

Intra-school differentiation in primary education of Ukraine (1975-1990s): Achievements and disappointments in a historical perspective

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Abstract

The article examines the issue of intra-school differentiation (Ukr. Transl. 'внутрішньошкільна диференціація') in primary education, actualized in the early 70s of the 20th century in Ukraine. Analysis of various types of sources proved that intra-school differentiation was initially realized in the form of levelling classes (Ukr. Transl. 'класи вирівнювання') (1975–1984) and then as a system of differentiated classes (Ukr. Transl. 'диференційовані класи') (1988–1990s). It had a number of benefits (it made it possible to implement an individual approach to learners with different levels of readiness for systematic schooling, cognitive abilities development; to provide comfortable conditions for gifted, standard, pedagogically neglected and mentally challenged students, etc.). The present research shows that due to a number of reasons such as problems with the preparation of educational and methodological supply, lack of school psychologists, psychological unwillingness of some teachers to change educational approaches to different categories of students, insufficient financing of the educational sector, etc., there was a certain disappointment at intra-school differentiation among the teachers and researchers and the collapse of differentiated classes in primary school of Ukraine in the late 90s of the last century.

L'articolo esamina la questione della differenziazione intra-scolastica nella scuola primaria, che venne a realizzarsi in Ucraina all'inizio degli anni '70 del secolo scorso. L'analisi di diverse fonti prova che la differenziazione intra-scolastica fu inizialmente realizzata nella forma di classi di recupero (1975–1984) e poi in un sistema di classi differenziate (1988–anni '90). Questo sistema garantiva alcuni vantaggi (consentiva di applicare una didattica individualizzata per alunni con diversi livelli di sviluppo cognitivo e di capacità di apprendimento scolastico; di garantire condizioni adeguate a studenti dotati, medi, con difficoltà cognitive, etc). La presente ricerca mostra che, a causa di una serie di ragioni (problemi nella preparazione della dotazione didattica; carenza di psicologi scolastici; scarsa disponibilità di alcuni docenti a modificare l'approccio pedagogico verso alcune categorie di alunni; insufficiente finanziamento del settore educativo, etc.), c'è stata una certa delusione tra insegnanti e ricercatori verso la differenziazione intra-scolastica nelle scuole primarie ucraine alla fine degli anni Novanta del secolo scorso.

Keywords: differentiated learning; intra-school differentiation; differentiated classes; primary education; Ukraine

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Parole chiave: apprendimento differenziale; differenziazione intra-scolastica; classi differenziate; scuola primaria; Ucraina

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1. Introduction

The dynamism of modern social transformations is accompanied by the reform of the education sector, in particular of the primary school. One of the priority vectors of this process is the differentiated learning which means ensuring the individual educational direction of young learners' development, taking into consideration their personal needs, interests and abilities, which is emphasized in the fundamental educational documents 'New Ukrainian School. Conceptual principles of secondary school reform' (2016), Laws of Ukraine 'On education' (2017), 'On general secondary education' (2020). Regarding the mentioned facts, it looks reasonable to turn to historical and pedagogical experience, in particular, the period of the 70s – 90s of the 20th century when the issue of differentiation of education in Ukraine was actualized at the state level; the term 'differentiated learning' (Ukr. transl. 'диференційоване навчання') began to be used in legal documents and irreversibly entered scientific circles spreading in the educational environment. In addition, the research, experimentation and introduction of new forms and levels of differentiation in primary education was intensified within the outlined chronological period. The innovation of this period was the theoretical justification and practical implementation of the intra-school differentiation.

During the period of around 30 years, the idea of differentiated classes in primary school had undergone significant changes from gaining the greatest achievement to total decline. What was the reason for the actualization of intra-school differentiation in primary education in Ukraine in the 70s – 90s of the 20th century, what were its main characteristics and the results of its implementation, as well as what led to the disappointment with this form of differentiation among the teachers? The search for the answers to these questions led us to a thorough study of primary sources: the works of scientists who participated in the experimental research into intra-school differentiation in the 1970s – 1990s (Yu. Hilbukh, L. Kondratenko, V. Kravets, H. Kumarina, I. Yurchenko, etc.); legislative documents that regulated the activities of differentiated classes (resolutions, Laws of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, regulations on equalization (levelling) classes); reports on the results of the experiments in intra-school differentiation which were published and are kept in the funds of the Central State Archive of Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine and are being scientifically analyzed for the first time (Kolehiyi Ministerstva, 1989; Pro eksperyment, 1989); methodological recommendations for organizing differentiated classes work.

Respectively, the interpretational sources which present retrospective analysis of the differentiation in Ukrainian education or of similar issues have been taken into account. Specifically, fragmentary information about the functioning of differentiated classes within certain chronological period can be found in monographs prepared by scientists of the Department of History and Philosophy of Education of the Institute of Pedagogy of the National Pedagogical Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 'Essays on the history of the development of a differentiated approach to the organization of education in the Ukrainian school (late 30s – 80s of the 20th century)' (2017) and 'Processes of differentiation in school education of independent Ukraine (historical and analytical aspect)' (2019); in the monograph of Ukrainian psychologist L. Kondratenko 'Psychology of primary school failure' (2017); in the publications of the Ukrainian scientist in the field of the history of education N. Dichek 'Achievements of Ukrainian pedagogical psychology in the implementation of a differentiated approach to school education: the legacy of Yu. Hilbukh (1928–2000)' (2017b), 'The relevance of Yu. Hilbukh's ideas on attitude to gifted children' (2017a), 'Contribution of psychologists of Ukraine to the individualization of the educational process in secondary school (second half of the 20th century)' (2018).

The historiographic research proved that foreign scientists (Bearne, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999; Curran & Petersen, 2017; Deunk et al., 2018; Eikeland & Ohna, 2022; Kanellopoulou & Darra, 2022, etc.) also studied the

educational differentiation in primary education, however, the issue of intra-school differentiation in Ukraine was not reflected there.

2. Methodology

The methodological basis of the research is represented by two approaches: the source criticism (it provided the opportunity to identify and analyze various types of sources where the issue of intra-school differentiation of primary education within the definite chronological period was discussed) and historiographical approach (it contributed to the identification of the issue in historical and pedagogical sciences). Besides, the epistemological principles of historicism, objectivity, systematicity have been considered in our research. A complex of methods has been used to implement the research goal: general scientific (analysis, synthesis, comparison, systematization, generalization which served as the basis of the study of the outlined issue), historically structural (contributed to the development of the research structure), historically genetic (enabled systematization of the factual information), terminological analysis (made it possible to define the key concepts of the study ‘differentiated learning’, ‘intra-school differentiation’).

3. Differentiated learning: The definition, forms, levels

Historical and pedagogical study of the differentiated learning starts with its definition. Basing on the terminological analysis of the scientific resources (Dichek et al., 2019; Lypova, Voitsekhivskiy, & Zamaskina, 2011; Osmolovskaya, 2005; Sukhomlynska et al., 2017; Yaroshenko, 2008;) ‘*differentiated learning*’ is regarded as a way of organizing the educational process, which takes into account the individual and typological characteristics of the individual (abilities, inclinations, interests, peculiarities of cognitive activity, etc.). Differentiated learning can be revealed in different forms, namely:

- *external differentiation*, implemented at the level of the secondary school education system by means of creating differentiated schools (*inter-school level*) or implemented at the school level creating differentiated classes at schools (*intra-school or class level*);
- *internal differentiation*, which is implemented at the class level and involves separating certain pupils’ groups according to their characteristics (level of their abilities (general or special), interests, etc.).

4. The reasons for actualization of intra-school differentiation in primary education

The analyzed sources reveal that the issue of intra-school differentiation in Ukraine started to be discussed in the early 70s of the 20th century in terms of structural and content transformations in primary education (reduction of studying time to three years, updating educational content, emphasis on the developmental aspect, increasing the theoretical level of teaching, etc.) which, on the one hand, created favorable conditions for gifted learners’ development, and, on the other hand, led to an increase in the number of learners who had learning problems and needed systematic additional teachers’ assistance (Havrylenko, 2019, p. 276). Therefore, the search for appropriate forms of education, primarily, for pupils who were unable to keep up, was actualized. Since it was quite complicated to provide this category of learners with individual teaching in the condition of ordinary classes (the number of pupils in a class was up to 40 with the eventual reduction to 30 since 1986), they were suggested to be educated in specially created classes which received the name of ‘*classes of individualized study*’, or *equalization (levelling) classes*. The latter name reflected their main task ‘to equalize (...) the educational opportunities of weak pupils, to create the most favorable conditions’ for their studies, upbringing, and development (Klassy’ vy’ravnivaniya, 1980, p. 5).

It is worth mentioning that the first levelling classes on the territory of the former Soviet Union (by 1991 Ukraine as well as a number of other countries of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, part of Russia) and of South-Western and Central Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, part of Russia) were parts of the USSR, an authoritarian mono-party state) were opened in Estonia in 1969 and were functioning as experimental classes. Secondary school students (5–7grades) who fell behind with studies could be enrolled there. The results of the three-year experiment showed that only 50% of schoolchildren managed to overcome knowledge gaps and keep up with the curriculum requirements. Therefore, the Estonian researchers came to the conclusion that it would be possible to increase these indicators, provided that corrective work with the students who fell behind began in primary school (Maslov, 1973).

5. Equalization (levelling) classes as a type of differentiated classes: The process and results of the experiment (1975–1983)

Taking into account the results of the Estonian researchers, in July 1975 the board of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine decided to organize experimental levelling classes in eight schools in Donetsk region with the aim to make a *special focus on the work with challenging and pedagogically neglected primary school pupils, to eliminate their knowledge gaps, to reduce the number of pupils who were left in the same grade for a second year* (Pro organizatsiyu eksperymentalnykh klasiv, 1975, p. 25). The experiment was conducted by a group of researchers from *The Scientific Research Institute of Pedagogy of Ukraine* and *The Scientific Research Institute of Psychology of Ukraine*: M. Bogdanovych, Yu. Hilbukh, I. Diomina, A. Koval, V. Kumarin, H. Kumarina, N. Skrypchenko, and others. The group included specialists in didactics, education, teaching methods, psychology, physiology, speech therapy (Kumarina, 1978, pp. 44, 47). This enabled the researchers to conduct a comprehensive, systematic and multi-layered study on efficiency of the new educational mode aiming at overcoming younger learners' failure.

At the initial stage of the experiment, equalization (levelling) classes were formed with second-graders who, due to a temporary developmental challenges, pedagogical neglect, weak health condition, and other reasons, fell behind with the so-called 'core' subjects (the core subjects in that period included Ukrainian and Russian languages and Mathematics (Havrylenko, 2019, p. 184)). Before being transferred to levelling classes with the parents' consent, the pupils had been examined by the medical and pedagogical committee. Children with significant deviations in psychophysical development were sent to special educational institutions (Kumarina, 1978, p. 45).

Analysis of the information about the pupils enrolled in the experimental equalization (levelling) classes (recommendations given by previous teachers; data from medical examinations; results of the direct observation in the process of study; laboratory study of their mental development), revealed the following learners' characteristics:

- a visible negative attitude to studies, to school in general (reluctance to go to school, to participate in studying activities, to do homework, to meet teachers' requirements, to follow established school rules; discipline violations);
- low self-confidence (anxiety, painful shyness, reluctance to answer);
- increased fatigue, low work capacity (sustainability of attention only during the first 15-20 minutes of the lesson; decrease in work capacity to a critical level at the end of the third lesson; sharp decline in work capacity at the end of the week and quarter);
- low learning ability, underdevelopment of cognitive interests (Kumarina, 1978, p. 45).

In addition, the majority of pupils had slow perception, inert thinking, weak memory, and underdeveloped language, which significantly complicated their studies. The outlined young learners' characteristics were the 'basic points' in determining the organizational, psychological, and pedagogical conditions for their education, upbringing and development, and basing on these characteristics, research tasks were defined. (Kumarina, 1978, p. 46). The conditions of 'low-achieving' pupils' teaching are going to be considered in details.

In order to provide individualized teaching for 'low-achieving' students (those who fell behind with the studies), *the number* of learners in experimental levelling classes was reduced to the half number of a regular class and amounted to 16–20 pupils. Their composition could be flexible, in particular, when learners managed to catch up with the curriculum, they were transferred to a regular class before the due time, and another pupil could be enrolled in his place. *Qualified and experienced teachers* who had appropriate training were involved in working with schoolchildren with learning problems. *A system of extended day* staying after regular classes was launched for each levelling class. In most cases, the same class teachers continued working with pupils, which increased the opportunity to timely provide learners with individual help (Kumarina & Kravets, 1979, p. 32).

Teaching in experimental levelling classes was carried out according to *the current curricula and programs* for primary school, which made it possible for 'low-achieving' students to finish primary school simultaneously with their peers from regular classes. Within the framework of the curriculum, teachers were allowed to be flexible with the teaching time. Due to this, they could concentrate more on the difficult topics in language, reading, mathematics classes.

Taking into account the learners' increased fatigue, *lessons* were planned in a way to make an effective use of their most active studying time. In particular, the new material was presented at the beginning of the lesson, and the assessment was not singled out as a separate lesson stage (it took place briefly during the regular lessons and at extended day classes). The main didactic tasks (presenting educational material, its comprehension, recycling and application) were usually solved during the class time. Additional classes, widely practiced during individual work with 'low-achieving' students in regular classes, were not present at leveling experimental classes. It is quite logical that additional classes led to learners' increasing educational load, as a result, they could experience mental fatigue, health problems, school negativism, etc. *The slow pace of knowledge acquisition*, characterizing 'low-achieving' students, was 'compensated not in an extensive way by means of increasing study time, but in an intensive way by means of intensifying the educational function of each unit of the study time and, above all, the entire lesson time' (Klassy' vy'ravnivaniya, 1980, p. 23). In particular, specially published workbooks (at Maths lessons) or punchcards (at language lessons) were supposed to facilitate the study (Kumarina, 1978, p. 46).

One of the ways to solve teaching problems concerning the 'low-achieving' learners was the change in *learners' assessment*. Hence, the teachers' feedback focused not on learners' mistakes but on their learning improvements. The teachers tried to concentrate on each even insignificant learners' success (Kumarina, 1978, p. 47). Consequently, the mark was turned from a 'punishing tool' into a motivational and encouraging means for learners. A positive aspect of the experimental levelling classes was a *calm and friendly atmosphere*; the teachers' interested attitude to learners' studying results; the intention to discover learners' hidden abilities, to identify positive personality traits and to rely on them in the educational process; to create the situation of success for each child. Therefore, the conditions for developing positive learning motivation and activating learners' cognitive abilities were provided in the leveling classes. The mentioned changes can be considered as steps towards the humanization and child-centeredness in the Soviet educational process.

The experiment revealed that an important factor in the levelling classes efficiency was pupils' *relatively homogeneous composition*. This enabled the teachers to organize the educational process, in particular frontal work, with the accordance to 'low-achieving' students' pace of knowledge acquisition; to implement a differentiated

and individual approach in presenting new material, in the process of applying the acquired knowledge, in overcoming knowledge gaps, in revising the learning material; in implementing the developmental function of learning. In addition, pupils' relatively equal level of educational opportunities served for them as a psychological protection against insecurity and humiliation (Kumarina, 1978, p. 46).

As it was mentioned above, at the beginning of the experiment, 'low-achieving' students of the second grade were enrolled on the levelling classes. Therefore, teachers had to bridge knowledge gaps from the previous period simultaneously with teaching the material of the corresponding grade; as well as to re-teach and re-educate; to restore the desire to study and attend school, etc. Consequently, just the first year of the experiment enabled the researchers to come to the conclusion of the irrationality of this approach. In their opinion, the priority task of the levelling classes should not have been to overcome falling behind with the studies, but to prevent this negative phenomenon. At the scientific and practical conference held in Donetsk in June 1976, a year after the experiment started, levelling classes starting *from the first year of study* were recognized as an appropriate and necessary measure (Kumarina, 1980, pp. 70-71). Therefore, from 1976–77 school year, experimental leveling classes were composed of pre-school learners who turned out to be unprepared for systematic learning in regular classes, as well as I-II grade pupils who fell behind with two or more subjects (Kumarina, 1978, p. 50). This approach also made the teachers' work easier.

The data collected during the four-year experiment (studying tests results, psychological tests results, observation diaries, parents' questionnaires, records of teachers and pupils' interviews, direct classroom observation) enabled the scientists to draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the new mode of education. Thus, 82% of primary school pupils who studied in levelling classes moved to the category of 'achieving' students by the end of the primary school. The study also showed that the majority of pupils were able to meet the requirements of the primary school curriculum within the prescribed three-year study period (Kumarina, 1980, p. 70).

The results of the first stage of the experiment (1975–1979) were positively evaluated by the board of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine (April 13, 1979). The further research was considered important in terms of expanding the network of levelling classes in Donetsk region and opening them in other Ukrainian regional centers (Pro pidsumky eksperimentalnoyi roboty, 1979, p. 3). Since 1979–80 school year, their functioning was regulated by the Regulations on experimental knowledge levelling classes of secondary schools of the Ukrainian SSR (August 14, 1979) (Polozhennia pro eksperymentalni klasy, 1979, p. 27).

The second stage of the experiment (1979–1982) confirmed that the important conditions for the efficient work of experimental levelling classes were: relatively homogeneous composition of classes, the flexibility of the study time, the implementation of the educational process by highly qualified teachers, reducing the number of pupils (Kolehiyi Ministerstva osvity, 1983, pp. 20-21). The organization of levelling classes turned out to have provided favorable conditions for functioning regular classes. As they did not include 'low-achieving' students, teachers had the opportunity to focus on other learners' needs. Therefore, there was a real opportunity to increase teaching and educational efficiency on the scope of the whole primary school, as well as to intensify the learning process in regular classes (Havrylenko, 2015, p. 51).

However, such issues as the selection methods to levelling classes, teachers' effective training, scientific and methodological support, transferring pupils from levelling to regular classes were not resolved during the experiment. In addition, the expansion of the research scope (in 1982–83 school year there were 118 experimental levelling classes with 2,050 pupils (Pro pidsumky eksperimentalnoho navchannia, 1983, p. 17) actualized the issue of providing these classes with highly qualified teachers, speech therapists; appropriate material and technical supply, etc (Kolehiyi Ministerstva osvity, 1983, p. 25).

The overall results of the long-lasting study finally confirmed that the experiment in levelling classes, which was launched in Donetsk region's schools and later spread to all regions of Ukraine, was verified. The obtained data

convincingly proved that *it is advisable to organize levelling classes in secondary schools as an effective form of individualization of education, overcoming and preventing primary school learners' falling behind with the studies and development.*

Since 1983, the results of the experiment had been widely used in Ukrainian school education, moreover, they became the basis for carrying out similar studies in Belarus, Russia, Estonia, and Latvia. The functioning of levelling classes in secondary schools was determined by a new Regulation (September 9, 1983) which clarified the previous document in terms of class composition, organization of the educational process, and management of the work (Polozhennia pro klasy vyrivniuvannia, 1983). However, a year later, levelling classes were actually equated to specialized schools and meant to provide education for mentally challenged learners basing on a special curriculum, which implied one additional studying year (O dal'nejshe sovershenstvovanii, 1984/1986, p. 40). Consequently, they lost their original aim to prevent and overcome the failure of children who were poorly prepared for schooling and experienced underachieving in primary school, and began to be closed in secondary schools (Yurchenko & Hilbukh, 1987, p. 3). We assume that this happened due to the fact that levelling classes as a form of differentiation and individualization of the education contradicted a unified education system prevailing in the Soviet Union. It is worth reminding that the major characteristics of the social and political life in the Soviet Union were the dominance of communist ideology, isolationism, forced collectivism, persecution of freedom of speech and thoughts, and open russification of the population. Under such conditions, the vector of state educational policy was oriented towards ideologizing, unifying, sovietizing, and russifying each level of education (Havrylenko, 2019, p. 185).

6. Psychological and pedagogical system of differentiated learning (1987–1990s)

However, the work with intra-school differentiation did not stop. On the one hand, it was facilitated by the changes in the social sphere that took place in the late 80s of the 20th century (the fall of the totalitarian regime, the collapse of communist ideology, the birth of democratization and liberalization) and, accordingly, in the educational domain (humanization of the educational process, increased attention to the needs and interests of the child, the development of their abilities and skills in the educational process) (Havrylenko, 2019, p. 361)), and on the other hand, there was the restoration of the Laboratory of School Psychodiagnostics at the Scientific Research Institute of Psychology of Ukraine, as a result of the 'liberation of psychological thought' in Ukraine, the return to the scientific and practical use of psychodiagnostics 'as an effective tool for studying the nature of the child' (Dichek et al., 2019, p. 71). These were the researchers of *the Laboratory of School Psychodiagnostics* (under the leadership of the famous Ukrainian psychologist *Yu. Hilbukh* who took an active part in the experiment into the efficiency of levelling classes) who developed *a psychological and pedagogical system of differentiated learning in primary school*. It was based on the idea that all children regardless of their pre-school preparation should be ensured equal access to quality education. Intra-school differentiation was considered by the scientists of the mentioned laboratory as one of the main directions of the development of secondary school on the basis of humanism and democracy, cooperation between teachers and pupils, and the provision of the conditions for each child's personal growth. The purpose of such training was to overcome pupils' alienation from school (Hilbukh, 1991, p. 63; Kondratenko, 2017, p. 256).

The system of differentiated education applied a purely psychological approach for the first time: the children were grouped into different classes according to the level of cognitive abilities development, and not according to the level of academic knowledge (Kondratenko, 2017, pp. 128-129). Consequently, it was proposed to introduce three types of classes in secondary school, starting from the first year of study:

- *classes of the age norm* – organized to educate children whose mental development corresponded to their actual age, their education was carried out according to the current curriculum;
- *classes of the accelerated study* – organized to educate children with a high level of mental development, their education was carried out according to condensed curriculum (the educational material was presented in large blocks, its concentricity was eliminated), which made it possible to shorten the term of primary education by one year;
- *classes of the increased individual focus or levelling (equalization) classes* – organized to educate children who were poorly prepared for studying at school, for pedagogically neglected children, as well as children with minor mental challenges, their education took place according to the usual curriculum, but in a much smaller class size (16-18 pupils) (Kolehiyi Ministerstva narodnoyi osvity, 1989, pp. 81-82).

A very important fact is that the boundaries of these classes were relative, i.e. depending on academic achievements, a pupil could be transferred from one class type to another (Hilbukh, 1994, pp. 12-14).

Experimental testing of the suggested intra-school differentiation system began in 1988 at ten secondary schools of Ukraine. The results of the study proved the efficiency of the differentiated classes. Despite this, the initial stage of the experiment led scientists to a conclusion about the inexpediency of joining two types of learners in the classes of increased individual attention, namely, pedagogically neglected students and students with mental challenges, because the last category required a slower pace of learning (Kolehiyi Ministerstva narodnoyi osvity, 1989, p. 83). As a consequence, since 1991 schools participating in the experiment started to open *classes for mentally challenged students*. Their education took place according to the usual curriculum, but at a much slower studying pace which led to a one-year extension of primary school education. Class size was reduced to 12 pupils (Hilbukh, 1994, p. 22).

Differentiated classes were constituted on the basis of psychological and pedagogical diagnosis of future first year schoolchildren. In order to do this, a set of test methods developed by researchers of the Laboratory of School Psychodiagnostics was used (Hilbukh, Korobko, & Kondratenko, 1987).

To provide teachers with support, laboratory researchers developed and published methodical manuals and recommendations, conducted training courses for teaching in the differentiated classes. Scientists also constantly monitored the experimental classes (Uchebno-vospitatel'nyy process, 1991).

The research found out that the psychological and pedagogical system of learners' differentiation according to the current level of their cognitive abilities was an effective means of ensuring the harmonious and comprehensive development of both individual and learners' groups (Dichek, 2018, p. 23). The psychologists proved that 'profound structural changes in the learners' cognitive activity and moral sphere' took place. The experiment showed that in both areas, learners had significant potential that wouldn't be discovered in the traditionally organized educational process. Control 'tests' of learners' achievements and mental growth conducted in the differentiated classes in a number of schools in Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Rivne and Kharkiv regions of Ukraine, proved the significant advantages of the functioning of differentiated classes (Dichek et al., 2019, p. 77). According to a famous Ukrainian psychologist H. Ball, evaluation of the experimental differentiated education demonstrated that the differentiated classes really provided an individual approach to each child, promoted individualization, which is a 'principal characteristic of strategies for personality development' (Ball, 1996, pp. 10-11, auth. trans).

Resource analysis demonstrated that the suggested intra-school differentiation in primary education was supported by teachers and researchers. The fact that in the 1993–94 school year it was implemented in more than 2,000 schools in Ukraine and in other countries of the former USSR (Moldova, Belarus, Russia) is the best evidence of its support (Hilbukh, 1994, p. 19). Nevertheless, it remained at the experimental stage. After

Yu. Hilbukh's immigration to Israel in 1995 (Hilbukh, 2022), the experiment on the introduction of differentiated education was gradually shut down.

7. The reasons for disappointment at intra-school differentiation

The introduction of differentiated classes was connected with big expectations, namely, improving the quality of primary education, eliminating learners' overload, meeting their cognitive abilities, revealing and developing their skills, etc. (Dubynchuk, 1994, p. 10). However, the analysis of resources demonstrates that transfer to intra-school differentiation was not properly prepared. Thus, the appropriate *teaching supply* (curriculum, textbooks, illustrations) was not developed, as the scientific focus was mostly on psychological aspect (Dubynchuk, 1994, p. 10). The almost total absence of *school psychologists* led to the situation where diagnostic work, as well as corrective work in classes of increased individual attention and classes for mentally challenged children, were carried out by teachers (Kondratenko, 2017, p. 298).

Teachers and school authorities' insufficient competence in intra-school differentiation, their fragmentary awareness of the tasks and principles was also observed. A significant part of teachers tended to focus more on their own empirical experience and observation than on scientific research into differentiated education. In some schools, only the external attributes of differentiated classes were implemented, for example, teachers focused not on meeting learners' needs as an individual approach, but on the selecting gifted children from those who had learning problems with the aim to provide a higher level of education to more capable ones or to eliminate 'low-achieving' students from regular classes and in this way to facilitate the teacher's work. This approach, unfortunately, discredited the idea of intra-school differentiation and neutralized its positive aspects.

Some teachers were not psychologically ready to change their own teaching approaches and did not take into account learners' characteristics of different types. Pedagogical educational institutes did not contribute to this either. According to L. Kondratenko, the issue of differentiated education in elementary school has not become a part of educational curriculum of pedagogical institutes (Kondratenko, 2017, pp. 253-256).

We agree with N. Dichek that along with 'internal' reasons, there were also 'external' ones. In the 90s of the 20th century in Ukraine, the economic crisis caused a significant reduction of *financing* both the educational sector in general and experimental research, the introduction of innovations in primary education (Dichek, 2018, p. 24).

We assume that the mentioned factors led to the disappointment at intra-school differentiation among teachers. Moreover, as it has been mentioned above, one of the leaders of the experiment on differentiated classes in primary education had to leave Ukraine and soon passed away due to a serious disease. Consequently, differentiated classes in primary school of Ukraine stopped functioning in the late 1990s.

8. Conclusions

Summing up, we would mention that *intra-school differentiation in primary education*, actualized in the early 70-s of the 20th century in Ukraine due to primary school structural transformation, was initially realized in the form of *levelling classes* (1975–1984) and then as a system of *differentiated classes* (classes of the age norm, classes of the accelerated study, classes of the increased individual focus or levelling (equalization) classes, classes for mentally-challenged students) (1988–1990) had a number of *benefits*: to make it possible to implement an individual approach to learners with different levels of pre-school preparation and cognitive abilities development; to provide comfortable conditions for different categories of learners (gifted, standard, pedagogically neglected and mentally challenged); to improve the quality of education at the primary school level. However, due to a

number of reasons (problems with the preparation of educational and methodological supply for different classes; lack of school psychologists who could carry out diagnostic and corrective work with pupils; teachers and school authorities' insufficient awareness of the tasks and principles of intra-school differentiation; some teachers' psychological unwillingness to change educational approaches to different categories of learners; insufficient financing of the educational sector) there was a certain *disappointment* at intra-school differentiation among the teachers and researchers which eventually led to the collapse of differentiated classes in primary school of Ukraine in the late 90s of the last century.

From today's perspective, the issue of intra-school differentiation deserves attention and requires further thorough research. It can be suggested that in primary school where there are children with different levels of preparation, abilities, development of cognitive processes, the intra-school differentiation is more effective than internal differentiation.

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