Language of instruction

Implementation of bilingual education or ethic minority education [1] reform in Russian and other non-Latvian language schools started on September 1, 1999. In accordance with the Education Law [2], all state and municipal general education schools started to implement the ethnic minority education programme aiming at transforming all Russian language-of-instruction schools into bilingual schools. Transition gradually involved pupils of integrated primary and lower-secondary schools. Therefore, completion of the first step of the bilingual reform took nine years. First-grade pupils who started in the 1999/2000 school year completed their bilingual nine-year compulsory education in the spring of 2008.

The aim of bilingual education is to give all nine-year compulsory school graduates a good knowledge of both Latvian and their own native language. Bilingual education can be defined as an educational process in which pupils concurrently use two languages; hence, the other language (in this case, Latvian) changes its status from the object of learning to the tool of learning. Curriculum being developed according to the specifications and needs of each ethnic minority, bilingual education gives ethnic minority children the opportunity to acquire the Latvian language and culture without losing their sense of ethnic belonging.

Four different models of integrated primary and lower-secondary ethnic minority education programmes [3] were prepared during the initial stage of bilingual education reform process. These four models had advisory status and determined the ways different variants of bilingual education could be implemented, depending on the choice of parents and pupils, their Latvian language proficiency and qualification of teachers. Schools were also allowed to implement their own licensed programmes. There has been an obvious increase in pupils’ knowledge of the Latvian language during the implementation of bilingual education reform.

The Parliament of Latvia [4] on March 2018 passed in the final reading amendments to the Education Law and the Law on General Education under which education programmes of ethnic minorities will have to start gradual transition to Latvian-only upper-secondary education in the 2019/2020 school year. A new bilingual education model will be introduced also in grades 1-6 of ethnic minority education programmes, ensuring that at least 50% of the education content is taught in Latvian, and in grades 7-9, ensuring that at least 80% of the education content, including foreign languages, is in Latvian in 2019/2020. The final exams for the 9th grade pupils will be held entirely in Latvian.

Several schools with Latvian language of instruction specializing in foreign languages teach several subjects in a foreign language, for example, Rīgas Franču licejs [5] (French), Rīgas Valsts vācu ģimnāzija [6] (German), Ziemelvalstu ģimnāzija [7] (Nordic languages).
Organisational variations

In accordance with the Education Law [8], there are four forms of education acquisition:

1. full-time education;
2. extramural education; a sub-category of the extramural education method – distance education;
3. self-education, and
4. education in the family.

Basic education pamatizglītība is provided in evening schools also in extramural form. Besides basic education pamatizglītība can also be acquired in the form of distance learning, for instance, at Riga Distance Education School [9].

Persons who have passed the minimum permitted school-leaving age and have not acquired lower-secondary education may acquire lower-secondary education in the form of evening schools or distance learning, and graduate from school as external students.

Various general education schools provide with the opportunity to acquire their implemented educational programmes for external students (self-education).

In the first four years of integrated primary and lower-secondary education there is a possibility for parents to organize learning at home if a child has difficulties to communicate with classmates, or is at bad health, or the school does not have a possibility to ensure the necessary specific learning conditions. At the end of each school year such a pupil has to pass a test in order to transfer to the next class.

Boarding schools

Boarding schools and custody places where children up to 18 years of age reside permanently should provide possibilities to acquire integrated primary and lower-secondary education. Children hospitalized protractedly [10] also should receive tuition. Children staying at home because of sickness are subject to schooling at home as well.

Basic vocational schools

It is possible to complete integrated primary and lower-secondary educational programme and achieve the first level of vocational qualification in basic vocational schools. Basic vocational education [11] lasts maximum 2 years; pupils that have not completed lower-secondary education are accepted starting with the age of 15. Although the vocations acquired in these programmes are rather simple, this group of programmes is important to prevent social exclusion of young people. Completion of a basic vocational education programme leads to the certificate on basic vocational education [12] apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību thus making pupils eligible for further studies at upper-secondary level.

Pedagogical correction programmes

Schools may offer pedagogical correction [13] programmes for pupils with development problems or inadequate social behaviour. The aim of these classes is to favour acquirement of compulsory education of all school age children according to their educational needs. Admission of pupils to these classes is coordinated with parents. In pedagogical correction classes the following pupils are admitted:

- pupils who need more time to learn the programme of compulsory education, pupils that have
rambled ("street children") and therefore not attended school for a longer period of school;

- pupils without developed motivation to learn who therefore have not acquired education in step with their age;
- pupils who are disturbed to prepare home works and socialize because of malevolent environment in the family;

All pupils in pedagogical correction classes have a prolonged school day to prepare home works, participate in groups of interest-related education and other activities.

It is planned, however, that from September 2018 students will not be enrolled anymore in pedagogical correction programmes, but ongoing programmes will be finished till 30 June 2019. By its nature, pedagogical correction is temporary additional measure for children who needs individual support. The Ministry of Education and Science has opinion that children have to be provided with timely individual pedagogical support in regular school, and not in separate pedagogical correction programme.

Social correction programmes

Social correction programmes [13] are offered at social correction educational establishments. These programmes provide for the organisation of the values education for students and their preparation for social reintegration. Knowledge and skills required for independent life within the society are provided to minor law-breakers. Minor law-breakers are also given an opportunity to master professional skills.

