

IS IT PURPOSEFUL FOR STUDENTS OF LITHUANIAN HIGHER SCHOOLS TO CONTINUE LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE? MOTIVATION FACTORS

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After Lithuania had regained its independence the policy of foreign languages teaching/learning at secondary schools changed cardinally. The majority or former school leavers do not perceive it to be purposeful and meaningful to prolong the English language learning on the university or college level. According to them, having covered the secondary school programme they possess a full baggage of the English language knowledge allowing them to communicate fluently in the above mentioned language while travelling, studying and working in foreign countries. Does this belief correspond to the reality of today?

The article is based on four factors which are supposed to motivate freshmen and senior students to go on learning the English language as the main tool to enhance their position in contemporary world irreversibly affected by massive globalization and Eurointegration processes.

VDU UKI in spring semester of 2014 carried out a research. The questionnaire was compiled the goal of which was to determine whether the English language level of the students matches all the international requirements for the language awareness and present the motives for students to continue the English language studies on a higher level. 172 first year students of various programmes participated in the research. The principle points of the questionnaire sought to provide answers to the following questions: whether the level of the English language acquirement is sufficient after having covered the secondary school programme, if VDU UKI English language teaching/learning policy enables students to acquire the language on a higher level, whether a language is a living, thus a constantly changing organism which requires progressive studies and refreshment of knowledge, if the level of language acquisition remains on the same level if it is not exploited on daily basis. Having systematized the questionnaire results the authoresses of the article draw the conclusion for the purposefulness of continuing the English language level on the university and college level.

Keywords: secondary school, motivation factors, purposefulness, globalization, Eurointegration.

Introduction

The majority of former school leavers in Lithuania do not perceive it to be purposeful and meaningful to prolong the English language learning on the university or college level. Since the time when Lithuania regained its independence the policy of foreign languages teaching/learning in secondary school has changed cardinally and so has the secondary school language teaching programme. When our country became the member of the Europe Union the foreign languages teaching programme was revised in accordance with the generally accepted foreign language acquisition requirements. Thus, the newcomers to university or college suppose that having covered the secondary school programme, they possess a full baggage of the English language knowledge allowing them to communicate fully in the above mentioned language while travelling, studying and working in foreign countries. Does this belief correspond to the reality of today?

Having evaluated their language acquisition level on the basis of the diagnostic test which is compulsory to VMU freshmen, the authoresses could give the answer to the latter question. The goal of the article is not to discuss the perfection of the secondary school programme, but to state whether the school leavers have fully acquired the programme.

Further on the article focuses on the factors which are supposed to motivate freshman and senior students to go on learning the English language as the main tool to enhance their position in contemporary world irreversibly affected by massive globalisation and Eurointegration processes.

The aim of the article is to systemise the results of the research carried out at VMU in spring 2014, to determine whether the English language level of the students matches all the international requirements for the language awareness and present the motives for students to continue the English language studies on the university and college level. The object of the research is the level of VMU students at the English language

after completion the secondary school course, their attitude towards the school programme, English Level B1 and Level B2 courses provided by VMU Institute of Foreign Languages. Respondents of the research are 172 first and second year students enrolled in English Level B1 (85 respondents) and English Level B2 (87) courses at VMU in the spring semester of 2014. Combined quantitative/qualitative research based on the questionnaire was chosen as the basic method of the research.

Results of the research

The analysis of the data presented in percentage terms in Figure 1 reveals that students tend to think that the secondary school programme in Lithuania is sufficient for acquiring CEF Level B2 competence of the English language.

Do you think that the Lithuanian secondary school English programme is sufficient for acquiring CEF Level B2 competence?

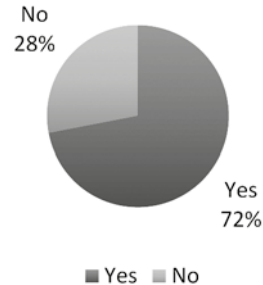


Fig. 1. VMU students' opinion regarding the Lithuanian secondary school English programme in relation to CEF Level B2

When asked to evaluate the quality of the secondary school English programme, students seem to rate grammar and writing skills more highly than speaking and listening skills. As Figure 2 shows, the labels “excellent” and “good” together make over 70% in the categories of grammar and writing compared with just over 50% in the categories of speaking and listening. The most frequently exhibited response in the latter two categories is “satisfactory”, which constitutes nearly 40% of all the answers.

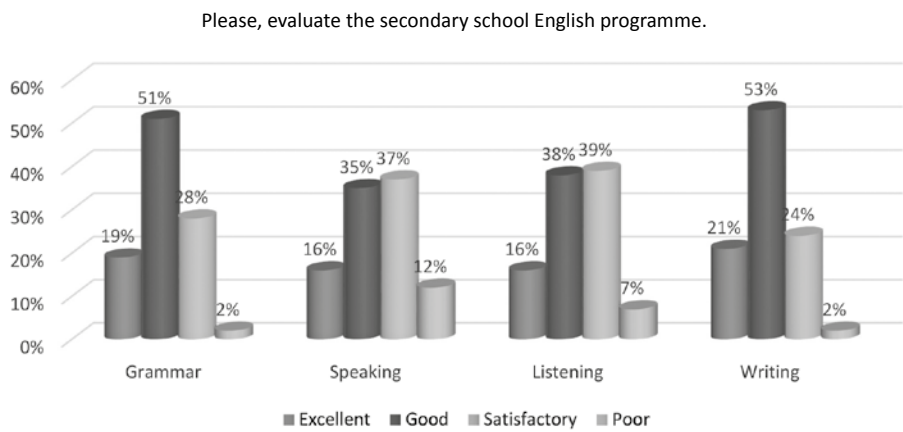


Fig. 2. VMU students' evaluation of the secondary school English programme

The prevailing explanations for the lower estimate of listening and speaking are “low quality of audio records” and “few possibilities for real speaking” in contrast to “a lot of grammar drills” and “a lot of writing practice” in English classes.

Students who enter Vytautas Magnus University have to take a diagnostic test in order to determine their level of the English language competence. Figure 3 reveals that the results of the diagnostic test contradict to students' general opinion that the Lithuanian secondary programme is sufficient for acquiring CEF Level B2 competence (see Fig. 1 above). According to the diagnostic test results, just over half of the respondents, when they entered the university, possessed English Level A1 competence, a quarter exhibited B1 level com-

petence, and only 23% had acquired English B2 level competence. Apparently, students at university are not completely satisfied with their diagnostic test results. As shown in Figure 4, only three fifths of the respondents claim to be content with the level of competence revealed by the diagnostic test, one fifth of them are satisfied to some extent, and another fifth are not satisfied at all.

Not surprisingly, a further analysis of the data presented in Figure 5 suggests that the majority of students consider it purposeful to continue learning English at university; however, they do not seem to think that they should revise the whole English programme they have covered at a secondary school. Figure 6 shows that only one third of respondents find the idea of revising the secondary school programme attractive.

Which CEF level of your English language competence did VMU diagnostic test reveal?

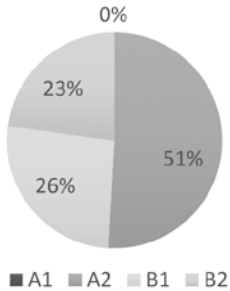


Fig. 3. VMU students' diagnostic test results

Were you satisfied with your diagnostic test results?

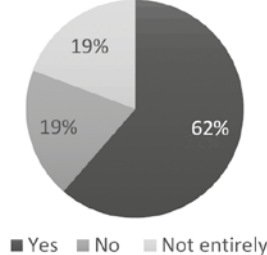


Fig. 4. VMU students' attitude to their diagnostic test results

Do you think it is purposeful to continue learning English at university?

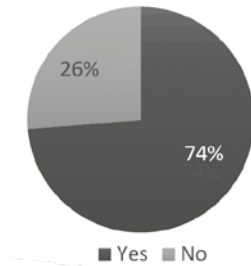


Fig. 5. VMU student's opinion on continuing learning English at university

Do you think that at university one should revise the whole English programme one has covered at a secondary school?

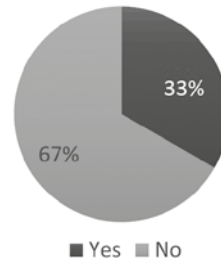


Fig. 6. VMU students' opinion regarding the revision of the secondary school English programme at university

When asked to evaluate the programme of the English level they are studying at present, both Level B1 and Level B2 students tend to rate it highly as the label “good” dominates in all four categories (see Fig. 7 above and Fig. 8 below). As far as Level B1 programme is concerned, grammar and listening are the best evaluated categories; here the answers “excellent” and “good” together constitute 89% and 75% of all the responses respectively. Most students claim to be satisfied with “the way grammar is presented in English classes”, “being given numerous possibilities to apply grammar in practice” and “being exposed to a variety of real-life audio and video materials”. The major criticism regarding speaking and writing (although the answers

“excellent” and “good” together make far more than a half all the responses in these categories) is “not enough possibilities to express themselves in English in the class” and “lack of personal feedback of written tasks”.

With respect to Level B2 programme, the best evaluated categories are grammar, speaking and writing, in which the labels “good” and “excellent” together constitute 97%, 93% and 86% respectively, compared with 69% of all the responses in the category of listening. In most cases, students pinpoint that “the learning material is presented in a systematic way”, “they are given a lot of practical tasks”, both oral and written, they are given “numerous possibilities to consolidate their knowledge of the English

Please, evaluate the programme of the English level you are studying at VMU now: B1

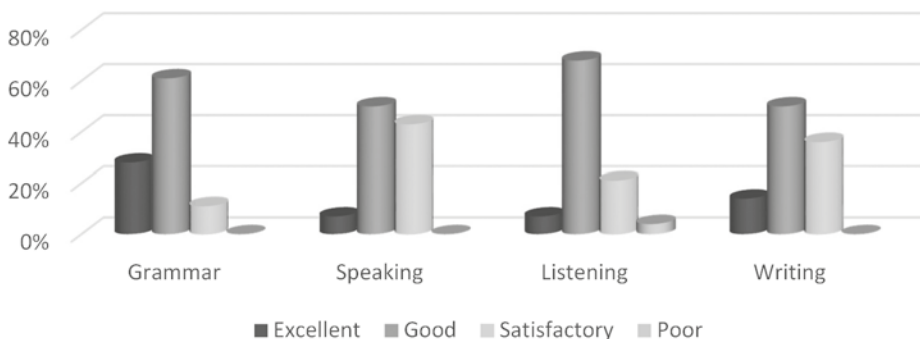


Fig. 7. Students' evaluation of the English Level B1 programme at VMU



Fig. 8. Students' evaluation of the English Level B2 programme at VMU

language” as well as “to practice their speaking and writing skills”.

A further study of the data presented in Figure 9 implies that a vast majority (nearly 90%) of all the respondents believe that CEF Level B2 is sufficient for comprehensive communication in the English language while studying, working or travelling in foreign countries. Only approximately one person in

ten feels they need a higher level of English in order to be able to communicate comprehensively abroad.

Finally, the students' need to continue learning English at university (see Fig. 5) is further complemented by the data presented in Figures 10, 11 and 12. As these figures reveal, most respondents (over 80%) believe that a language is a living, thus a constantly changing organism.

Is Level B2 sufficient to communicate while studying, working or travelling in foreign countries?

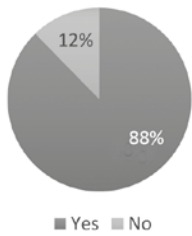


Fig. 9. VMU students' opinion regarding Level B2 communicative competence

Do you believe that a language is a living, thus a constantly changing organism?

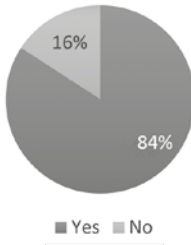


Fig. 10. VMU students' opinion regarding a language as a constantly changing organism

In your opinion, should English be exploited on daily basis in order to preserve the same level of the English language competence?

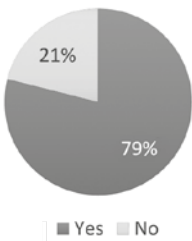


Fig. 11. VMU students' opinion on exploiting English on daily basis to preserve the same level of the linguistic competence

Do you believe that the English language is vital for an educated contemporary world citizen?

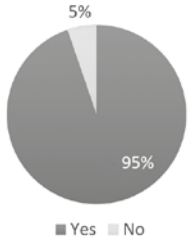


Fig. 12. VMU students' opinion regarding the importance of English in the contemporary world

A vast majority (95%) think that English is vital for an educated contemporary world citizen. Therefore, most of them (nearly 80%) agree that English should be exploited every day in order to maintain the same level of competence.

Discussion

According to Harmer (2007), successful learning cannot be separated from motivation: in order to succeed at something we must want to do it. Therefore, it is important to understand what motivation is, where it comes from and how it can be sustained. Harmer (2007) defines motivation as “some kind of internal drive, which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something” (Harmer 2007: 98). For instance, this is the feeling that makes you want to learn to swim or drive a car. In a similar way, the same feeling pushes you towards learning a foreign language.

It can be said that motivation is a non-constant, dynamic process, which can change along the way. Thus, the sustainability of motivation is of primary importance in both language learning and teaching. Williams and Burden (1997) point out that “the strength of [...] motivation will depend on how much value the individual places on the outcome he or she wishes to achieve” (as quoted in Harmer 2007: 98). This means that there are various goals that the learner wants to achieve but some of these goals are more prominent than others. Goals may be clearly defined or vague. Harmer (2007) explains that adults often have clearly defined goals whereas children’s goals are often vague. However, he points out that both kinds of goals are equally important and strong.

Harmer (2007) suggests a clear distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation. *Intrinsic* motivation comes from “inside” of the individual. Intrinsic motivation, according to Harmer (2007), “produces better results than its extrinsic counterpart”. A possible explanation for this is that intrinsic motivation is much more powerful, stronger and more important

than the extrinsic one. From the psychological point of view, intrinsic motivation is accepted as more prominent because of the fact that imposed reasons for motivation are usually accepted with less enthusiasm and there is almost always resistance to them. Examples of intrinsic motivation are one’s personal or professional ambitions, a wish to travel to other countries without communication problems or, for instance, one’s ability to learn about other cultures.

Extrinsic motivation, as the name suggests, comes from the “outside” of the individual. It is a less powerful motivation but it is also an important part of learners’ ability to achieve certain goals. Instances of such motivation are one’s wish to achieve better prospects in employment, high salary or an approaching exam.

It is important to note that one type of motivation can be merged with another type or can be transformed into another type: a learner may begin learning English having been forced to learn it by his/her employer but may gradually discover that he/she enjoys learning it thus changing the extrinsic motivation into the intrinsic one.

According to Wlodkowski (2008), “gaining, holding, and focusing attention supports the notion that learning is frequently, partly or wholly, work. Intrinsic motivation makes this effort worthwhile, but, more often than not, it does not make arduous persistence unnecessary” (Wlodkowski 2008: 226).

Wlodkowski (2008) also suggests that other factors – personal skill and quality of instruction, for example – are also necessary for learning to occur. If the learning tasks are well beyond their current skills or prior knowledge, people will not be able to accomplish them, no matter how motivated they are. In fact, at a certain point these mandatory learning factors, including motivation, are insufficient. For example, if learners are involved in a genuinely challenging subject for which they have the necessary capabilities, a point will come at which further progress will require effort (motivation), whether in the form of extra practice or

increased study time, to make further progress (Wlodkowski 2008: 6–7).

Gilbert (2002) provides the following steps with the aim of enhancing learner motivation in English classes:

- Ensure you are doing all you can to develop and maintain high levels of hope.
- Bear in mind what you, as a teacher, can do to help your community with its hope levels.
- Set up opportunities, such as effective brainstorming sessions, for everyone to succeed in your classroom.
- Make sure you have a “vision” and ensure that everyone knows what it is.
- Teach to “hearts and minds” as well as the brains of all your students (Gilbert 2002: 180).

The interpretation of the findings

A Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 1998a) emphasizes the fact that knowledge of the society and culture of the community in which a language is spoken is one aspect of knowledge of the world. Therefore, CEFR places a particular emphasis on the development of socio-cultural competence. The socio-cultural competence emphasized in CEFR, requires the development of the skills needed for participating in a variety of social and cultural contexts, which in turn leads to strategic competence and sustainable development. It is generally recognized that communication strategies enhance the effectiveness of communication. Savignon and Sysoyev claim that “none of the existing taxonomies of L2 communicative strategies includes strategies having to do specifically with cultural performance.” (Savignon, Sysoyev 2002: 512). They introduced the term “socio-cultural strategies” to define techniques “useful for establishing and maintaining international contact in a spirit of peace and a dialogue of cultures” (Savignon, Sysoyev 2002: 512) and stress the usefulness and benefit of explicit teaching of them. They also propose the socio-cultural strategy training with the specific goal to prepare le-

arners for interaction with unfamiliar cultures in unpredictable communicative situations. These views are consonant with one of the goals of our curriculum: to develop language learning skills that are necessary for successful communication in a new global context.

As the survey reveals, a strong need is felt to update the current program from the intercultural perspective. Its methodological principles can be based on the following the rationale below.

Rationale

Contemporary societal changes form the basis for the rationale:

- globalization – recession, the economic, social and political processes;
- a new global context;
- incorporation of IT into a curriculum;
- the new generation of adult learners with their differing values and attitudes;
- the future of most students who will need English for their jobs and communication with other native and non-native speakers;
- there is a much greater emphasis on the skills needed for effective communication and the methodological consequences that follow from this;
- decrease of motivation after a state exam;
- the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe 1998b) equally emphasizes linguistic and cross-cultural skills in language competence.

Recommendations for teachers

In order to keep their students motivated the teachers are encouraged to use a wide range of motivational techniques that can be applied easily within the class setting:

- to encourage students to keep a type of a *Diary of Achievement*, which could be useful for various purposes, for instance reflecting on the things one has learned or for effective time management;

- creating learning activities which are relevant to the students, for instance, by including ideas from student life and environment;
- balancing the difficulty of tasks so that the tasks are of the level just above the students' so the activities are neither too easy nor too complex;
- regular personal feedback on performance, which is one of the strongest motivating aspects in education;
- possibility for students to express their interests/hobbies in class setting.

Conclusions

- The research has revealed that students at VMU are highly motivated language learners who find continuing learning English at university purposeful.
- A vast majority of the respondents indicate that Level B2 is sufficient to communicate fluently while studying, working or travelling in foreign countries. Furthermore, two thirds of them think that the Lithuanian secondary school programme of the English language is sufficient for acquiring CEF Level B2 competence. However, the results of the diagnostic test which they took after entering VMU indicate that the level of the students' English language acquirement is not sufficient after having covered the secondary school programme. According to the diagnostic test, most respondents possessed Level A1 or Level B1 competence, whereas just under one fourth of them were assessed as possessing Level B2 competence of the English language. Moreover, most respondents claim they were satisfied with their diagnostic test results. Two thirds of them express a belief that at university one should not revise the whole English programme one has covered at a secondary school and expect to have more practical culture and profession related English classes, project work and problem solving tasks.
- With respect to possible reasons as to why the level of the students' English language acquisition is not sufficient after having covered the secondary school programme, the research reveals that, although most respondents value both the secondary school English programme and the English Level B1 and Level B2 programmes provided by VMU Institute of Foreign Languages, the latter are evaluated by the students much more positively in all categories, including grammar, speaking, listening and writing (except for Level B1 writing, which is slightly exceeded by the secondary school English writing). This proves that the English language teaching/learning policy implemented by the Institute of Foreign languages at VMU enables students to acquire the language on a higher level.
- Other intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors driving the vast majority of the respondents to continue learning English are:
 - a strong belief that a language is a living and constantly changing organism;
 - an acceptance that English should be exploited on daily basis in order to preserve the same level competence;
 - a conviction that the English language is vital for an educated contemporary world citizen.

The above mentioned motives lead to a conclusion that most students experience a strong need to acquire the English language competence on a higher level in order to be able to compete with their counterparts and enhance their position in contemporary global world.

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AR TIKSLINGA LIETUVOS AUKŠTŲJŲ MOKYKLŲ STUDENTAMS TĘSTI ANGLŲ KALBOS MOKYMĄSI? MOTYVACIJOS VEIKSNIAI

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Lietuvai tapus nepriklausoma valstybe, iš esmės pasikeitė kalbų mokymo politika šalies bendrojo lavinimo mokyklose. Daugelis vakarykščių abiturientų nemano, jog yra tikslinga tęsti anglų kalbos mokymąsi universitetuose ir kolegijose. Jų supratimu, baigę mokyklą, jie turi pakankamai anglų kalbos žinių, leidžiančių laisvai komunikuoti šia kalba keliaujant, mokantis ar dirbant užsienio šalyse. Ar toks požiūris atitinka realią nūdienos situaciją?

Straipsnyje remiamasi keturiais veiksniais, kurie turėtų motyvuoti įstojusius studentus toliau mokytis anglų kalbos, kaip pagrindinio įrankio jiems įsitvirtinti šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje, negrįžtamai veikiame visuotinės globalizacijos ir eurointegracijos procesų. VDU UKI dėstytojai 2014 m. pavasario semestrą atliko tyrimą. Buvo sudaryta anketa, kurios tikslas – nustatyti, ar studentų anglų kalbos žinių lygis atitinka visus tarptautinius reikalavimus, apibūdinančius anglų kalbos, kaip užsienio kalbos, mokėjimą, ir pateikti motyvus, kodėl studentai turėtų tęsti anglų kalbos studijas aukštesniu lygiu. Apklausoje dalyvavo 172 įvairių programų studentai. Pagrindiniais anketos punktais buvo siekiama išsiaiškinti, ar studentų anglų kalbos lygis, baigus bendrojo lavinimo mokyklų programą, yra pakankamas, kadangi besimokydami bendrojo lavinimo mokykloje dėl motyvacijos trūkumo jie neįsisavina visos programos siūlomos medžiagos, ar VDU UKI anglų kalbos mokymo politika suteikia galimybę išmokti šią kalbą aukštesniu lygiu, ar kalba yra gyvas, taigi, nuolat kintantis organizmas, tad jos reikia nuolat mokytis, ar nenaudojant kalbos kasdieninėms reikmėms jos mokėjimo lygmuo išlieka toks pats. Susisteminsius apklausos rezultatus, straipsnio autorės daro išvadą dėl tikslingumo mokytis anglų kalbos aukštesiose Lietuvos mokyklose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos, motyvacijos veiksniai, tikslingumas, globalizacija, eurointegracija.