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The Development of Primary Education in Soviet Ukraine in the mid 60's–early 80's of the 20th Century Organizational Aspect

Abstract

The article examines the features of organization of primary education in Soviet Ukraine in the mid 60's–the first half of the 80's of the 20th century on the basis of analysis of legislative and regulatory documents, annual reports of the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR. Attention displays on the analysis of the structural transformations in primary education; description of the types of schools that provided this level of educational process; analysis of educational and material support of the educational process in primary school.

Keywords: organizational of primary education, duration of studying, types of educational establishments, junior school children, teachers of primary school, educational and material support, Soviet Ukraine

Introduction

The reformation of educational section in line with European priorities is an important vector of public policy in Ukraine in conditions of modern challenges, transformations in the political, economic and cultural life of Ukrainian society. In this context of special attention displays on primary education as a basic educational level that is focused on formation of educational and social competencies; they are necessary for further successful education and self-realization. Updating of the legislative and regulatory fields of primary education, determination of its optimal duration, searching of resources to maintenance the network of small amount of primary schools in rural areas, updating the quality of preparation of primary school's teachers, improvement of teaching and material support of the educational process in primary school is taken place nowadays. Considering all

mentioned above it would be logical to appeal to the study of national, historical and pedagogical experience of the Soviet period, 1964–1984 years in particular; Ukrainian scientist O. Sukhomlynska emphasizes „events, facts, phenomena that took place at that period are our recent history [...] processes and tendencies that were founded in that time are in current discourse” (Sukhomlynska, 2007, p. 7). Therefore, their comprehension can become the basis in resolving of modern educational problems; it will allow revealing achievements and avoiding mistakes.

A short review of researches on the theme

A historiographical analysis has showed that the recent attention of Ukrainian historians of pedagogy (L. Berezivska, V. Kuzmenko, O. Petrenko, L. Pyrozhenko, O. Sukhomlynska etc.) had increased to the study of development of school's education in Soviet Ukraine including primary education. A number of historical and pedagogical studies appeared; their subjects of studies were specific problems of primary education in the outlined chronological limits: reformation of the primary education's content (O. Savchenko), textbooks' formation in primary education (Ya. Kodliuk, L. Vysochan), differentiation and individualization of primary education (T. Vozhehova), developmental and problem studies (O. Zamashkina, N. Yants), evaluation of educational achievements of primary school children (A. Predyk, S. Chupakhina) and others. Undoubtedly, they enriched the understanding of development of primary education in Ukraine in the mid 60's–early 80's of the 20th century. However, the question of organization of primary education in this period was left aside by the researched; it stipulated implementation of the scientific research.

The purpose of the scientific research is to expose the features of organization of primary education in Soviet Ukraine in the mid 60's–early 80' of the 20th century.

Exposition of basic material of research

The period in 1964–1984 years (so-called “Brezhnev epoch”) is one of the most difficult and controversial in the history of Ukraine. After L. Brezhnev had become a new political leader, a course towards further development of social democracy was declared. However, the new conservative tendencies in socio-political sphere appeared: increasing of authoritarian-bureaucratic regime, monopoly of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), ideological dictatorship; alienation of the party from people; reduction of publicity; exaltation of new secretary-general; transition to overt russification. Certain con-

traditions were manifested in the socioeconomic sphere: increasing of the investment in the economy, improving its quantitative indexes and at the same time lagging of the scientific and technological progress; development of the industrial sector which led to the acceleration of urbanization and as a result degradation of the village; improving of the living standards, enhancing of social protection and at the same time the lack of economic security led to worsening of demographic situation (Boyko, 2006, p. 531–546). Contradictory tendencies were typical for development of educational industry. On the one hand, there were quantitative and qualitative changes: expansion of network of educational establishments; increasing of level of professional preparation of the teaching staff; development of educational and psychological science and their influence on modernization of education; deployment of experimental research with improvement of educational process. On the other hand, there was unification of education's system; insufficiency of financing; privation of possibility for pedagogical public to participate in discussion of organizational and semantic transformations in education; strict regulation of teachers' labor; privation of freedom of pedagogical work etc. The state policy in education, as well as in previous periods, was determined by party's congresses and was reflected in corresponding documents; the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic (the Ukrainian SSR) was its repeater (Berezivska, 2008, p. 305–335). The outlined factors influenced on development of primary education in general and its organization in particular.

Let us note that, considering the organizational aspect of development of primary education in certain chronological limits, we focused on description of its components: duration of studies at primary school; types of educational establishments that provided this level of education; participants of educational process, their quantitative and qualitative indexes, social protection of children and teachers; educational and material support of educational process in primary school.

The study of legislative and normative documents shows that from the 20's of the 20th century duration of primary school was four-year. In 1964 the Central Committee (the CC) of CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR) accepted resolution "About the change of duration of study in general secondary polytechnic schools with productive studies"; the duration of secondary education was set 10 years instead of 11 (Postanovlenie, 1964, p. 218). It stipulated structural transformation of education at school in general and its primary link in particular. To reduce the duration of primary education to three years a new course was selected.

Transition to a three-year term of primary studies was positively perceived by the majority of pedagogical community. The headings of scientific and prac-

tical articles published in rubric “Primary Education” of journal “Soviet School” during 1963–1967 eloquently show this: “Three years are enough for primary education”, “Primary education for three years”, “More knowledge, shorter term of study” etc.

At the same time not all teachers agreed with the outlined changes. Famous Ukrainian scientist and teacher V. Sukhomlynskyi was one of the few who negatively estimated structural transformations in the primary link of school. In the article *What and how Children are Taught*, the manuscript of which is kept among archival documents, Vasyl Oleksandrovych expressed a critical attitude to the processes taking place in primary education in the 60’s of the 20th century.

Spears break around the question of how to put as much knowledge as it is possible to the child’s head; there is the dispute about how to give primary education not for four years but for three. The „effective” teaching methods have become modern nowadays; their total content is to ensure that every minute of the lesson was filled with labor, no minute should be lost, it is good for child to solve not one or two but four, five or six arithmetic problems (Sukhomlynsky, fol. 9).

The teacher was convinced that this approach in teaching of junior school children negatively affected their health and mental development.

V. Sukhomlynsky proved that primary education is a “period of the protracted childhood of human brain, entire human nervous system; period when tender, sensible cells of hemispheric cortex develop, when thinking forms”. Thus, it is impossible to reduce “period of the childhood of human brain” that lasts 11–12 years; it is also impossible to reduce the period of primary education. Therefore, the scientist considered arguments and conclusions in behalf of “intensification” speculative; they ignore the nature of child (Sukhomlynsky, fol. 13).

However, despite of the ambiguous perception of the issue of structural transformation of primary education, the CC of CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR made a resolution *About the Measures of Further Improvement of the Work of Secondary School* (1966); the transition to the systematic teaching of science in the fourth year of study was announced without previous discussion with teachers which was typical for the second half of 50’s of 20th century; consequently the course of primary education was limited by three grades. The accomplishment this task scientists of the Research Institute of Education of the Ukrainian SSR prepared new programs and textbooks for three-year primary school; their experimental examination was during 1967–1970. From the 1970/1971 school year (hereafter — s. y.) all primary classes came to a new duration of studies — three years (Havrylenko, 2014, p. 93).

Having analyzed published sources where the questions of structural transformation of school education were illuminated we believe that reduction of

primary school's education had more negative than positive consequences. Thus, the transition to a three-year course of primary education caused a number of problems: social (preservation of primary schools in rural areas, employment of primary school teachers that were released from teaching in the fourth grade); organizational and financial (reorganization of the school network, remove of more than 95 thousand of students of fourth grade to primary school and eight-year school; this required the completion of classrooms, organization of transportation of pupils to schools in rural areas, the implementation of the staff changes, retraining of teachers); physiological (complications of adaptation of children to secondary school because of an early transition to learning the fundamentals of science, a larger number of new teachers, changes in social status); pedagogical (overloading of school children, especially first-class children, educational work; increasing of number of underachieving of pupils, teachers complications of ungraded schools) (Udovychenko, 1968, p. 16; Stiosa, 1969, p. 38).

That is why in the first half of 70's of the 20th century a question about the search of educational time's reserves for extending the duration of primary education appeared. It was proposed to solve this problem by reducing the lower limit of the beginning of school, from six years. In 1972 the Research Institute of Pedagogy of the Ukrainian SSR and Management of Schools and the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR initiated realization of experimental study on the possibility of teaching of children from the age of six (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1976, f. 5127, fol. 16–17). During nearly a decade of comprehensive (attended by teachers, psychologists, hygienists, physiologists) experiment the possibility and feasibility of systematic education of six-year-old children was proved; the forms of educational process, content and teaching method were identified; teaching and didactic materials were prepared; economic, personnel, administrative aspects of the transition to teaching children from age of six were studied etc. (Skrypchenko, 1986, p. 42–48). From the 1986/1987 s. y. the transition to studying at school children from the age of six took place; consequently the duration of primary education has increased by one year and was four-year like in the early 70's.

We consider that the reduction of primary education's duration to three years was the hasty step of the educational policy of the government and did not bring the expected results. Thus, these changes are considered as a negative trend of this period.

In the context of studying the problems of primary education let us focus on the types of educational establishments that provided this level of education. Primary education could be gained in mass schools (primary, eight-year and secondary) where the majority of primary school children

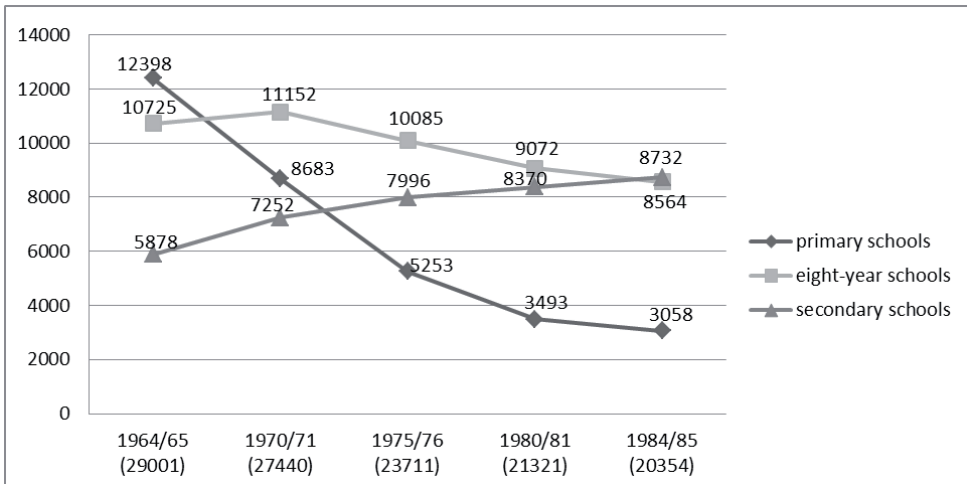


Fig. 1. Dynamics of network of primary, eight-year and secondary schools in 1964/1965–1984/1985 school years

studied. Also, children of primary school age could get it in schools with studying of a number of subjects in a foreign language; their quantity increased annually. Junior pupils whose parents worked and were not able to provide proper education and supervision for children studied at schools of extended day. In places where there were no sufficient educational facilities and a contingent of pupils for organization of this type of educational establishments groups with extended day were opened.

Children without parental care and from families with many children were able to obtain primary education in boarding schools. A few of primary school children studied sanatorium-forest schools and boarding schools for sick children; they functioned as educational and therapeutic establishments. Children with mental and physical development could get education in special schools and boarding schools. Children who needed special conditions of education studied in special schools for difficult children and juvenile delinquent.

For overage children, who for various reasons dropped out of school and for three or more years exceeded the age of pupils of appropriate classes, classes for overage were opened; schools for overage were opened if there was contingent. Youth from the age of 16 and older who worked in one of the industries of national economy as well as housewives who did not have primary education received it in evening and correspondence schools.

Let us emphasize that authorial schools by V. Sukhomlynsky, O. Zakharenko, I. Tkachenko were alternative for formal educational establishments;

although a few of children of primary school was able to get primary education. Their activity based on humanism principles and was orientated on development of individuality of pupils, opening their creative potential (Havrylenko, 2014, p. 93).

The mentioned data affirms about creation by the state of certain conditions for getting primary education by different categories of children and youth.

Let us pay attention on the dynamics of development of mass schools that covered a significant number of physically and mentally healthy children (fig. 1).

As it is seen from the image the network of mass schools declined despite of the annual building and opening of new schools. In particular during the mentioned period their number decreased by 29.8%. We connect this with the strategic tasks of public policy — competition of the transition to compulsory secondary education that caused structural changes in the school network. A characteristic feature of these changes was a decrease of primary schools and eight-year and increase of secondary schools. From 1964/1965 to 1984/1985 s. y. the number of primary schools decreased on 75.3%, eight-year on 20.1%; quantity of secondary schools increased on 45.7% (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1964, f. 166, fol. 1; 1985, f. 166, fol. 11). Transformations in the school network caused the increasing of amount of primary school children who studied in secondary schools. Thus, in 1984/1985 s. y. 13.6% of school children got basic education in primary schools, 45.9% in the eight-year schools, 40.5% in sec-

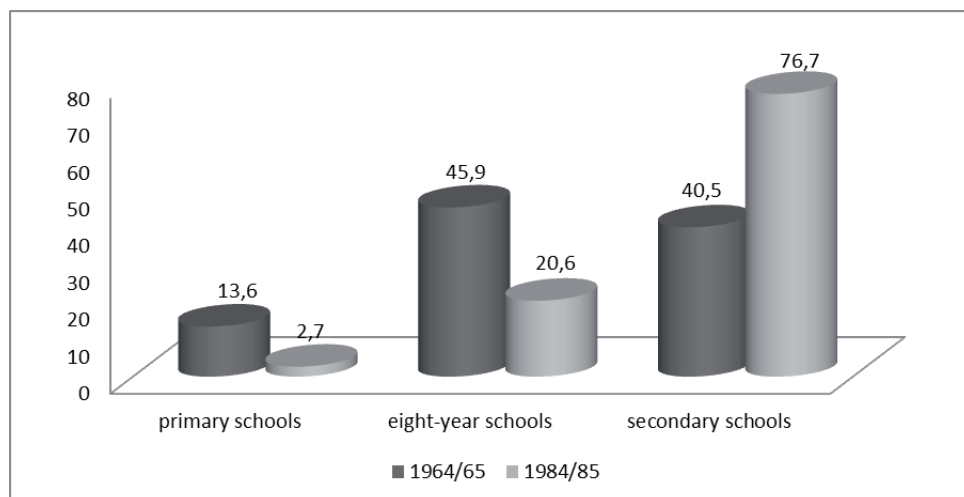


Fig. 2. Distribution of primary school children by the type of mass schools in 1964/1965 and 1984/1985 school years [%]

ondary schools (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1964, f. 166, fol. 1); in 1984/1985 s. y. their number was accordingly 2.7%, 20.6% and 76.7% (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1985, f. 166, fol. 11). Therefore, the main type of educational establishment for obtaining primary education has become secondary school (fig. 2).

Having analyzed the annual statistical reports of the Ministry of Education of the USSR we observe that certain changes in correlation of mass schools on a territorial basis took place during 1964–1984. Acceleration of urbanization of the rural population, elimination of the small rural schools led to a reduction of schools in rural areas and their increase in cities. Accordingly, the number of school children who got primary education in municipal schools increased. In 1968/1969 s. y. contingent of primary school children who studied in municipal schools exceeded the quantitative indicators of pupils of primary classes in rural schools (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1969, f. 166, fol. 1). In 1984/1985 s. y. 65.8% of school children gained primary education in municipal schools while 34.2% in rural (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1985, f. 166, fol. 11).

Let us emphasize that correlation of educational establishments on a language basis changed as a result of a long, deliberate russification policy of the government. According to the archive documents annually there was a growth of mass schools in Russian language; however there was a decrease of mass schools with teaching in Ukrainian. These changes were characteristic for indicators for primary school children. Figure 3 illustrates this.

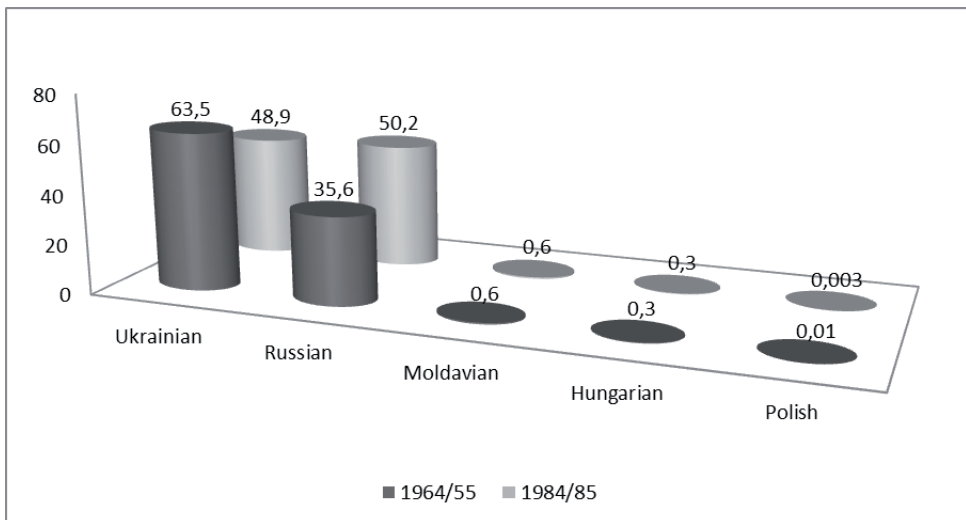


Fig. 3. Distribution of primary school children by the language basis in 1964/1965 and 1984/1985 school years [%]

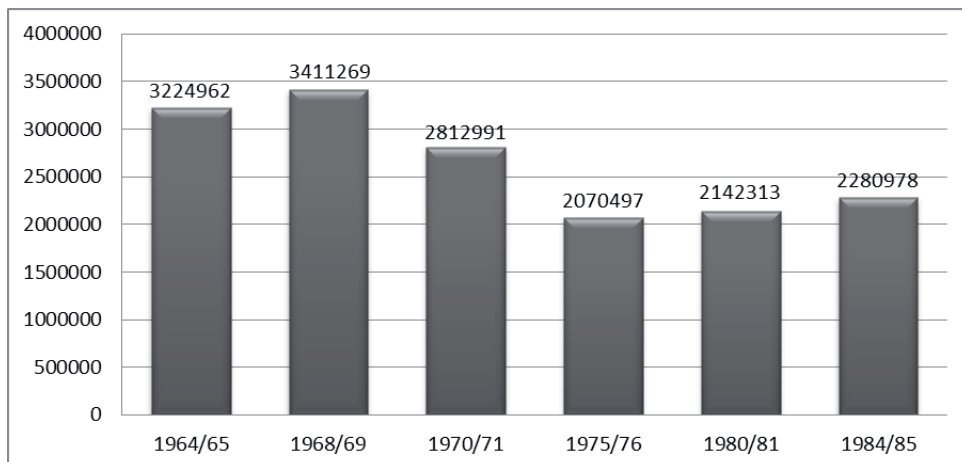


Fig. 4. Dynamics of number of primary school children in 1964/1965–1984/1985 school years

These data indicate that quantity of primary school children who studied in Ukrainian language during this period increased on 14.6%. The contingent of school children who studied in Russian language increased on the same percentage. A number of primary school children who studies in Moldovan, Hungarian and Polish almost unchanged; the number was less than 1 % (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1985, f. 166, fol. 22). Let us emphasize that majority of children of national minorities who lived in Ukraine were deprived of possibility to study in their native language; they gained primary education in schools with Russian language.

Let us consider quantitative and qualitative indicators of participants of the educational process in primary schools; we would like to illuminate the issue of their social security. In the 60's of the 20th century Ukraine managed to overcome the demographic consequences of the World War II, Stalin's repressions and famines. The population in this period had increased. Positive trend in the contingent of primary school children was observed. In 1968/1969 s. y. it reached the record levels 3411.3 thousand people (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1969, f. 166, fol. 1); it did not succeed to be overcome in the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods. However, from 1970/1971 s. y. due to structural transformations in primary education (school children of the classes passed to studying in the secondary link of school) the number of primary school children began to decline. The insignificant increase in the contingent of pupils of primary school began in the late 70's; it was characterized further. Thus, quantitative indicators of primary school children predetermined by the duration of primary education and demographic situation and had wave-like features (fig. 4).

Let us note that the educational policy of the government aimed to cover all primary school children by primary education; create favorable conditions for their education. The transportation to schools was organized for pupils who lived at a distance of more than 3 kilometers from schools; boarding schools functioned. In many schools children got free meals. Milk was given to primary school children in all cities and working settlements (Havrylenko, 2014, p. 93).

We consider the organization of preparatory classes as a positive change in the investigated period at legislative level (1974); there was organization of preparatory classes with training of children to the systematic school studies who did not attend preschool establishments. From the second half of the 70's of 20th century they began to spread in all areas and districts of Ukraine and covered more than 160 thousand of future first-grade school children by preschool education in the mid 80's (Havrylenko, 2014, p. 94).

In the context of the investigated problem let us concentrate attention on the analysis of pedagogical staff of primary education. The analysis of the annual reports of the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR has showed that primary link of school was provided by teachers whose amount varied depending on the amount of primary school children and had the wave-like character (fig. 5).

As you can see there was a significant reduction of teachers in primary school in the 70's of the 20th century; we associate this with a decrease of the duration of primary education to three years. We positively estimate that the

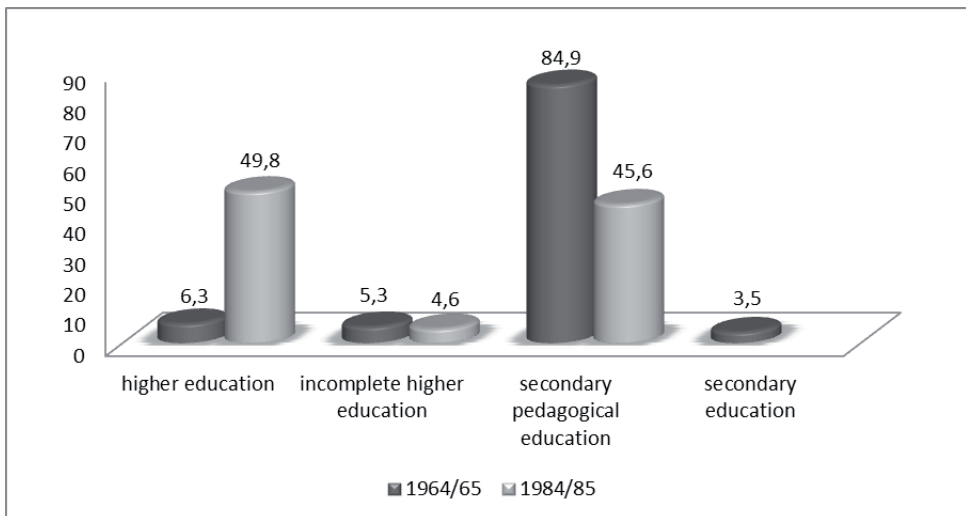


Fig. 5. Dynamics of the number of primary school teachers in 1964/1965–1984/1985 school years

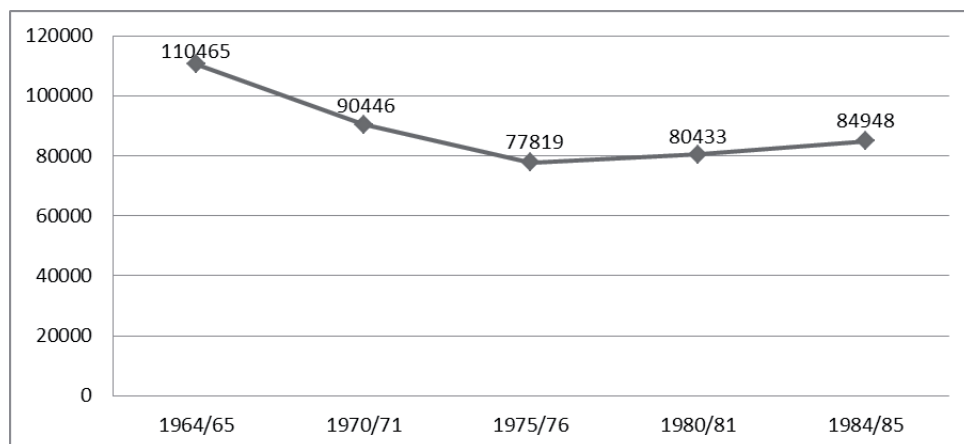


Fig. 6. Educational level of primary school teachers in 1964/1965–1984/1985 school years

issue primary school teachers' employment at the state level have been resolved (Prikaz, 1970, p. 22–24).

Despite of the reduction of quantitative indexes of primary school teachers their quality continued to grow. Figure 6 illustrates this.

The data shows that there was a significant increase of professionals who had higher education during 1964–1984. Their number increased by 43.5%. This contributed to a renewal of training of primary school teachers in higher education in 1956. We positively consider that in the early 80's of 20th century there were almost no primary teachers without pedagogical education. However, we consider the strengthening of feminization of teachers as a negative trend. Archival data on contingent of the gender of primary school teachers was found; 98.1% of women worked on this position in 1983/1984 s. y. (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1984, f. 166, fol. 31).

Particular attention of the state was put on improving of working and living conditions of teachers; a number of resolutions that had been adopted during 1964–1984 testify about this. From 1972 teachers set the title of “Senior Teacher” and “Teacher-Methodologist” for special merits in training and education of school children; certification of teachers in secondary schools was introduced in 1974; it was a stimulant measure to enhance teachers' skills, the rise of the responsibility for professional activity. In order to improve the material conditions of primary school teachers the salary was increased over three times (1964, 1972, 1984) and additional charge for checking exercise-books and classroom management was introduced. On the state and local levels attention was concentrated on the building of houses for teachers; repairing of their apartments; providing of fuel, food etc. (Kurylo, Shepot'ko,

2006, p. 246, 259). Consequently, the constant care of teachers, introduction of moral incentives, improving of social security contributed to increasing of social status, rising of the prestige of the teaching profession in society. However, as it has been mentioned before, activity of teachers was strictly regulated; it was deprived of creativity.

Let us consider the characteristics of educational and material support of primary education. The analyzed sources indicate about annual increase of public spending on the development of schools, in particular primary education. This allowed accomplishing the intensive school building, improvement of the schools' equipment and visual aids, technical equipment etc. However, we would like to note that in the early 80's almost 30% of mass schools were in unusual establishments; about 50% needed reconstruction and modernization. The problem of multichanging of studies was not solved due to the lack of classrooms in some schools. Despite of the repeated government's decision to one-shift of primary school education about 15% of primary school children continued to study in the second shift. Also, studying of school children in the third shift was observed in some urban schools. For example, in 1980/1981 s. y. 235,9 thousand primary school children studied in the second shift and 763 in the third (TSDAVO Ukraine, 1981, f. 166, fol. 23).

In this period the attention was focused on the equipment of classrooms for primary school children. Thus, in 1969 the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR initiated the creation of working rooms for school children in primary school; classes were held with labor studied (Postanova, 1969, p. 19). In the early 70's classes-cabinets were established in the primary schools; they allowed to keep necessary equipment in the educational process not in the library or at teachers' homes but directly in the classroom (*Klassy-kabinety...*, 1974).

We consider the possibility of primary school children from 1977 to use textbooks for free as the achievement of the investigated period. At the end of studying all educational books were given back to the librarian fund of schools, except *ABC* that children remained as memory (Nakaz, 1977, p. 6). Textbooks of Music and Art were given to primary school children during the lessons. Exercise-books with the printed basis were bought by children's parents (Havrylenko, 2014, p. 95).

Conclusions

Thus, the development of primary education, in particular its organizational component, in Soviet Ukraine in the mid 60's—the first half

of the 80's of the 20th century was determined by sociopolitical, socioeconomic and pedagogical conditions. Having analyzed the legislatively-normative documents, the annual analytic reports of the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR of the investigated period we made a conclusion that the educational policy of the Soviet government, despite its ambiguity, aimed the creation of conditions for primary education for children of different categories (physically and mentally healthy children, orphans, children from low-income families, children whose parents could not provide pedagogical supervision during the day, children with minor disabilities in health, children with disabilities, overage children) and youth in different types of educational establishments. We positively estimate that in the outlined period the preparation for systematic school studying of preschool children by opening of preparatory classes happened; primary classes were provided by highly qualified teachers whose working and living conditions, social protection were improved; educational, material and technical support of primary education upgraded; junior school children were provided with free textbooks. However, there were defects and inadvertences in organization of primary education: reduction of its duration to three years; reduction of the number of Ukrainian schools and primary school children who received primary education in Ukrainian language; deprivation of the most minority of children to study in their native language; strict regulation of teachers' labor, deprivation of the liberty of pedagogical creativity; feminization of primary school teachers; multichanging of studies.

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