, English has become one of the main subjects along with Swedish and mathematics, and as the main foreign language it has become a tool for Swedes to communicate with people outside of Sweden on various topics [1, 4, 5].

In 1995, a new national curriculum was introduced in Sweden plan. Since then, English has been studied from the 1st grade, and in some schools from the 4th grade. Local schools had the opportunity to make their own decisions about the stage learning English and allocating time for its mastery. Minimum the amount devoted to mastering the English language was 480 hours [3, p. 154].

The 1995 English syllabus for the compulsory school articulates two significant elements of English teaching: communicative language skills and intercultural understanding.

As evidenced by scientific research, English is the mandatory first foreign language to learn. The analysis shows that more hours are allocated to its study. Each school in Sweden can autonomously determine from which class a foreign language is studied as a compulsory subject. The central authorities of education in Sweden only determine the age limits at which it is recommended to start studying foreign languages. Usually such limits are from 7 to 10 years. The purpose of learning a foreign language, in particular English, in compulsory school is the development of language skills and important socio-cultural knowledge for the purpose of students' functioning in various situations in which English is used as a means of communication [9].

Foreign language teachers in Sweden are provided with guidelines for their teaching, but guidance on teaching methods is not specific. As a result, teachers have a substantial amount of freedom in their instruction. English teaching aims to develop four language skills: oral proficiency; listening comprehension; reading comprehension; and written proficiency [7, 11].

Oral proficiency and listening comprehension study. In class, students are encouraged to speak in English while instructions are given in the target language. English teaching at the lower levels targets listening

comprehension and oral practice as the most important skills. In grades 1–3 (figstadium), children practice words, phrases, and grammatical patterns of simple spoken English. They talk about themselves in simple forms of language, such as by saying their names, singing songs, playing games, and creating rhymes. Children's physical participation is encouraged through simple exercises. There are two main types of oral exercises practiced at the lower grades: fixed oral exercise, in which the teacher asks a question that has only one correct answer, and substitution exercise, in which students substitute a word with another word of the same part of speech in a sentence. In the middle levels (grades 4–6; Mellanstadium), students listen to interviews with native speakers and stories in order to develop listening comprehension. They practice easy conversation to get information and to say what they need or want. Exercises that are practiced in these levels consist of simple role plays, storytelling, descriptions or explanations of things, games, and songs. In the higher grades (7–9; Hogstadium), authentic or produced recorded materials are used for listening comprehension. Students practice role plays and interviews and participate in discussion, singing, and music. They engage in free conversation exercises, the aim of which is to strengthen students' ability to fully express themselves in English. For example, in one exercise, the student is given a picture in which a dramatic incident is depicted and asked to describe what he or she thinks is taking place. The grammatical structures are introduced to the students through systematic exercises. In the early stages, these exercises are strictly oral; only later are they incorporated with written practice. Unfamiliar structures are always presented with thoroughly familiar vocabulary (Anderman 1974) [11].

Reading comprehension is represented by English texts which are presented with pictures at the beginning level, and the teacher spends only a small portion of the lesson on reading practice. Reading at the beginning level is done in chorus. In the lower grades, only the words that students are already familiar with are presented in reading, while at the higher levels authentic texts, such as newspaper articles and books, are used for reading comprehension. Reading is not used as a medium for creating literary essays or for grammatical explanations but has a purpose in itself; that is, it is done for pleasure or to get specific information. Generally, the emphasis is on gist comprehension, while translation of passages is rarely done [11].

Written proficiency is also determined. Teachers are careful when making the transition from spoken to written English and do so only when they are confident that the students are completely familiar with the meanings of the words to be presented. While writing is not generally practiced in the lower grades, middle-level students practice spelling by copying and writing simple messages and short letters. In the higher grades they write about what they have read and discussed and practice functional writing exercises, such as writing messages and letters. Students also practice “free writing,” such as writing one’s own stories or diaries and copying word lists and passages from the textbook [11].

English lessons are conducted in the target language, although teachers are prepared to use Swedish if necessary. Giota (1995) reported in her survey study that 50 percent of the students indicated that the teacher almost always spoke in English during lessons while another 12 percent said the teacher only spoke in English during lessons [12].

English teaching materials in the compulsory school include the basic textbook, supplementary booklets, and audio-visual materials such as film strips, slides, and tape recordings. Texts are studied in two ways. The first way is through intensive study, and its purpose is to gain thorough understanding of the content and to acquire new vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Students use the basic textbook in this manner in class. Extensive study is done individually, and its purpose is to enable the student to understand the content as a whole and extract important facts. Supplementary booklets, which contain texts of simpler content and few unknown words, are used for extensive study. This additional study provides students with an opportunity to develop their potential at their own pace. Among supplementary booklets, exercise books are available for practice of grammatical structures and vocabulary that students encounter in the main textbook. Short stories are used to develop students’ interest in reading on their own in English and to provide detailed information of specific subjects. In addition, teachers make extensive use of tape recorders in class [12, 13].

Sweden has created a very successful public education system. Thanks to small class size, even in public schools, students show increased motivation to study.

It was recently written about an automatic method of learning, the adepts of which condemn academic methods as untenable. One way or another, millions of people around the world study foreign languages

at school. A questionnaire based on the analysis the pupils results of mastering English at Ukrainian schools shows that the school program does not work (or works in individual cases), but in Sweden it works systematically.

We agree with the scientists [5, 13] that one of the factors of the success of the Swedes, is the extremely high quality of education, which consists of the fact that the Swedish education system pays special attention to the combination of theory and practice. For example, the Ukrainian system focuses primarily on theory. In Swedish school, the main emphasis is on the ability to speak and understand the language, much less attention is paid to memorizing grammar.

In practice, they regularly practice online communication with English people to encourage students and give practical meaning to the current work. Schools develop thinking and skills important for adult life, as well as general awareness and erudition of schoolchildren, which also contributes to success in learning foreign languages. Swedish education system which is famous by its lack of competition, pressure on the student and an individual approach to children from an early age has a positive effect on the successful acquisition of knowledge. While learning a foreign language, students should take part in conversations, discussions, express their own views, develop a tolerant attitude towards other people and the world in general. Emphasis is placed on the motivational aspect of language learning, which is embodied in its practical application [10].

In the field of higher education, English is not just studied, but has become a working language. Sweden’s universities are leading in Europe and offer many international English-language programmes, especially at master’s and PhD level. The community of foreign students increases every year, which is also facilitated by prosperous fellowships for motivated applicants, including those from Ukraine. The main textbooks and manuals are published in English and prepared mainly by international publishing houses at universities. It is explained by the fact that information about the latest achievements in the field of education appears faster in English-language literature, and since universities want to give students the latest knowledge, the choice in favor of English-language literature is obvious.

The third argument is the role of mass media. As a powerful tool for communication and entertainment, the media can be very useful for language learning. Teaching methods, however perfect, will only work if the level of integration of a foreign language in your life correlates with your ability to communicate in that

language. That is, you must constantly feel the need for this language, otherwise you will lack motivation. Today's world with a free access to a whole range of audio, printed, video and interactive mass media creates unique conditions for self-improvement. Moreover, it focuses on natural improvement, without a sense of artificiality. The choice in this regard is very large. If you are interested in politics or economics you can subscribe to English-language newspapers and news, if you like TV series you will watch English-language films or cartoons with subtitles, in addition, the networks are represented by the meetings with the heroes of cult films without translation [8].

Researchers believe that the main trigger that pushed Swedes to mass master English was the broadcast of popular English-language films and series on local television without translation (with subtitles). This not only creates interest, but also ensures the regularity of foreign language practice and getting used to it. All teachers know that regularity is a key concept in learning any language. Any discipline, in general. In Sweden, firstly, all TV shows are shown in the original language with subtitles, and secondly, it is better to watch or read something in the original without translation. Therefore, a characteristic feature of the acquisition of English in Sweden is the creation of an atmosphere of constant contact of the society with English-language audio and video material, since English-language films and TV programs are broadcast in the original language. The experience of early acquaintance with the English language through the above-mentioned means of communication indicates that its further study in primary school takes place by more quickly overcoming psychological and communicative barriers in the process of mastering foreign language material and types of speech activity [9].

Despite its status as a foreign language in Sweden, the English language has also appeared in everyday communication, and it is not limited to contacts with foreigners, i.e. English words have «joined» ordinary language. H. Sharp, having conducted a study of the language situation in Sweden, concluded that teenagers and middle-aged people widely use the English language in everyday speech. Members of these age groups also tend to mix long English phrases with Swedish [13, p. 198]. Among the possible reasons is the fact that English is taught from an early age and also has a high status.

**Conclusions and Prospects for Research.** Sweden continues to improve its national education system,

particularly in the field of foreign language learning, as this is one of the important aspects of labor market mobility and intercultural interaction. English in Sweden should be considered as a foreign language, despite the fact that some linguists propose to give it official status due to its prevalence. However, English is de facto the second language in the field of education in the conditions of its constant development in Swedish society and the internationalization of the state. Grammatical interference in this case is the result of the transfer of grammatical features from one native language system (Swedish) to another (English) while having the contacts.

The Swedes have achieved a remarkable standard of English over the last few decades. Social atmosphere and affective factors have played important roles in their achievement. The use of English is widespread in today's Swedish society: people are exposed to the language in almost every aspect of their daily lives. The society has put great emphasis on the use of English. For the most part, children have a strong motivation to learn English and have a positive attitude toward the language and its use.

However, the most important factor for second/foreign language educators and researchers to consider should be the Swedes' impressive educational efforts toward the creation of a nation bilingual in Swedish and English. Young children enter compulsory school with the knowledge of only a few English words and phrases, but a large number of them grow to function as English speakers with a high level of communicative competence.

It is important to note that English is taught for practical purposes in Swedish schools. The English curriculum emphasizes the importance of English oral skill acquisition and English as a world language. In class, students are encouraged to produce oral output in English while instructions are given in the target language. They are exposed to English of different regions and are encouraged to see the value of learning other languages through the ability to understand and communicate with people of different cultures.

Ukraine, as already mentioned, occupies a place within the rating of the indicator of English language proficiency of the population. Both the government of the country, which is trying to reform the system and methods of language teaching in educational institutions, and individual citizens are aware of the importance and vital need at the moment to know the language of global communication. That is, the resources of the state and the motivation of citizens are

important factors to improve the general situation with the population's command of the English language. Ukraine's direction in the direction of European

integration is also taken into account, which is another important factor of such a process.

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