Yaroslavl oblast is located in the European part of Russia that is the central economic region of the country. This geographic location affords the oblast the advantages of a close proximity to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

With respect to economic structure the Yaroslavl oblast is very typical if compared to central Russia regions. But due to its economic and scientific potential it is steadily moving into the top third of all regions of central Russia. The territory of the oblast is 26 400 square km, its population - 1 426 million people. 50% of the population live in the 2 biggest cities: Yaroslavl – 650 000 and Rybinsk - 250 000 people. Other important cities are: Rostov, Uglich, Pereslavl, Tutayev.

Yaroslavl regional development programme "From Survival To Prosperity" stated that education is one of the main factors of development of the region, which can help building new strategies and shaping new social values. The education system should be characterized by new parameters:

* transparency of education establishments;
* correspondence to social needs;
* flexibility;
* ability to introduce changes to schools according to the change of social environment;
* ability to establish productive relationship with stakeholders and social partners.

At present new legislation is under preparation to support regional education system. Draft regional Law on Education has been designed, together with the set of regulations covering various activities of regional educational institutions. Interaction between various administrative bodies also gave some positive impact, e.g. Regional Employment Service jointly with Committee on Youth initiated the programme to assist young graduates in finding a job. In the 90's administration of Yaroslavl region initiated some reforms in economic and social sphere and attracted foreign investments to support these initiatives. These reforms imply new quality of labour resources, which put forward new requirements to educational services and to regional education service as a whole.

English is taught in 276 urban and 97 rural schools. The total number of students learning English both on primary and secondary levels is 89549. Of three languages taught English is the most popular the figures below tend to indicate the predominance of teaching English in the region. The proportion of students studying each language is as follows:

##### Table 2. Number of students learning foreign languages

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Schools** | **English** | **German** | **French** | **Other (Latin)** |
| Urban | 81396 | 31401 | 8551 | 30 |
| Rural | 8153 | 11232 | 380 | - |
| Total | 89549 | 42633 | 8931 | 30 |

General tendency is supported by the information of working foreign language teachers, which testifies to an overall shift of balance toward the English language.

##### Table 3. Number of foreign languages teachers

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Schools** | **English** | **German** | **French** |
| Urban | 370 | 225 | 111 |
| Rural | 330 | 152 | 4 |
| Total | 700 | 377 | 115 |

Teaching English in Yaroslavl region is conducted within 3 models:

1 model - 5-11 forms

2 model - 2-11 forms

3 model - 1-11 forms

##### Table 4. Models of ELT used in schools

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Educational institutions** | **1 model** | **2 model** | **3 model** | **Total** |
| EL specific schools | - | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| gymnasiums | 3 | 3 | - | 6 |
| Lyceums | 1 | 1 | - | 2 |
| Ordinary schools | 350 -360 | 10 – 15 | 10 – 15 |  |

350 -360 of ordinary schools follow the 1 model. Among other types of secondary educational institutions all the three models are explored.

A dozen of ordinary schools and some gymnasiums have classes for EL specific learning that means that their curriculum is close in the amount of teaching hours to that of the EL specific schools. Getting a rapport with the parents administration of ordinary schools adopt 2 and 3 models.

Some schools (their number varies from year to year and depends on parents' demands) on a primary level follow models 2 and 3 to adhere training requirements specified by students' families and turn to model 1 on a secondary level, as they can't provide continuity of primary school programmes. In these circumstances students' motivation falls down, though the English language is regarded a priority school discipline by the society.

The three main providers of teacher training in Yaroslavl are: Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K.D.Ushinsky, the Pedagogical College and the Institute of Education Development.

The entry requirement differ in these educational establishments and include a Certificate of passing Unified State Exams in English, Russian and Social Science and a Certificate of General Secondary Education in Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K.D.Ushinsky, a Certificate of General Secondary Education in the Pedagogical College and a Certificate of Higher Education/ of Secondary Professional Education in the Institute of Education Development.

The number of applicants at the University is usually 140-200 pupils (at the age of 17-18) and only 60 may be accepted in the College they accept only 28 applicants (at the age of 15-16) out of 35. As for the Institute of Education Development, all the pre-planned applicants are accepted. Usually they are university or college graduates.

The application procedures are either selective (results of the unified state exams are taken in consideration) or non-selective (anyone with secondary professional or higher education is admitted)

The **Length of courses also varies from** 5 years (300 credits) in Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K.D.Ushinsky to 3 years in the Pedagogical College and 72 hours -1 year in the Institute of Education Development.

The practicum in the University and in the college is included in the professional component discipline of the national curriculum while the practicum in the Institute of Education Development is an in-service training with refresher courses within a syllabus.

The list of courses is the longest at the University and it contains Psychology, English literature, Linguistics, Theory of language, History of the language, Country studies, Methodology, Pedagogy, English practicum. In the college the students study Psychology, English literature, Introduction to Linguistics, Country studies, Methodology, Pedagogy, they also have English practicum.

In the Institute of Education Development the teachers go through Psychology, Pedagogy, Methodology and Linguistics.

Blended learning prevails in all the establishments and include distance learning and face to face interaction.

The assessment in all the educational establishments is based on formative and summative assessments with self-assessment mainly in the Institute of Education Development.

The course tutors at the University arelectures, native speakers, candidates of science, doctors of science, associate professors, full professors, doctors habilitate at the other institutions the are teachers, instructors, lectures, methodologists: candidates of science and university lectures.

The majority of teachers of foreign languages who got their education in Yaroslavl are from Russia. Nearly 50% of them work in secondary comprehensive schools and 80% work in primary schools very few of them (1% and 2%) work in primary and secondary private schools respectively.

All the teachers need a Pedagogical University degree in FLT With the following basic courses:

* Language teaching methology
* Pedagogics
* Government Standards requirements
* Psychology
* Linguistics
* First and second language acquisition
* Literature
* Assessment
* Special education needs

The most successful features of teacher training programme are: FL practice (100% of teachers maintain it), Professional Development courses (100% of teachers) and self-development (30%). The less successful features are: Informational Technology (5,9 %), online courses (2%), new methology (3%).

As a result the teachers point out that some aspects are missing from their programmes and among them the most important is Information Technologies (33%), then comes Contemporary Teaching Methology (10%), Knowledge of European practice (6,7%), Class Management (7%), FL practice in natural environment abroad (10%), special education needs (10%), assessment (7%), motivation (7%). The majority of teachers of foreign languages have been working as language teachers for 1-5 years. Some of them have worked 6-10 years. It should be mentioned that we have few experienced teachers with more than 10 years of work. The main method of teaching is communicative approach, the weak point here is that seldom if ever teachers use discussions, competence approach or a combination of methods in their work. The strong point is that teachers use authentic English materials (Headway, New Cutting Edge, Enjoy English, New Millennium, Spotlight), various didactic computer games, song materials and board games.

The questionnaires were aimed at collecting information on teaching situation and atmosphere as well as opinions concerning the teaching of English as a foreign language in secondary schools.

The questionnaires for language teachers, school administration and students were administered to the representatives of Yaroslavl secondary schools (not including schools with the advanced learning of English). It was essential that it should not be too long; and its completion should not take longer than 15 or 20 minutes. It was also important that the questions do not contain any suggestions as to what the “right” answer should be; it was to be avoided that everyone should feel safe by the outcome of the questionnaire.

To obtain the best possible result, closed and open-ended questions were used, so that statistical analysis could be done more easily.

After a draft had been prepared some pre-piloting followed in various secondary schools in Yaroslavl. As a result, the questionnaires were modified. Then they were distributed with the help of schoolteachers and the pre-service system. 60 students of Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University participated in the research. They were given instructions on guiding the questionnaires and had a letter for the heads of schools to allow them to make such a survey. The schools were chosen to represent every administrative district of Yaroslavl. Questionnaires were sent to various schools from September to October 2012-2013 and completed copies came back by November 2013.

The questionnaires had some core questions concerning:

\*students motivation in language learning \*lesson planning

\*classroom management \*teachers’ instructions

\*using equipment and additional materials \*forms of interaction

Besides, teachers and school administrators were asked about the in-set system and its ability to assist teachers in their professional development, the ideas the respondents had for innovation and the key points of the professional competence /good knowledge of the subject, pedagogical competence, teacher’s personal qualities/.

Most teachers are of the opinion that the good knowledge of subject is the most important point, 45% of respondents put it on the first place in the rank. Next is the pedagogical competence, 37% of respondents named it as the second, and the third important point was the teacher’s personal qualities, 68% of respondents put it on the third place.

Whereas school administrators nominated the pedagogical competence as the most important point, 50% in a rank, so good knowledge of subject takes the second place in their rank, 54% (see F. 1).

To find out more about the role of in-set system in the support of teachers’ knowledge in both points /good knowledge of subject and pedagogical competence/ more questions were included into questionnaires.

Both categories note that it’s almost impossible to acquire good teaching skills without any special courses /70% for both of categories/. At the same time 92,5% of teachers mentioned the importance of introspection in their work and 62,5% of them discuss the results with their colleagues. 80% of respondents develop their professional skills on their own and 67,5% attend different courses /55% are within the in-set system/.

75% of teachers and 89% of school administrators appreciate the in-set courses as useful because they help to obtain confidence in teaching and give a chance to find out about the new achievements in ELT.

On the other hand, respondents note that the content of the courses doesn’t vary much from year to year, only general assumptions are given and the courses are far from the practical teachers’ needs because some trainers don’t know the school reality. There are also a little of alternative modules.

In a questionnaire teachers were asked to rank five training modules according to their importance. These were the following: Classroom Management, Developing Skills /Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing/, Material Evaluation, ELT in Russian Educational Context, Methodological Module /based on teachers’ demands/. (see F.2.)

The analysis shows the teachers’ list of preferences:

1. Developing Skills.
2. Material Evaluation.
3. Classroom Management.
4. Methodological Module.
5. ELT in REC.

Whereas school administrators’ list of preferences differ in points 1, 2, 3:

1. Classroom Management.
2. Developing Skills.
3. Material Evaluation.

In the Methodological module teachers claimed such topics as “Country Study”, “Intensive Teaching”, “The Global Problems of the Modern World” (see F.3).

To define teachers’ needs more clearly the questionnaire contained the question about the difficulties teachers had ever had. There was the list of core points for respondents to choose (see F.5).

The analysis revealed the main problems as teachers see them: time management, the use of variety of teaching methods, students’ personal development and students’ involvement into work. As it shown, main problems are similar for teachers and school administrators.

As for the students, 79% of them mention in their questionnaires that they are interested in language learning. Their motivation is based on the students' believes that they'll need English in their future life (42%), some of them will have to take entrance exams in English at the university (26%), others are interested in English traditions and culture and they'd like to communicate with people from other countries (16%). There are also students who study English only because it is one of the compulsory school subjects (18%).

Students were asked about different aspects of the learning process: teachers' instructions, explanations, exercises, testing and error correction, etc. Only 37% of students consider teachers' instructions rather clear and precise. 53% do not always understand what to do at the lesson. At the same time teachers' explanations of the new material are usually distinct to the majority of students (81,5%). According to the questionnaire teachers use both languages to give instructions: English - 86%, Russian - 83%.

70% of students mention that teachers make corrections and explain the errors in the written works, and only 12% of students note that teachers encourage them to correct mistakes themselves. 18% of students mark that their teachers correct but do not explain mistakes.

Students find the exercises they do at the lessons rather useful: dictations (74%), games (74%), supportive clues for speaking (71%). Also students mark the use of such forms of interaction as group work (76%) and pair work (82%) but the leading form of interaction is the frontal work with the whole class (83%).

Developing reading skills students note that teachers use different activities, but the leading role take such kinds of work as reading aloud (93%), answering the questions (94%), reading for information (88%), reading and retelling (81%). Writing skills are developed by such activities as tests (86%) and translations (81%), dictations (62%) and compositions of different kinds (57%). Speaking skills are developed mainly by answering teachers' questions (97%), retelling texts (93%) and reproducing or learning by heart topics (84%).

The aim of this study was to find out as much as possible about what goes on in classrooms. Therefore, we decided to use classroom observation as a technique to collect data. First, books on classroom observation were reviewed: the most important sources included Wallace (1991), Wajnryb (1992).

Then, observation instruments described below were scrutinized by the team. Students of the State Pedagogical University, English department were involved in gathering data as a part of their university assignment. After discussing with them how to observe, they were given instructions to make sure that all of them implemented all tasks according to the same guidelines. We considered that the students would see a realistic picture because teachers obviously wouldn't put on a show for the sake of a visitor. This factor may strengthen the validity of their findings.

Altogether, 74 teachers were observed in secondary schools, teaching 148 classes.

Two instruments were used for data collection:

* Classroom situation observation form 1 was designed to evaluate teaching: preparation for the lesson, use of the native and the English language, participation of the class, methodological aspects of teaching by circling the appropriate number on the scale (4-outstanding, 3-good, 2-needs some improvement, 1-needs much improvement). Three open questions intended to elicit information on the use of innovative approaches, attractive instructional techniques and the character of the instructor’s classroom presence.
* Classroom situation observation form 2 included a list of classroom activities, patterns of interaction, activity time, teachers’ instructions and possible outcomes.

Besides these instruments, observers were encouraged to take notes, and put down everything they considered important.

The first form was filled in during the observation; the second form was filled in after the lessons and was based on the students’ drafts and notes.

Speaking about findings on teachers, first of all we'll analyze their preparation for the lesson, their management skills, and the use of native and English languages and then we will focus on methodological aspects of teaching.

On the whole, most observers described teachers' preparation for the lesson as good. 70% of observers found that the instructor seemed to have planned the day's lesson to include communicative practices, on the other hand only 40% of the observers found that the instructor was able to relate the day's lesson to other material if appropriate.

As for teachers' use of the first and the target language, 83% of the observers noted that the situation needs improvement, and only 6% as good. Considering that students have limited access to English outside the classroom, this high rate of mother tongue use seems to be against their interest. Observers noted that teachers tended to use Russian for two reasons: to explain new vocabulary and grammar and to translate their own instructions or explanations from English into Russian. Observers thought that students would have understood more in the target language than teachers tended to expect them. There were not observed important phonological, structural or lexical errors made by teachers during the classes.

As for work management, figure 4 illustrates how much emphasis teachers devoted to frontal, group and individual class work.

About 62% of teachers preferred frontal work and only 6% used individual work. The differences for frontal and group work are obvious too - 62% and 32% correspondingly.

In table 7 patters of interaction are rank ordered according to frequency of use in the observed classes.

###### Table 7

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Patterns of interaction | Observed |
| Closed-ended teacher questioning | 146 |
| Open-ended teacher questioning | 127 |
| Choral responses | 53 |
| Group work | 52 |
| Teacher talk | 31 |
| Collaboration | 27 |
| Student initiates, teacher answers | 4 |
| Individual work | 4 |
| Self-access | 3 |
| Full-class interaction | 2 |
|  |  |

The most frequent patterns of interaction turned out to be closed-ended and open-ended teacher questioning according to Classroom situation observation form 2: teacher initiates, students reply and teacher gives feedback. Some of the observers emphasized how boring this type of whole -group activity was. This list above shows that teachers prefer to dominate at the lesson than to use student active forms of work.

The analysis of Classroom situation observation form 1 shows the similar tendency.

##### Table 8

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Outstanding | Good | Needs some improvement | Needs much improvement |
| 1. Entire class was involved in the lesson | 6% | 4% | 28% | 60% |
| 2. There was active and lively participation | 12% | 14% | 30% | 42% |
| 3. Students were aware of what was expected of them | 21% | 35% | 30% | 14% |
| 4. Instructor was in control of the classroom situation | 43% | 35% | 10% | 12% |
| 5. Questions and discussions were appropriate to the level of the class | 44% | 36% | 12% | 8% |
| 6. Instructor encouraged small group interaction | 5% | 7% | 15% | 72% |
| 7. Instructor facilitated response and gave corrective feedback | 7% | 5% | 27% | 58% |

As table 8 illustrates, only 6% of the observers found that the entire class was involved in the lesson and only 12% that there was active and lively participation. According to data in table 8 most teachers were not able to encourage small group interaction (87%), to facilitate response and give corrective feedback (85%). However the observers noted that questions and discussions were appropriate to the level of the class (79%) and that the majority of teachers were in control of the classroom situation (78%).

As far as methodology concerned, Classroom situation observation form 1 included the following aspects:

###### Table 9

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Outstanding | Good | Needs some improvement | Needs much improvement |
| 1. Instructor was aware of and planned for the needs of the class | 8% | 12% | 19% | 60% |
| 2. Instructor was able to adjust instructional techniques to the needs of the class | 8% | 28% | 27% | 34% |
| 3. Explanations were clear, brief and accurate | 36% | 22% | 26% | 14% |
| 4. Sufficient examples were given | 45% | 34% | 13% | 8% |
| 5. Instructor made effective use of the board and teaching materials as needed | 6% | 12% | 14% | 68% |
| 6. Class time was used efficiently | 12% | 12% | 14% | 62% |
| 7. Instructor made appropriate use of individual work | 4% | 12% | 17% | 67% |
| 8. Instructor provided ample opportunities for students to use English | 36% | 29% | 18% | 17% |
| 9. Errors were appropriately corrected | 38% | 36% | 20% | 10% |
| 10. Instructor adequately recognized good performance | 45% | 33% | 16% | 6% |

As observers noted teachers adequately recognized good performance (78%) and appropriately corrected errors in most cases (74%). As table 9 shows, teachers did not always provide ample opportunities for students to use English (65%). Most of the observers pointed out that teachers' speaking time prevails over students' speaking time and in some cases teachers answered themselves without giving an opportunity to the students to think and answer their questions.

As far as effective use of the board and teaching materials the observers identified the situation as negative (82%). Observers mention also that most classrooms were equipped with the boards and tape recorders though the latter were very seldom used. There were no any electric appliance and teachers had to carry with them all appliances they wanted to use.

As table 9 illustrates, teachers have problems in planning for the needs of the class (79%), in adjusting instructional techniques to the needs of the class (61%), nevertheless 58% of the observers think that teachers' explanations were clear, brief and accurate and 79% think that sufficient examples were given. Two "problem areas" were brought to light during the observation - efficient use of class time and use of individual work.

According to Classroom situation observation form 2 one can judge how much emphasis was put on the development of the 4 skills. It is obvious that more time and effort was devoted to the development of reading and speaking and less to the development of writing and listening. The development of listening comprehension was the most neglected skill area.

It is interesting to mention that the majority of the teachers as the result of learning or educational outcome do not realize forming attitudes parallel with knowledge and skills. Most observed teachers were not aware of how classroom activities could contribute to the development and maintenance of the students' attitudes and motivation.

A closer look at the two tables above allows identifying the most important teachers' strong and weakpoints. The weakpoints relate to classroom management skills including time management and involvement of the whole class in the lesson, using different patterns of interaction, appropriate use of individual work. According to observers teachers' language proficiency is rather good. However, good language proficiency and teaching effectively did not always coincide with each other.