

## ПЕДАГОГІКА

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### NATIONAL POLICY IN EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

*The article deals with some pressing issues faced by high and highest schools in Great Britain and the USA. Considered are educational, organisational, financial, psychological problems and their social effects in the framework of general characteristics of new trends in education. Analysed are the latest publications in the press and some statistics are given.*

*Присвячено деяким нагальним проблемам, з якими стикається середня і вища школа у Великій Британії та США. Розглянуто освітні, організаційні, фінансові, психологічні проблеми та їх соціальний вплив в світлі загальних характеристик нових тенденцій в освіті. Проаналізовано останні публікації в англomовній пресі та надано деякі статистичні дані.*

**boarding schools, entrance tests, exam results, higher education, private schools, pupils students, range of subjects, secondary education, vocational guidance**

#### Introduction

Private education is a core of efficiency of secondary education system in Great Britain.

As a rule, private independent schools serve as a kind of elevator to professional prominence: a third of all MPs, more than half the appointed peers in the House of Lords, a similar proportion of the country's best-known journalists and 70 % of its leading barristers were educated privately. Nearly half of the undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge were privately schooled too. Though fee-paying schools have long played a big part in public life in Britain, they teach only 7 % of its children. Many ambitious parents would like to set their children off on this gilded path, but there is a problem – the cost of private schools soars.

Fees at private day schools have more than doubled in the past 20 years, in real terms; those at boarding schools have risen even faster. Since 2000 fees have risen by at least 6 % every year: double retail-price inflation and half as much again as the growth in wages. If this continues, a four-year-old embarking on a career in private day schools this year will have cost his parents around £170,000 (\$335,000) in today's money by the time he completes secondary school. So even though more Britons than ever before describe themselves as comfortably off, the share of children being educated privately is barely higher than it was two decades ago [1].

#### Essential content of the study

Many critics of the present state of education say that one cannot be sure of securing an acceptable alternative: state-financed schools for the gifted are now scarce.

The same is true with state-funded religious education. The government's position concerning religious education is that church schools should be stripped of their power to select pupils, as they are believed to be covertly selecting the best pupils, which leads to class segregation and systematic unfairness. Each school should have a mixed-ability intake. No school would be allowed to manage its own admissions – a practice which was compared to “pupils marking their own essays” [2]. Researchers at the Centre for the Economics of Education have used data on earnings, social class and education to define advantages that students at private schools may enjoy. Those who left private schools in the 1980s and early 1990s can expect to earn 35 % more in life than the average product of a state school, around half of which can be attributed to education, not background. The benefits are being felt by local private schools. Brighton College, in the town centre, has seen the number of 11-year-olds taking its entrance test rise by almost half. Its head teacher says he is thinking of expanding.

Private education has a lot of advantages rather than educational. Long gone are the days of spartan dormitories and cold showers-kids in the private sector now have fabulous science labs and sports facilities, and access to a huge range of subjects and activities.

But there are some points that cause controversial views. One of them is that private schools have better exam results, which, as many analysts think, are not completely adequate. They say that in the past few decades private schools have transformed themselves into highly effective exam-passing machines.

Also, they hire better-qualified teachers, and more of them, offering higher salaries to lure those with qualifications in difficult subjects such as physics, mathematics and foreign languages, and now have twice as many teachers per pupil as state schools do [3].

Another group of researchers interviewed parents and children from 124 well-off white middle-class families in three English cities. The parents had made the decision to send their children to poorly-performing local comprehensives. The children did well, with excellent exam results and plenty of places offered by highly-regarded universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. One reason for their success, the researchers suggest, is that the schools, mindful of their positions in official league tables, were keen to keep these valuable clients. Teachers paid the youngsters more attention in class than they did to dozier students and arranged extension activities for them. One school, desperate to keep a bright child in the sixth form, even ran an A-level drama course especially for her.

The parents were delighted by their huge savings. But they had to work hard. More than half became school governors, and all monitored their children's progress relentlessly. "They thought their children would do well being exposed to a more socially and ethnically diverse educational experience", says one of the researchers [3].

The financing of state schools in England, in particular, is not satisfactory, as has been revealed by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) of 160,000 members. It was confessed that "grotty toilets and dirty buildings are not the right places to make our children feel their education matters" and stressed that in order for teachers and children to teach and learn in an effective manner, school buildings need to be safe, clean and inspiring [4].

The ADL's survey of 353 staff stated that a third of teachers complained that pupil lavatories were "abysmal". Many also said there were few staff lavatories, they were not kept clean and facilities were often shared with pupils. According to the ATL, facilities in many schools are "appalling", with senior teachers saying rebuilding should be accelerated to prevent standards slumping further. There exists the Future programme and it is believed it will transform education standards in England. The first new schools are built as part of a £45 billion plan to refurbish every secondary school in England. But there are fears, the newspaper says, that the scheme is being hit by delays, with just 50 schools expected to be completed by 2009 - 15 fewer than planned [4].

British secondary schools are sometimes blamed for over-measured, over-monitored education, that one which focuses on targets and outcomes, and fails to meet individual pupils' needs. In fact, many of the Government's semi-independent academies have installed cameras and two-way mirrors to let senior staff monitor pupils, and the ADL fears that the systems are being used by head teachers to monitor staff performance, putting teachers' ability to work independently at risk. Schools are believed to have first installed classroom CCTV four years ago, with an academy in Middlesbrough using cameras to monitor pupil behaviour and protect expensive equipment. Many teachers were alarmed by the technology which meant many would never take risks for fear of being penalized. Many critics believe that increased monitoring and more measurements means young people can only function in a society which has been so spoon-fed that it cannot think for itself and cannot challenge and grow in the future [5].

Some analysts are of the opinion that education is being undermined by the National Curriculum because it preserves lessons that are too formal. The system, established 20 years ago to dictate lesson content for different age groups, should be relaxed, they think, to give teachers more freedom to plan timetables themselves, according to the chief executive of the General Teaching Council who also called for an end to national tests, targets and league tables for seven- to 14-year-olds which he said damaged their enjoyment of school [6].

The tests – often known as "Sats" ( acronym for standard assessment tasks, standard assessment tests, or standard attainment tests (now officially called national tests) – are used to judge pupil development in the core subjects and provide results for school league tables. But a new national curriculum for 11- to 14-year-olds, published in 2007, dramatically cut back the amount of detailed knowledge prescribed by the Government for teaching in schools. It is decided that some pupils should be assessed informally in the classroom rather than by means of a timed exam [7].

The change, likely to be introduced in 2011, would affect those children starting secondary school this year. It comes days after a report published by Cambridge University said the repeated testing of young children damaged their education.

Pupils aged 14 are expected to reach Level-5 in the exams, while 11-year-olds are expected to reach Level-4.

Those teenagers not expected to reach the standards achieved of the average 11-year-old should not sit exams at the age of 14. It is said that they could be assessed 'more appropriately' by their teachers (ibid.)

There is diminishing interest in science in schools. Pupils are bored and switching off, the curriculum is no longer 'relevant' to their lives. Science teaching must therefore change and so must the exams that measure that teaching. Science must relate to pupils' lives and ordinary experiences. The sunlight of excitement must be let into the dark, dusty, old-fashioned corridors of school science [irony, sarcasm]. The truth is infinitely more depressing. The new GCSE specifications look likely to be lethal injection for science, not a stimulant. They will have a dire effect on A-level and post-16 studies, and hence on recruitment to science courses at university [8].

One has first to understand why these new specifications have come about.

First, they can no longer deliver conventional science teaching because good science graduates are not coming into teaching in sufficient numbers. The best possible person to excite young people about physics is a graduate physicist. They are also attracting fewer good mathematicians into teaching, so the maths that underpins quite a lot of good and interesting physics and chemistry is not available.

Second, single-subject science GCSEs are harder than some other subjects. There is pressure on schools that care about league tables to drop them for other, easier subjects, some of which count for two GCSEs in the league tables.

Third, practicals are increasingly constrained by health and safety requirements, and even by pupil indiscipline that can turn a lab into a war zone. Besides, practicals do not come cheap.

Fourth, at some stage pupils who might hope to go on to post-16 studies need to be taught a different science from those who simply need to learn a bit about global warming. One size does not fit Oxford and Cambridge, or Leeds and Birmingham, and the teachers think they must allow children to start choosing an individual route from the age of 14 onwards. As a result, they want to bring in science based on what one as a citizen might quite like to know as distinct from what one as a scientist need to know. As experts think, the new GCSEs are to real science what baby food is to steak and chips (ibid.)

Changing to IGCSE (International GCSE) is not easy, they assert. Although it is simply a traditional exam, the Government does not recognize it as a proper exam.

It means a great deal of work for science staff but they think it is essential if they are to preserve science and enthusiasm for science at A-level and beyond. It used to be the Three Rs that dominated teaching. For the future, it is more likely to be the Three Cs: cosy, comfortable and consumer based. Perhaps to those a fourth should be added: catastrophic (ibid.)

Over the past ten years, a number of initiatives on everything from truancy to careers advice has cost hundreds of millions of pounds and brought little, according to the National Audit Office, a body controlling spendings. The government's anti-truancy programmes, for example, cost £885m, with negligible effect, the officials say. A new television channel for teachers which started broadcasting in 2005 costs £20m a year. One of the latest schemes is personalisation: letting pupils concentrate on what they are good at.

Old-style educationalists passionately support the idea of comprehensive, non-selective education as a social leveller. Without political restraint, they fear, head teachers will pick the best and brightest pupils, and shun the rest. The government now sees this thinking as the biggest obstacle to its reform plans. It wants to shunt the local education authorities into providing back-up services, such as school transport and provision for difficult, disruptive and specially needy pupils. Ambitious head teachers wanting to expand – for example by opening sixth forms – would be able to do so freely. School authorities are dreaming of getting rid of central, local and quangocratic control [9].

The problem of teachers training cannot be isolated from all other issues of education. Until recently, in was very difficult, almost impossible, to get rid of an incompetent teacher. Now though, schools can turn to the General Teaching Council, which is responsible for upholding professional standards helped by employment legislation and the teachers' unions though they are believed to be more concerned for their members' interests than the pupils [10].

Beginning teachers in the USA have better academic credentials than their predecessors did a decade ago. The improvement holds across gender, racial and ethnic lines, a new study finds. It suggests tougher requirements at all levels have forced teachers' colleges to improve offerings while luring more qualified candidates to teaching. The study was released in December, 2007, by the Educational Testing service, which designs the Praxis test now taken by most new teachers.

It finds qualifications have risen rapidly with candidates' verbal SAT scores rising 13 points and math scores rising 17 points [11].

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the national accrediting body for schools of education, states that a new generation of teachers is being formed, and they are, by traditional academic measures, stronger than they were ten years ago. Study author Drew Gitomer credits “significant attention toward the issue of teacher quality” at nearly every level (*ibid.*) Also, teacher shortages and classroom size limits led to a boom in alternative certification programs such as Troops to Teachers and Teach for America. These programs broadened the candidate pool and in many cases, attracted talented career-changers and recent college graduates.

There has been a 41 % (£8.8 billion) real increase in the schools budget since 1997. Much of that has gone in higher salaries – a top head teacher can expect to earn well over £100,000 (\$190,000) a year. The educational establishment's control over teacher training has been broken – making it possible for able graduates to become teachers in mid-career. A new £2 billion programme is overhauling run-down school buildings. But with generosity has come toughness: scores of bad schools have closed, and dozens of new ones opened. Seventeen of these are independently run, privately sponsored academies, which cost up to £26m each. These schools, loathed by left-wingers and local bureaucrats for their cost and elitist ways – uniforms, strict discipline and so forth – are a centrepiece of the government's secondary-school reforms. More than 2,000 schools have opted for specialist status in subjects such as languages, sport or science. That choice entitles them to more government cash. This has brought improved results. Yet overall results are still disappointing. Barely half of England's 16-year-olds (the rest of Britain and Northern Ireland run education differently) gain five GCSE passes, of grade C or above, though that standard is wobbly. Those five passes, for example, can now include one all-encompassing technology qualification that counts as four grades in individual subjects. And English and maths, which employers care about most, are not compulsory subjects [9].

Secondary schools will have to cope with the mutinous, dispirited 20 % of pupils who arrive from primary school unable to read. The national test results released on August 12 th, 2008 revealed that almost a third of English 14-year-olds cannot read properly. Of course, partly it is quite understandable: the English spelling, being a feature of written English's idiosyncrasies well-known by both foreigners and natives, highlights the shortcomings of English orthography.

Due partly to its mixed Germanic and Latin origins, English spelling is strikingly inconsistent. It takes more than twice as long to learn to read English as it does to read most other west European languages, according to a 2003 study led by Dundee University. Some educationists believe that the approach to the problem needs to be changed somehow. One solution is to accept the most common misspellings as variants rather than correct them. Another concerns introducing some standardising rules (on doubled consonants, considered as bereft of logic; removing erroneous silent and superfluous letters, etc. Perhaps, some changes are worth considering, nevertheless it is clear that the settlement of the situation requires much time and tolerance. Many experts think that the rules need updating, not scrapping, as is asserted in the topical article on the needs in a central regulatory authority capable of overseeing standardization [12].

Official figures in the press show that the number of teenagers studying European languages has slumped to below half (Graeme Paton. Fewer than half of pupils take a language GCSE : *The Daily Telegraph*. November 6th, 2007, p.9). Just 48 per cent of 16-year-olds at English secondary schools took a GCSE in French, German or Spanish, compared with eight in 10 (80 %) a decade ago (when Labour came to power). The figures were obtained by the Liberal Democrats. David Laws, the party's children secretary, said: “In just five years we have gone from the vast majority of young people taking GCSE in European languages, to less than one child in every two. “We have always been regarded as one of the most incompetent nations in our ability to speak other languages. These figures suggest that our counterparts abroad have seen nothing yet.

The decision in 2004 to make studying languages optional sent the subjects into freefall. This year, the proportion of pupils doing French fell for the eighth year in a row, to just 28.7 per cent, while German fell to 11.5 per cent. The true percentages may be much lower because the figures fail to recognize those pupils who are studying more than one language.

It was hoped that such falls would be compensated by pupils studying “world” languages such as Mandarin, Japanese, Urdu, Turkish, Arabic and Farsi, but these have also declined in popularity, with fewer than three per cent of teenagers studying them at GCSE – a lower rate than 15 years ago.

Spanish is the only language to have witnessed a revival, with 8.1 per cent of students taking a GCSE in the summer of 2007 compared to 5.9 per cent in 1997. Experts put the rise down to the continued attraction of Spain as a holiday destination as well as growing interest in South America (many think that, with 86 per cent of Spanish-speaking people now living in the New World, Spanish can hardly be reckoned a European tongue).

### Conclusion

The poor take-up comes despite a Government target to encourage between 50 and 90 per cent of teenagers to take a foreign language.

Business leaders have stated the decline will hit profits as firms struggle to trade with companies overseas (although if you want to sell to foreigners, as opposed to buying from them, you should still try to use their language). At present too few young people are entering work with language skills. Some believe that children have been "spoiled" by the growth of English. English being a world language brings many benefits, it is stated, but the young people English-speaking countries of Europe are put at the severe disadvantage of not having an incentive to engage in another language. If, over a period of time, English becomes the language of the European Union, it will make this situation so much worse.

The decline in languages has also been put down to the perceived difficulty of the subjects, with some head teachers allegedly encouraging pupils to take easy courses in order to boost a school's league table positions. Some experts call for languages to be made easier to bring them into line with other subjects.

One way in which the Government hopes to revive interest is by offering new diplomas in languages – enabling teenagers to study them as an alternative to GCSEs and A-levels. In addition, ministers are putting faith in a review of language teaching including compulsory lessons to primary school children as they have been concerned for some time about the decline in language learning. It is said that the chief purpose of linguistic accomplishment is to be able to enter a different mindset, to acquire a completely fresh perspective on the world. This is less a question of utility than of what ought to be the primary purpose of education: to expand our thinking (ibid.)

Educationists in the United States who pursue radical reforms in schools and other reform-minded advocates favouring sustainable and incremental change in school approaches to educating children are of the opinion that the main role in promoting reforms should be played by Teachers' unions - the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association. As it has been stated that bribery in schools has a place, today the unions' authorities support pay-for-performance schemes and agree to a plan that awards schools lump bonuses for teachers if scores improve. The AFT is the second-largest union in the USA and it supports such bonuses, if negotiated with a local union. It also represents teachers in more than 70 charter (publicly funded but self-governing) schools, in ten states. There are plans for launching more charter schools though it forayed into charter schools with caution, contending that one of the most important traits of a charter is that it is not unionised. Now there exist some requirements that if a charter has more than 250 students before its third year, its teachers must unionise. According to many school education analysts, schools should develop into community centres with a full range of services, and encouraging districts and locals to develop new salary models. Such views were discussed in the framework of the AFT's convention on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 with the conclusion that schools and teachers got to modernize [13].

Financial problems influence the policies not only of high schools but also the schools of higher education. British universities rely increasingly on foreigners to supplement government-capped fees. More than 10 % of students come from outside the European Union (EU). There are good academic reasons for wanting foreign students, but the main motivation is mercenary: foreign students keep British universities from crumbling. They subsidise the loss-making teaching of home students (and of the EU ones, who pay domestic rates). They pay £8,000 (\$15,000) a year, compared with the £5,000-odd in fees and subsidies that universities get for an average home student. Things are looking still better now that Britain's biggest competitor in higher education, America, has driven away tens of thousands of potential students by tougher visa rules. Demand from China is huge (it has been rising by more than 50 % a year) and the British brand is strong [14].

Still, they feel growing competition from continental European universities which are now aggressively marketing post-graduate courses for overseas students, and from American universities which want to grow abroad. Foreigners are becoming more demanding. China is encouraging foreign universities to open campuses there and has the plans to develop its own universities – and not only for its own students: an increasing number of people from other Asian countries are choosing to study there too. Secondly, traditional universities often regard foreigners as a necessary nuisance: for some academics, work with lots of diverse students is a hassle, looking after outsiders properly is expensive, and universities often plead poverty. Foreign students also find it hard to open bank accounts, to get jobs, and to gain and renew visas. That drives some students elsewhere. Like customers everywhere, foreign students will look for value for money. British universities can offer that – but only if the government lets them set higher prices at home (ibid.)

The Fulbright Institute, an advisory service for American universities, says that Britain could be facing an undergraduate brain drain. Britain was the only country to show an increase in the number of students enrolling at American universities last year: up two per cent. German students were six per cent down and French – 5–6 per cent.

American universities are launching their biggest recruitment drive after a record number of inquiries from British students facing top-up fees of up to £ 3,000 from next September.

More than 100 universities will be hoping to pick up some of the brightest talent with offers of bursaries and scholarships at a fair in London.

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What British universities need is the freedom to raise and spend their own money as they choose; for if they, too, could offer handsome scholarships awarded solely on academic merit, they would also be able to keep more of their own brightest youngsters at home.

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