ADULTS’ NEED FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AS A FACTOR OF WELL-BEING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LATVIA AND LITHUANIA’S CASES

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ABSTRACT
The quality of life as well as human well-being in Latvia and Lithuania is improved with the emergence of new possibilities and opportunities after the economic crisis. On the one hand, the foreign language competence is desirable and indeed necessary for tackling these possibilities and opportunities. On the other hand, foreign language incompetence is argued to be the factor that has a negative impact on economic, political, social well-being of adults. The aim of the present research is to compare adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania. The meaning of the key concepts of need and needs analysis is studied. Moreover, the study shows how the steps of the process are related: defining needs analysis → empirical study within multicultural environments → conclusions. The empirical study was carried out in 2014. Comparative study as a qualitative research design was employed. The sample included 50 adult respondents from Latvia and 50 adult respondents from Lithuania. The study results demonstrate that the adults’ needs in use of foreign languages are heterogeneous, and the adults in both Latvia and Lithuania put the emphasis on use of foreign languages for their working activities. A hypothesis is elaborated. Directions of further research are proposed.

KEY WORDS: use of foreign languages, well-being, needs analysis, comparative study.

Introduction

Economic crisis has affected the quality of life in the Baltic states, namely Latvia and Lithuania. Economic crisis has brought more volatility, uncertainty, complexity and
ambiguity to these Baltic countries. Currently, Latvia and Lithuania are facing enormous socio-economic and unprecedented demographic challenges, including regional disparities, aging populations, high rates of low-skilled adults and of youth unemployment, and migration (Lifelong Learning, 2008). These social challenges may affect people in different critical stages of their lives or when facing particular events – job loss, emigration, etc. Structural features, such as education, may help to deal with these critical phases successfully or vice-versa may make it more difficult to deal with critical events.

The economies of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are growing at present. Membership of the EU has led the investment, economic growth, and living standards also had to grow up. The quality of life as well as human well-being in Latvia and Lithuania is improved with the emergence of new possibilities and opportunities. Foreign language proficiency is determined to be a prerequisite for adults’ effective communication, mediation and intercultural understanding (Key competences for Life-long learning, 2011). Consequently, the foreign language proficiency is named a major factor presupposing economic, political and social well-being as shown in Figure 1.

The context of globalization reinforces adults’ use of foreign languages both inside and outside the country. Foreign language competence allows adults undertaking activities which are meaningful, engaging, and which make them feel competent and autonomous. However, linguistic incompetence is the one of the factors that has a negative impact on economic, political and social well-being of Latvia and Lithuania’s citizens.

Research efforts have been put to outline a list of foreign languages used by adults. According to Eurobarometer (2013), English is the most commonly used foreign language in EU countries. In Latvia 24 percent of citizens are using English as a foreign language and in Lithuania 36 percent respectively. However, adults’ needs in use of foreign languages from Latvia and Lithuania have not been analysed. Moreover, adults’ needs in use of foreign languages from Latvia and Lithuania have not been compared.
The aim of the present research is to compare adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania.

The meaning of key concepts of “need” and “needs analysis” is studied. Moreover, the study shows a potential model for development, indicating how the steps of the process are related following a logical chain: defining needs analysis → empirical study within multicultural environments → conclusions.

The methodological foundation of the present research is formed by the System-Constructivist Theory. The System-Constructivist Theory is based on (Maslo, 2006)

- Parsons’s system theory (Parsons, 1976) on any activity as a system,
- Luhmann’s theory (Luhmann, 1988) on communication as a system,
- the theory of symbolic interactionalism (Mead, 1973) and
- the theory of subjectivism (Groeben, 1986).

The System-Constructivist Theory and, consequently, System-Constructivist Approach to learning introduced by Reich (Reich, 2005) emphasizes that human being’s point of view depends on the subjective aspect (Maslo, 2007): experience plays the central role in the knowledge construction process (Maslo, 2007). Therein, the subjective aspect of human being’s point of view is applicable to the present research.

1. Theoretical framework of research

The theoretical framework provides the definition of needs and needs analysis. Need is defined by the reasons for which the student is learning a foreign language, which will vary from study purposes such as following a postgraduate course in an English-speaking country to work purposes such as participating in business meetings or taking hotel bookings that are the starting points which determine the language to be taught (Dudley-Evan, John, 1998). Education should be based on consistent analysis of needs for competence. Needs analysis provides the crucial information to ensure that education and/ or professional development is purposeful, appropriate, valid and relevant. Consequently, three dimensions of adults’ needs in foreign languages are differentiated as demonstrated in Figure 2.

However, the emphasis of the System-Constructivist Theory on the subjective aspect of human being’s experience does not allow analyzing the needs objectively: human beings do not always realize their experience and their wants (Maslo, 2007).

Needs analysis helps to bridge the gap between the needs in adults’ foreign languages and foreign language studies (Oganisjana, Koke, 2008). Needs analysis provides the crucial information to ensure that development is purposeful, appropriate, valid and relevant. Moreover, regular analysis of needs becomes a means of development of adults’ foreign languages within foreign language studies (Lūka, 2008).
Hence, the success of adults’ use of foreign languages is generated via analysis of adults’ needs in use of foreign languages.

Design of empiric study

The empirical study’s design within the present contribution comprises the empirical study’s purpose and question, the sample of the present empirical study and the empirical study’s methodology as demonstrated in Figure 3.

The research purpose and question

The present research is aimed at comparing adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania. The empirical study was conducted in Latvia and Lithuania in 2014. The research topicality was determined by ever-increasing flow of information in which an important role is laid to use of foreign languages as a means of getting information and gaining experience. The research question is as follows: What are the similarities and difference in adults’ use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania? Efforts have been made, as far as possible, to avoid mentioning individual languages by name because it is hoped to advance the benefits of language study in general, rather than to promote one language at the expense of another (although in a few cases this has been unavoidable). Reasons for learning English as a second or additional language have not been specifically included in the research. This is because the position of English as global lingua franca means that a quite different set of rationales is in operation in comparison with all other languages. The scope of the study has not included a focus on the reasons why adults do not want to learn languages.
The sample of the research

Needs analysis comprised 50 unemployed adults in Riga, Latvia, and 50 adults in Klaipeda, Lithuania in 2014. The adults who participated in the empirical study were between 30 – 55 years old. All of them were registered at local labour markets at the time research was carried out. All the respondents received either vocational or higher education in different professional fields. All the respondents obtained some work experience in their past. The respondents were the representatives of different cultures such as Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, etc. Therefore, the sample was multicultural as the respondents with different cultural backgrounds and diverse educational approaches were chosen. That emphasizes the significance of the analysis of needs of each respondent (Luka, Ludborza, Maslo, 2009) within the present empirical study. Thus, the sample’s socio-cultural context (age, field of study and work, mother tongue, etc.) was heterogeneous.

Selecting the cases for the case study comprised use of information-oriented sampling to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This is because an average case is often not the richest in information. In addition, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to produce this kind of insight; it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity. Moreover, the cases themselves are not of interest, only the conclusions and transfers we can draw from this material (Mayring, 2007).

The optimal number of respondents depends on the characteristics of the study itself. However, the greater the heterogeneity of the group of respondents, the fewer is the number of respondents recommended, 100 being a good size (Okoli, Pawlowski, 2004).
2. Research methodology

This study is oriented towards the comparison of adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania.

The interpretive paradigm was used in the empirical study. The interpretive paradigm aims to understand other cultures, from the inside through the use of ethnographic methods such as informal interviewing and participant observation, etc (Taylor, Medina, 2013). The interpretative research paradigm which corresponds to the nature of humanistic pedagogy (Lūka, 2008) was determined for the present empirical study. The interpretative paradigm creates an environment for the development of any individual and helps them to develop their potential (Lūka, 2008). The core of this paradigm is human experience, people’s mutual everyday interaction that tends to understand the subjectivity of human experience (Lūka, 2007). The paradigm is aimed at understanding people’s activity, how a certain activity is exposed in a certain environment, time, conditions, i.e., how it is exposed in a certain socio-cultural context (Lūka, 2007). Thus, the interpretative paradigm is oriented towards one’s conscious activity, and it is future-oriented (Lūka, 2007). Interpretative paradigm is characterized by the researcher’s practical interest in the research question (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2003). A researcher is the interpreter. Thus, the interpretative paradigm in the present empirical study is underpinned both by the researcher’s practical interests – adults’ foreign language studies as the basis for provision of adults’ use of foreign languages – and the correspondence of the social constructivism theory to the given paradigm (Lūka, 2007).

Comparative study as a research design was employed (Flick, 2004). The exploratory type of the comparative study was applied (Phillips, 2006). The exploratory type of the comparative study aims to generate new hypotheses and questions (Phillips, 2006). The exploratory methodology proceeds (Phillips, 2006) as shown in Figure 4:

- ‘conceptualisation’ in Phase 1,
- detailed description of educational phenomena in the countries to be investigated, with full attention paid to the local context in terms of its historical, geographical, cultural, political, religious, and linguistic (etc.) features in Phase 2,
- the data collection in Phase 3,
- explanation through the development of hypotheses in Phase 4,
- re-consideration of the initial questions and application of the findings to other situations in Phase 5.

The qualitatively oriented empirical study allows the construction of only few cases (Mayring, 2004). Moreover, the cases themselves are not of interest, only the conclusions and transfers we can draw from these respondents (Mayring, 2007).
3. The results of the empirical study

The empirical results of the present study facilitate the analysis and comparison of adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania.

Survey’s results

In order to analyse as well as compare adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania, the survey was carried out. The survey consisted of 4 sections of questions:

- **Section 1**: Identifying other known foreign languages except for mother tongue.
- **Section 2**: Dimensions of adults’ needs in foreign language competence.
- **Section 3**: Foreign language for other purposes.
- **Section 4**: Adults’ foreign language competence and well being.

Only positive answers were taken into consideration for the analysis and comparison. Table 1 shows the results generated by the respondents from Latvia and Lithuania during the survey.

The majority of respondents both in Latvia and Lithuania stated that they most frequently use Russian as the foreign language, 98% and 86% respectively. English as a foreign language is used by 36% of respondents in Latvia and by 42% of respondents in Lithuania. Other mentioned languages were Latvian in Latvia and German in Lithuania.
Table 1: Survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Known foreign languages except for mother tongue</td>
<td>- Russian (49) - English (18) - Latvian (14)</td>
<td>- Russian (43) - English (21) - German (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dimensions of adults’ needs in foreign language competence.</td>
<td>- for further studies (10) - for working activities (30) - for travelling (16)</td>
<td>- for further studies (8) - for working activities (34) - for travelling (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you need a foreign language for other purposes? Please, specify.</td>
<td>- online communication (24) - reading books/articles/website information (25) - searching for jobs (15) - communication with family members (3)</td>
<td>- online communication (39) - finding friend/partners online (24) - searching for jobs (20) - browsing internet (19) - life-situations (buying a car, online shopping etc.) (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Foreign language competence and well-being.</td>
<td>- importance for employability (38) - mobility (31) - helpful for future career goals (30) - better relationship with other cultures (18) - personal satisfaction (17) - global relations (11)</td>
<td>- employability advantages (41) - cultural understanding of others (29) - meeting people and making new friends (23) - mobility (23) - personal development (19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data gathering process revealed a high level of adults’ identification with the personal benefits and well-being associated with language learning, such as communication, travel and employability.

The results of Latvia’s unemployed adults reveal that:
- ten adults of 50 who took part in the survey needed a foreign language for further studies,
- thirty adults of 50 who responded during the survey needed a foreign language for their working activities,
- sixteen adults of 50 who participated in the survey needed a foreign language for travelling,
- After the content analysis was done, the answers provided for the question “Foreign language for other purposes” can be summarized as follows: Foreign language is necessary for online communication, searching for some information on the internet, looking for jobs etc.

In comparison, the results of Lithuania’s adults reveal that:
- eight adults of 50 who took part in the survey needed a foreign language for further studies,
• thirty four adults of 50 who responded during the survey needed a foreign language for their working activities,
• twenty six adults of 50 who participated in the survey needed a foreign language for travelling,
• Other answers can be grouped on the basis of content analysis: foreign language is necessary for online communication purposes, for finding friends/partners, browsing internet for information, online shopping etc.

The comparison of the results of the survey shows that the majority of both Latvia and Lithuania’s adults need a foreign language for their working activities. Other specific purposes in use of foreign language were extracted during the content analysis. The answers were similar: both in Latvia and in Lithuania adults use foreign language as a means for searching information/communication/jobs etc. online.

The survey showed that the number of both Latvia and Lithuania’s adults who need a foreign language for their further studies is low, respectively 20% and 30%. It can be explained by the age of the respondents who were between 30 and 55 years old in which adults mostly have their own families they have to care about.

Both Latvia and Lithuania’s adults mostly need a foreign language for their working activities, respectively, 60% and 68%. As the economic crisis heavily affected economies of both countries, namely Latvia and Lithuania, adults focus on finding a new and better job to improve the quality of their life.

A number of respondents in Latvia and Lithuania, respectively, 32% and 50%, showed their interest in a foreign language for travelling as due to the economic crisis adults are oriented to provide themselves with the basic quality of life.

Adults demonstrated some interest in other dimensions in a foreign language for other purposes. A vast majority of adults acknowledged the importance of language learning for employability, personal development, mobility, enjoyment, cultural understanding, communication, language awareness. Clear interest was expressed in learning about, and gaining an appreciation of other cultures. Hence, the role of languages in social well-being was expressed. Respondents appeared to be far less aware of any potential significance of languages for the economic and political well-being.

**Conclusions**

The foreign language proficiency presupposes economic, political, and social well-being of adults. On the other hand, linguistic incompetence in foreign languages limits the communicational, meditational, intercultural competences of adults. Hence, the needs analysis of use of foreign language among adults is important seeking to purposefully improve the quality of life and well-being as well as to incorporation of foreign language studies at different levels of education.
The findings of the empirical study allow drawing conclusions that:

- adults’ needs in use of foreign languages are heterogeneous as adults need foreign languages for their further studies, working activities and travelling,
- the adults in both Latvia and Lithuania put the emphasis on use of foreign languages for working activities,
- adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in Latvia and Lithuania are similar,
- foreign language proficiency is important for social well-being of adults as a means for career advantages, mobility, communication etc..

Validity and reliability of the research results have been provided by involving other researchers into several stages of the conducted research. External validity has been revealed by international co-operation:

- the research preparation included individual consultations given by the Western researchers,
- the present contribution has been worked out in co-operation with international colleagues and assessed by international colleagues, and
- the research results have been presented at international conferences.

The present research has the following limitations. The inter-connections between needs analysis and their dimensions have been set. A limitation is the empirical study conducted by involving adults only in Latvia and Lithuania. Therein, the results of the study cannot be representative for the whole area in adult education. The empirical study emphasizes the needs in use of foreign languages shaped by adults only. Another limitation is use of only quantitative methods in the qualitative empirical study to the data processing and analysis.

Nevertheless, the results of the research, namely definition of needs analysis, dimensions of adults’ needs in foreign languages and the comparative study design, may be used as a basis of needs analysis at other levels of education.

The following hypothesis for further studies has been put forth: adults use foreign languages if

- adults purposefully improve the quality of their life and well-being,
- adults realise their needs in foreign languages,
- adults’ use of foreign languages is supported by a favourable surrounding environment.

There is a possibility to continue the study. Analysis of adults’ needs in use of foreign languages in other countries can be discussed. A comparative research of different countries on on adults’ needs in use of foreign languages could be carried out, too.

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References


SU AUGUSIŲĮŲ UŽSIENIO KALBOS KOMPETENCIJOS POREIKIS KAIP GEROVĖS VEIKSNYS: LATVIJOS IR LIETUVOS ATVEJŲ LYGINAMOJI STUDIJA

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Santrauka

Latvijai ir Lietuvai, kurios integruojasi į Europos ir pasaulio bendruomenę, komunikacinė kompetencija yra ypač aktuali. Pastaruoju metu visoms Europos Sąjungos šalims keliamas komunikavimo užsienio kalba kompetencijos disponavimo reikalavimas yra ypač aktualus. Sparčiai integravojantis į įvairias Europos Sąjungos šalis, atsiranda supratimas, kad užsienio kalbų mokėjimas yra pagrindinė priemonė, kuria atrandamos galimybės ne tik susipažinti, bet ir įsilieti į kitų šalių kultūras bei kitas svarbias šalių sritis.


Empirinio tyrimo metu nustatyta, kad suaugusiųjų užsienio kalbos kompetencijos poreikiai tiek Latvijoje, tiek Lietuvoje iš ešmės yra panašūs. Suaugusieji komunikavimo užsienio kalba kompetencijos ugdyomi poreikį visų pirma sieja su profesine veikla ir įsidarbinimo galimybėmis. Komunikavimo užsienio kalbos kompetencija taip pat svarbi kaip galimybė bendrauti ne tik su savo, bet ir su išoriniu pasauliu, ir taip pažinti tik savos, tik svetimos kultūros ypatumus. Komunikavimo užsienio kalbos kompetencijos ypatumai atskleidžiami kaip raktas į sėkmingą adaptaciją šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje, todėl ši kompetencija įvardijama kaip vienas socialinę, politinę ir ekonominę gerovę lemiančių veiksnių.