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CONTENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES OF THE PROGRAM OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF BACHELORS OF ARTS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF SINGAPORE

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the structural, content features and organizational peculiarities of the educational process under the Programme of professional training of Bachelors of Education (English) for primary schools in Singapore. According to Singapore's language policy, English is the official language of the country, the language of instruction. It is compulsory for learning beginning with the primary school. It is established that the Programme of professional training of Bachelors of Education (English) for primary schools, which is introduced in the only institution of higher pedagogical education in Singapore - the National Institute of Education, lasts 4 years, has full-time form of study and is implemented under the Graduand Teacher Competencies Framework. In addition to mastering the necessary professional knowledge and skills, it is important to form a value base in the worldview of future teachers, which will allow them to educate successful Singaporeans in the 21st century. The training of English teachers for primary schools under the bachelor's degree programme takes place within the general training track, that involves specialization in two subjects: English and mathematics or natural or social sciences. It is defined that the main content areas of the programme of professional training of Bachelors of Education (English) at the primary level of education are the study of pedagogical, subject, curriculum disciplines, improvement of English competence, acquaintance with academic (theoretical) aspects of English, pedagogical practice, study of the essential course, which reveals peculiarities of successful functioning in a multicultural environment, as well as elective courses aimed at expanding the general knowledge horizons of students. In order to develop students' personal qualities necessary for an effective 21st century educator and their ability to impart the basic moral and ethical values to the future generation, students of the National Institute of Education of Singapore study online course of ethics and morality and participate in the Meranti project, which is a part of Singaporean civic education. The author also analyzes the wide range of opportunities for international practice for students of the National Institute of Education of Singapore.

Keywords: *a teacher of foreign language, the English language, primary school, bachelor, professional education, professional competency of a teacher, pedagogical practice, civic education.*

АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті досліджено структурні, змістовні складові та організаційні особливості навчального процесу підготовки учителів – бакалаврів (англійська мова) для початкових шкіл Сінгапуру. З'ясовано, що у відповідності до мовної політики



Сінгапуру, англійська мова є офіційною мовою країни, мовою навчального процесу і обов'язковою для вивчення, починаючи з початкової школи. Встановлено, що програма професійної підготовки бакалаврів освіти (англійська мова) для початкових шкіл, яка запроваджена у єдиному в Сінгапурі закладі вищої педагогічної освіти – Національному інституті освіти, триває 4 роки, має денну форму навчання і імплементується в рамках Моделі компетенцій педагога – випускника. Крім опанування необхідних професійних знань і вмінь, в процесі підготовки важливістю набуває формування ціннісної бази в світогляді майбутніх учителів, яка дозволить їм навчати і виховувати успішних сінгапурців XXI століття. З'ясовано, що підготовка учителів англійської мови для початкових шкіл за бакалаврською програмою підготовки відбувається в межах загального треку підготовки, який передбачає спеціалізацію на двох предметах: англійській мові та математиці або природничих або соціальних дисциплінах. Основними структурними напрямками професійної підготовки учителів – бакалаврів (англійська мова) на початковому рівні освіти є вивчення педагогічних, предметних, програмних дисциплін, вдосконалення англомовної компетенції, знайомство із академічними (теоретичними) аспектами функціонування англійської мови, педагогічна практика, вивчення загальноосвітнього курсу, який передбачає дослідження передумов успішного функціонування в мультикультурному середовищі, а також факультативних курсів, спрямованих на розширення загальноосвітнього кругозору студентів. З метою формування необхідних для педагога XXI століття особистісних якостей і вмінь прищеплювати майбутньому поколінню основні моральні та етичні цінності, обов'язковими для студентів Національного інституту освіти Сінгапуру є вивчення курсу моральної етики та участь у проекті Меранті, який є частиною громадянської освіти сінгапурців. В статті проаналізовано також широкі можливості здійснення міжнародної практики або стажування для студентів Національного інституту освіти Сінгапуру.

Ключові слова: учитель іноземної мови, англійська мова, початкова школа, бакалавр, професійна освіта, професійна компетентність учителя, педагогічна практика, громадянська освіта.

INTRODUCTION

The spreading of the English language as a means of international communication, recognizing it to be the modern lingua franca has led to increasing the number of English language programs in the educational space of many countries and updating requirements for the quality of the learning process. At present, many leading and developed countries are reforming and improving English-language education in order to ensure the success and competitiveness of their citizens in the future. In addition to updating material, technical and methodological bases, much attention is paid to the quality of teachers professional training and development. Education is a key factor and teachers play a critical role in shaping the nation's future (Lin, 2016). Studying the experience of countries with world top educational systems and high-quality professional training of teachers is useful in terms of reforming the domestic system of teacher training.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to investigate the main content and organizational features of the program of professional training of bachelors of education (English) for primary schools in Singapore in terms of forming their professional competency.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Issues of the professional training of teachers, principles and prerequisites for forming their professional competency attracted the attention of many researchers (I. Bahaieva, I. Vasyliev, A. Derkach, I. Ziaziun, A. Markova, N. Nychkalo, V. Slastyonin, N. Huziy, T Komarnytska, T. Oshchepkova and others). In the Conception of pedagogical competency proposed by Banashko L., Sevastianova O. et al, professional competency is determined by the level of professionalism of the individual, and can be achieved through acquiring the necessary competencies, which are the purposes of professional training. (Banashko L., Sevastianova O. et al, 2021). There is no unified model of professional competency of a teacher in acmeology. Researchers propose various models which differ from each other in structure and components. However, a common feature of all existing models of teacher professionalism (competency) is the integration of activity and personality aspects of pedagogical activity.

Modern professional training of Singapore teachers is conducted within the Graduand Teacher Competencies Framework, which is based on the V3SK (Values3, Skills, Knowledge) model and MOE's (Minister of Education of Singapore) competencies framework for beginning teachers. The Graduand Teacher Competencies Framework involves three performance dimensions of competencies: professional practice, leadership and management, and personal effectiveness. According to V3SK model, in addition to mastering the necessary knowledge and skills, modern professional training of teachers should involve value learning, on the basis of which teachers' future professional activities will be built. The values that a 21st century Singaporean teacher should possess are divided into three paradigms: 1) learner-centric values; 2) a strong sense of teacher identity or pride; 3) service to the profession and community. Among core pedagogical approaches to the process of teacher professional training in Singapore the following ones can be indicated: didactics demonstration modelling, inquiry, reflection, experiential practicum, self-directed and collaborative approaches (A Teacher Education Model ..., 2009).

Theoretical research methods such as analysis, synthesis, interpretation, classification, generalization, as well as empirical methods that involve the study and analysis of pedagogical and normative documents are used to achieve the goal of the study.

RESULTS

The Republic of Singapore is a young, actively developing country that gained its independence from Britain in 1965. After gaining his freedom, Singapore began to build systems of general education and teacher training. One of the first steps taken by the Singaporean government in this direction was the solution of the language issue in a multinational country. The Republic of Singapore Independence Act of 1965 gave Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and English official language status. Of the four official languages, three (Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil) are seen as "mother tongues" of the Chinese, Malay, and Indian communities, respectively. English was chosen as an official language in Singapore and the only language of instruction. Bilingual education is an important element of Singaporean language policy. Bilingualism became compulsory in Singaporean schools in 1966 and was defined by the government as "proficiency in English and one other official language" (Siemund, 2020).

Singapore's education system has constantly been evolved and updated. The current phase of the reforming of Singapore's educational system is called "Learning for Life: Remaking pathways" and involves the introduction of the competency-based approach to learning process in all its directions, including teacher professional training. The



competency-based approach, in contrast to the traditional approach, involves not only acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities, but also forming and developing students' ability to adapt and act independently in standard and non-standard situations, quickly solve problems of varying complexity on the basis of acquired knowledge (Kharkivska, 2020).

The National Institute of Education is the only centralized institution of higher pedagogical education in Singapore that provides training for primary, secondary schools, junior colleges and institutions of higher education and reports to the Ministry of Education of Singapore. At present, for applicants who wish to become English teachers in primary schools, the National Institute of Education of Singapore offers two options of training programs depending on previous educational achievements. For entrants who have completed higher secondary education and have a General Certificate of Education "A" (advanced) level or a diploma of the Polytechnic University, a training program of Bachelors of Education (B\Ed) is offered for a 4-year full-time study. For entrants who have graduated from other institutions of higher education and have a bachelor's or master's degree, there is a 16-month postgraduate training program for English language teachers at the primary level of education. The form of training under this training program is also full-time.

Professional training programs for Bachelors of Education at the National Institute of Education have two areas of study: Bachelors of Arts (BA(Ed)) or Bachelors of Science (BS(Ed)). The award of BA(Ed) or BSc(Ed) is dependent on the choice of Academic Subject(s) taken. In the case of a BA(Ed) (Primary), the choice of the first Academic Subject must be an Arts subject, while in the case of a BSc(Ed) (Primary), the Academic Subject must be a Science subject (Nurturing Tomorrow's Educators, 2014). The training of English teachers for primary schools is conducted according to the program of Bachelors of Arts and provides specialization in two disciplines: English plus one of the proposed subjects (Mathematics, Science or Social studies). The curriculum of these programmes is broad-based, with a strong emphasis on inquiry in the form of research in the academic and education subjects. The curriculum is also individualised to the students's professional interests and aspirations (Bachelor of Arts (Ed.)/ Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2019). All disciplines of the Bachelor's degree program for English language teachers in primary schools in Singapore are divided into two types: compulsory and elective (Table 1).

Table 1

Bachelor of Arts (Ed) (English) training program for primary school teaching

Year of study	Subject area	Title of subject	Academic units (credits)
1	<i>Education studies</i>	– Educational psychology; Theories and applications for learning and teaching; – Group endeavours in service learning ; – professional practice and inquiry I; – The social context of education in Singapore	2 1 0 2
	<i>Academic subjects (1 subject area)*</i>	Any 4 disciplines of one subject area from the list of the offered subjects	12
	<i>Subject knowledge (aligned with curriculum studies subjects)</i>	– The English language: Grammar; – The second subject according to specialization (Mathematics, Science or Social studies)	2 8–9
	<i>LEADS**</i>	– Academic discourse skills; – Communication skills for teachers	3 2
	<i>Practicum</i>	– School experience	0

1) All freshmen are required to take an online ethics and morals course ***
2) All freshmen must attend English Language Certificate courses.****



Continued

2	Education studies	– Teaching and Managing Learners at the Primary Level; – Educational Psychology II: Theories and Applications for Learning and Teaching; – Technologies for Meaningful Learning; – Assessing Learning and Performance – Digital Literacy Discipline (optional) *****	2 1 2 1 3
	Academic subjects (1 subject area)*	– Any 5 disciplines of one subject area from the list of the offered subjects – Research methods	15 3
	Curriculum studies	– The English language: Teaching reading and writing in a multilingual context (Lower primary) – The second subject according to specialization (Mathematics, Science or Social studies).	3 3
	Subject knowledge (aligned with curriculum studies subjects)	– The English language: Exploring language in Texts	2
	Essential course	– Multicultural studies: Appreciating & valuing differences	3
	Practicum	– Teaching assistantship	3
1) All second year students are required to take an online ethics and morals course.			
3	Education studies	– Supporting diversity at the primary level; – Pedagogical practices; – Educational research; – Research project	1 1 3 3
	Academic subject*	-One subject from the list of Arts subjects*	9
	Curriculum studies (further studies in selected curriculum studies subjects in Year 2)	– The English language: Teaching reading and writing in a multilingual context (Upper primary) – The second subject according to specialization (Mathematics, Science or Social studies).	3 3
	General electives*****	Two disciplines of the student's choice from the list of the offered electives	6
	Practicum	Teaching practice 1	5
4	Education studies	-Professional practice and inquiry II	1
	Academic subject*	Any 4 disciplines of one subject area from the list of the offered subjects	12
	Curriculum studies (further studies in selected curriculum studies subjects in Year 2)	The English language: – Teaching speaking and listening in a multilingual context (Lower and Upper primary) – Approaches to teaching English in a multilingual context – The second subject according to specialization (Mathematics, Science or Social studies).	3 3 6
	Subject knowledge (further studies in selected subject knowledge areas)	The English language: – Current trends in English language – Education in the primary school – The second subject according to specialization (Math or Science)	2 2-3
	Practicum	Teaching practice 2	10

*Select 1 from the following list of Arts subjects: Art, Drama, the English Language, the English Literature, Geography, History, Music.

**LEADS – Language enhancement and academic discourse skills.



***All students of the National Institute of Education study the online course of ethics and morality. The purpose of the course is to analyze and evaluate the core moral and ethical values in a multinational Singaporean society (30).

***In addition to the core courses and the required number of prescribed electives, student teachers are required by Ministry of Education to undertake a compulsory Certificate in English Language Studies (CELS).

****Students choose for studying one of the following disciplines: Digital and media literacy / Computer literacy through coding and applications / Digital literacy for Net generation.

Source: Bachelor of Arts (Ed.). Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2020.

Table 1 demonstrates that the programme of professional training of BA (Ed) (English) in primary schools consists of eight areas of study: 1) Education studies; 2) Curriculum studies; 3) Subject knowledge; 4) Essential course; 5) Practicum; 6) LEADS; 7) Academic subjects; 8) General electives.

Education studies involves acquaintance with the key provisions and principles of the educational process in terms of ensuring its effectiveness. *Curriculum studies* introduce the methodology and techniques of teaching English in primary schools and teach future teachers to integrate different types of English-language activities in the learning process. *Subject knowledge* is aimed at deepening and improving students' subject knowledge. Future English teachers (primary level), as a rule, choose courses related to various aspects of the functioning of the English language and literature (Bachelor of Arts (Ed.). Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2020).

The essential course "Multicultural studies: appreciating and valuing differences" reveals the peculiarities of life in a multinational society, covers issues related to ethnicity, multicultural ethics and other social aspects of modern society (Bachelor of Arts (Ed.). Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2019).

Practicum is an integral part of the BA (Ed) (English) programme and includes 4 types: 1) *School experience* (acquaintance with the organization of the educational process; 2) *Teaching assistantship* (observation of the work of experienced teachers and assistance); 3) *Teaching practice 1* (observation and independent planning of lessons, lasts 5 weeks); 4) *Teaching practice 2* (independent organization and conducting of classes, participation in the extracurricular activities, lasts 10 weeks).

Disciplines of the course *LEADS* provide the improvement of language and voice skills necessary for successful teaching and research work. In the case of a BA (Ed) (Primary) student teacher, the choice of the first *Academic subject* must be an Arts subject. For future teachers of English in primary schools, various training courses are offered depending on the course of study. They provide acquaintance with theoretical aspects of the functioning of the English language and literature and methods of their teaching, as well as students' conducting empirical and theoretical research under the guidance of experts. First-year students study such academic disciplines as: *Introduction to the study of language*, *Language in context core*, *Exploring the grammar of English core*, *Exploring the words and sounds of English*. These subjects are compulsory for the first year of study. Starting from the second year of study, students choose a certain number of academic disciplines from the list of proposed ones, for example, *The Social variation of language*, *Language acquisition and development*, *The role of language in education*, *Language and literacy*, *Pragmatics*, *Syntax*, *The structure of Singapore English*, *Topics in phonetics / Phonology*, *Topics in pragmatics*, *Lexicology and lexicography*, *Critical discourse analysis*, etc.



Electives are also accompanied by two compulsory courses – *Research Methods* (3 credits) and *Academic Exercise: English Language*, which involves project activities of students under the guidance of supervisors (Bachelor of Arts (Ed.). Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2020).

Student teachers must also have 6 AUs of **General electives**. Subject areas of the offered electives are *Drama and performance*, *Early childhood education*, *Education studies*, *English language*, *Misc*, *Special needs education*, *Youth work and guidance*, *Science of learning*. The aim of electives is to equip students with multiple skills and broader knowledge, beyond what their major disciplines may provide. As a rule, students choose elective subjects different from their specialization. (Bachelor of Arts (Ed.). Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2020).

In addition to compulsory and elective disciplines, the BA (Ed) (English) training programme requires students to participate in a personal and professional development program called *Meranti Project*, specifically designed for future 21st century teachers and funded by the Ministry of Education of Singapore. This project involves communication with working teachers and primary school principals and students' active participation in preparing and conducting various educational activities in schools of Singapore. Taking part in this project, future teachers get acquainted with different strategies of pedagogical work, learn to work with different audiences, realize values and skills that should be developed in them (according to the V3SK Model) and imparted to the future generations. (The Meranti project, 2021). The project *Meranti* was named in honor of the Meranti tree, which is common in Singapore. The tree is very strong and high and has a wide crown, which gives shelter to many animals. This project is implemented within the framework of civic education, which plays one of the key roles in the educational system of Singapore. Singaporeans believe that civil position, like other aspects of civic and patriotic education, need to be taught, because young people do not become good citizens by accident (Sim, 2009).

National Institute of Education also provides many opportunities for overseas practice or study abroad for a significant period of time. Under the *Semester exchange GEM Explorer Programme*, students will have the opportunity to study one semester at a foreign university. All academic disciplines they will study abroad will be credited at the National Institute of Education. The minimum requirements for studying abroad are accumulated 69 credits. If the National Institute of Education has signed a memorandum of cooperation with a foreign institution of higher education in which a student plans to study under the GEM Explorer programme, training is free for him. The student pays only for travel, accommodation and insurance. (Bachelor of Arts (ed.) / Bachelor of Science (Ed.), 2019). *The International Practicum Programme* also allows future teachers to complete a 5-week foreign assistant and teaching internship, which will also be credited in the National Institute of Education of Singapore.

CONCLUSIONS

Singapore's educational system is highly efficient, which, in addition to the developed material, technical and methodological bases, is provided with quality teacher training. At present, teachers professional training in Singapore is conducted in accordance with the Graduated Teacher Competencies Framework. It is important for an effective teacher of the 21st century not only to acquire professional knowledge and skills, but to form moral qualities and values which will allow them to build an effective educational space and educate successful citizens. Bachelor of Arts (Ed.) (English) professional training program for primary schools at the National Institute of Education aims to develop various aspects of the professional competency of future teachers and provides them with full-fledged professional training. Education, academic, curriculum disciplines form professional knowledge of future specialists, pedagogical practice and overseas internships allow them



to apply the acquired knowledge in practice and develop professional skills. Courses for deepening English communicative skills are also proposed in the programme for improving English competence of future teachers. Elective, moral and ethical courses, the Meranti Project ensure personal development of students and their assimilation of moral and ethical values of Singaporean society, which will lie in the basis of their further professional activity.

We also consider it appropriate to study training programmes of English teachers for other levels of education (preschool, secondary, etc.) in Singapore with the purpose of determining the prerequisites and principles of effective training of foreign language teachers at different stages of the educational process.

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