

## State Organized Language Learning for Immigrants in Norway: a Case Study of a Selection of Local Courses

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**Abstract.** This article examines official Norwegian language courses that are currently being offered to immigrants arriving in Norway. Such courses have in recent years been made available on a large scale, due to the significant increase of immigration to the country. The article will give an account of how such courses are organized, what groups of immigrants they are aimed at, and how these courses are regulated by law. Furthermore, it will describe the actual users of the courses, the results they achieve and how these results correlate to such factors as for instance national background, linguistic habits and overall motivation. The parts of the article dealing with such topics are based on a survey carried out among participants in a selection of randomly chosen courses over a couple of months in 2011. In order to better describe the strengths and weaknesses of the Norwegian approach to organizing language courses for immigrants, the data from the survey is supplemented with information from the Vox database. This is a publicly accessible database provided by the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, an agency of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, consisting of both basic information about participants of language course and their results. The results from a survey done on teachers who are in charge of courses are also demonstrated. After presenting and discussing information drawn from this database and our own study, the Norwegian way of organizing official language courses is briefly discussed and compared to the way such challenges are met in Lithuania. The overall aim of this is to extract knowledge from the experiences gained by the Norwegians while implementing official language courses for adult immigrants.

The type of language learning that these courses provide is to a certain extent in demand in most countries, and the connection between local language skills and good integration is a well-established scientific fact. As a consequence, the experiences gained in this field in Norway might be of interest in most countries faced with immigration and the challenge of integrating immigrants successfully into society. Such countries could also be said to include Lithuania.

**Key words:** *Norwegian language, Norsk kurs, immigrants, language teaching for immigrants, intercultural communication.*

### Introduction

Norway has in recent years established itself as one of the most attractive destinations in Europe for emigrants seeking a new home, either temporarily or permanently. In addition to more traditional groups of immigrants, such as refugees and asylum seekers, Norway has also experienced a surge of EU-citizens who are attracted by the possibilities of the Norwegian job market.

To put the situation into perspective, we can add that Norway at present receives more immigrants in one year than Lithuania does in a whole decade (Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (UDI) (Norway), Refugees Reception Centre (RRC) (Lithuania)), and that the populations in the two countries are of somewhat similar size. To help these immigrants integrate into society, the Norwegian government organizes language courses all across the country in over 400 municipalities. The participants range from levels A1 (basic user) to B2 (independent user) (CEFR) in terms of skills, but are more significantly extremely diverse in terms of national and social background, age and motivation. Such diversity can

probably not be matched in Lithuania at present, even though such courses also exist there for similar reasons. The State budget institution called Refugees Reception Centre (*Pabėgėlių Priėmimo Centras*) in Rukla, provides linguistic and social tuition for newcomers, but this service is a rather recent phenomenon. Generally speaking, Lithuania must be determined to be a nation with limited experience in the field of language courses and social training for immigrants.

Norway, however has for a number of years been offering such education to a large number of people. It has even reached such extent that the so called “Norsk kurs” (Norwegian Language Course) has become a household name, a little teaching industry, and perhaps also a separate institution in its own right. Its name is recognized all over the country and critics of this institution are few and far between. Immigrants also find these courses attractive, even though many groups have to pay relatively large sums to attend. This popularity calls for attention, regardless of the effectiveness of the courses themselves. Nevertheless, both should be examined for the purpose of gaining knowledge regarding the organizing language and culture courses for immigrants.

Such knowledge could be useful if one should decide to implement similar methods of integration in other countries.

Although Lithuania at the moment is mostly associated with emigration, it is still a fact that the country has a growing economy and is facing a situation where the labor market is becoming ever more international. This might well at some point bring about an increase in immigration, in addition to the likelihood of an increase in refugees and asylum seekers in the years to come. As an example, the Institute of Ethnic studies has already reported a surge of immigrants coming into the country from China.

The aims of the article are to first of all investigate and describe the Norwegian practice when teaching immigrants a language in which they will have little or no preexisting skill. Secondly, it endeavors to develop a picture for educators and policy makers of a well-tested model for such organized language learning, and to share the experiences gained from implementing it. And finally it also strives to show how such a model could increase the effects of organized language learning for immigrants in smaller countries like Lithuania.

### Research Methods

This is an empirically applied research paper, and an ontological positivist position has been undertaken when analyzing the situation in Norwegian language courses for adult immigrants. In other words, naturally existing phenomena were described in purely factual and statistical terms drawing conclusions and testing hypotheses. With the help of two specially designed quantitative offline questionnaires (see Appendixes), language course participants and teachers were interviewed. The questionnaire in English targeting learners consisted of 23 questions with 19 closed ended and four open ended questions. The questionnaire for teachers consisted of eight questions with four closed ended and four open ended questions. Participants were to answer questions concerning their own language learning, while teachers were to answer questions regarding their teaching methods and participants of the course. The questionnaires were distributed for learners before or after classes. Assistance was sometimes needed with the English language, and oral translations into Russian, Polish or Lithuanian were offered. Collecting 112 responses took three weeks spanning from November to December in 2011. The student respondents took from 5 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires, and while teachers mostly chose to fill them out at home or in the privacy of their office, the majority of students filled in their answers directly while sitting in the classroom. In order to achieve as much variety as possible, questionnaires were distributed in all available classes taught in the municipalities of Lindås and Austrheim. Both of which are located in the county of Hordaland in the west of Norway. These municipalities were selected at random, and all students attending courses there were offered to take part in the survey. As a consequence, the respondents only constitute a representative selection to the same extent as the immigrant population in these two municipalities constitutes a

representative selection of the total immigrant population of Norway. To even out any deviations, we rely on the data from the database Vox, provided by the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, to secure the reliability of the findings in the survey.

The targeted student respondents were residing either in one of the two selected municipalities, or in one of the three neighboring municipalities where local Norwegian language courses were not offered. These three were the municipalities of Fedje, Meland and Radøy. In total, the five municipalities covered by the survey have a population in excess of 30 000 people. How many of these people that in fact are immigrants is unclear, since such numbers are not made public in Norway on a regional level. It is however clear that the two courses in this region at the time of the survey was attended by 228 foreign nationals. Fifty of them attended courses in Austrheim, while the remaining 178 attended in Lindås. Attempts were made to reach as many as possible, but only 106 students successfully completed the whole questionnaire. This does however bring the response rate to almost 50 % of the entire population in a randomly chosen geographical area.

When the data was collected, the results were counted and mathematically calculated by hand. The data was then presented graphically in tables and charts and conclusions presented. In fact most of the findings have been represented in the article graphically to emphasize and illustrate the findings visually.

### The Respondents

The total number of respondents was 112, consisting of 6 teacher respondents and the before mentioned 106 student respondents. Of the latter category, there turned out to be 70 women and 36 men. The ages of these respondents ranged from 17 to 62, and the groups counted among them 23 nationalities (see Figure 1). The largest ethnic group in the selection turned out to be Lithuanians, even though at present this group is only ranked as the seventh biggest group of immigrants in Norway according the Statistics Norway (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*). This deviation might have various explanations. First of all, many Lithuanians in Norway find work in enterprises where the requirements for formal skills are low. Such enterprises are found all over the country, but in rural areas such as the area selected for this survey both competition for jobs and the costs of living are lower than in the cities. Secondly, other groups of immigrants such as refugees and asylum seekers are largely supported by the state during their first years in the country. As a consequence of this, they can choose more freely where to live and tend to prefer urban areas. For Lithuanians and other work immigrants the place of residence is mostly determined by where they find work.

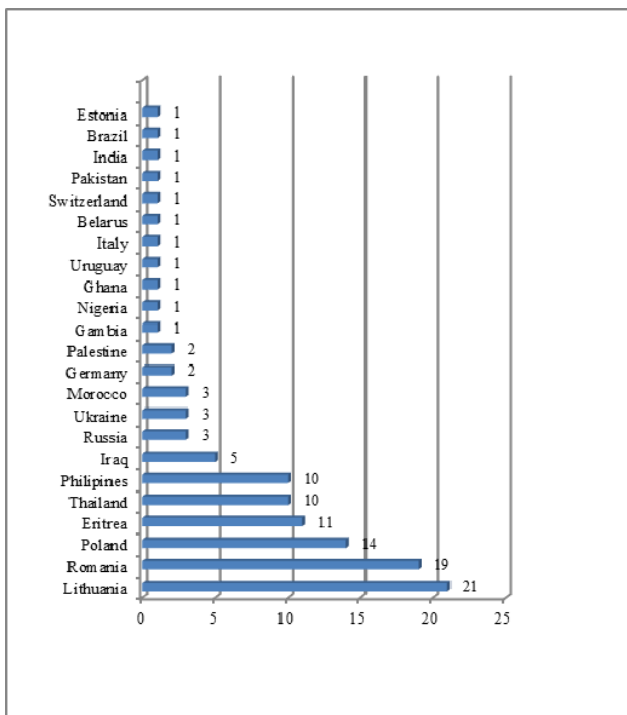


Figure 1. Countries Represented in the Questionnaire.

### Background and Literature Review

Any country receiving immigrants will have to have some sort of policy regarding how these newcomers are to be treated in order to become functional members of society. These policies are in turn usually based on some sort of ideology. Such ideologies and their implications for language learning are to a certain extent categorized in the Concise Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics (2010). The Norwegian policies seem mostly to fall in to the categories of assimilationist, ethnicist ideologies and *language as a problem* orientation, since a lacking ability to communicate in Norwegian is seen as perhaps the biggest obstacle when integrating immigrants. Many incentives are used to encourage language learning, and the government spends large sums each year on measures to promote Norwegian language skills among immigrants and their children. According to Kroon and Vallen, the article authors of the Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics called “Immigrant Languages”, assimilationist ideology maintains that immigrant minorities should adapt to the majority culture in general and give up their own identity, language and culture. An ethnicist ideology is very similar to assimilationist ideology but in addition evidently rejects linguistic and cultural diversity and makes it difficult for immigrant minorities to be accepted legally and/ or socially as full and equal members of the dominant society (Berns, 2010, p.131). In the Baker’s distinction of *language as a problem*, the native language of the immigrants is seen as a problem, since it is not the language of the majority. If the native language could be replaced by the language of the majority, this holds the key to solving problems such as

poverty, unemployment and integration into society in general (Berns, 2010, p.130).

As it is pointed out in the Encyclopedia of Linguistics, most nation states favor assimilationist and at times even ethnicist positions that resist multiculturalism and sees it as a problem in contrast to civic and pluralist ideologies which lead to undesirable separatism and segregation. The perhaps most efficient feature of defensive immigration laws shaped by ethnicist, assimilationist and *language as a problem* ideologies which are found in Norway, is that the government organizes courses and tests for newcomers to acquire language skills and knowledge about the culture of the local society. This is intended to assist immigrants in connecting with the culturally dominating majority.

Both in Norway and in Lithuania the integration of immigrants is a much debated topic (e.g. Bøhn and Dypendahl, 2009; Hansen, 2004; Piller, 2011; Žibas, 2011; Bartušienė, 2011). However, separate studies focusing on integration through language learning are rather few and far between in both countries. One reason for this might be that language courses for immigrants in both countries are rather a new phenomenon. Even for Europe in general, similar attempts by individual states at educating immigrants in the local language on such a large scale have not previously been undertaken at any point in history. This is a modern phenomenon brought on by the worldwide increase in migration seen in recent decades. Unlike Lithuania, Norway has a relatively long history of large scale immigration. Immigrants have been coming to Norway for the last 30–40 years since 1960–1970 (Hansen, 2004, p.13), to Lithuania since 1997, and a similar pattern can be observed in many other countries with similar backgrounds. The countries of the soviet bloc started receiving external immigrants only after the fall of communism, while western European democracies started recruiting guest workers predominantly in 1960–1970 and 1980. Colonial states such as the Netherlands, Britain or France have a different story of accepting immigrants from former colonies. In their case the immigration to the larger cities from former colonies began when the colonies started gaining independence in the sixties and seventies. The linguistic challenges in these countries were also different from those in other European countries, since immigrants from the colonies usually adopted the language and culture of the colonial state even before leaving their homeland. Neither Norway nor Lithuania has a history as colonial powers. The two countries are further similar in terms of population size and the rather homogeneous make-up of the society. Among the few larger differences are the facts that the Norwegian economy is significantly stronger, and that immigration to Norway in consequence is considerably larger than immigration to Lithuania. Both these factors have however been known to change over time.

Few studies have been done in Norway concerning the state organized language courses for immigrants, but some works can be found. One of them is a study of integration through language by Mariann Botten Hansen called “Vi er jo alle

damer!“ (2004) (*We are all women here!*). This is a study of how Norwegian language courses aimed at integration in Oslo are viewed from the perspective of immigrant women (gender here is interpreted as a social construct). It speaks about challenges, dilemmas and strategies of integration into the Norwegian society for women. The book analyses difficulties of combining Norwegian language courses with the domestic duties of women from traditional societies who are also expected to fill the traditional role of a stay at home housewife, and therefore have limited time for studying languages. The study showed that this combination could cause the basic learning process to take almost ten years.

A similar rare example from Lithuania is Janete Zygmantas' doctoral paper called “Adult Newcomers' Difficulties in Learning Lithuanian: An Ethnographic case study” (2011), where she investigates the difficulties faced by foreigners' of Lithuanian descent while studying Lithuanian language. Although she mainly focuses on the flaws found in the learning material, the author makes a particular mention of language learning for immigrants of non-Lithuanian decent.

Another Lithuanian study, conducted by Vaida Buivydienė and Regina Žukienė, dealt with foreign students who came to Vilnius Gediminas Technical University and Vilnius College through the SOCRATES/ ERASMUS programs. In a similar vein as the previous study, the researchers here emphasize that Lithuanian language course books for foreigners should teach functional language and introduce foreigners to sociocultural issues of the country more rather than represent pure Lithuanian grammar (Buivydienė, Žukienė, 2006).

This paper will concentrate mainly on language acquisition problems by immigrants, but has drawn inspiration from all the before mentioned scientific works.

### **The Legal Framework for the Norwegian Language Courses**

According to Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, the Norwegian language courses are available for people in every municipality all across Norway and are free of charge to certain groups of immigrants, such as asylum seekers, refugees, persons granted residence on humanitarian grounds and family members reunited with Norwegian citizens (children or spouses of Norwegian citizens). These people constitute the main target groups for this costly action to further Norwegian skills among immigrants, since they are more likely to spend longer periods of time in Norway than other categories of immigrants. In addition to these groups, the courses are also abundantly attended by temporary economic immigrants, also called guest workers, originating mostly from Eastern Europe. These people are often willing to pay for the courses themselves, and their ranks span from the unemployed and unskilled laborers to the highly educated and well paid experts.

Norwegian language training for immigrants is quite a recent phenomenon in its present form. According to UDI it became

statutory on 1 September 2005 for all the before mentioned groups of immigrants that are offered such training for free.

The aim of the tuition is to improve opportunities for immigrants to actively participate in the employment market and in society in general.

The Norwegian language courses are regulated by the so called Introduction Act. This law states that immigrants seeking to obtain a Norwegian citizenship must complete a certain documented number of hours of language tuition in order to be eligible for such citizenship in the future. In addition, they must also complete a separate course in social studies aimed at teaching them the essential parts of Norwegian culture. The requirements were originally set at 250 hours of language tuition and 50 hours of social studies. However, due to an amendment of the Introduction Act in 2011, the requirements have recently been raised to 550 hours of language tuition and 50 hours of social studies. This total of 600 effective hours of education provided free of charge constitutes a considerable expense when implemented nationwide. It also represents quite a challenge for the individual immigrants, who need to attend courses for rather a long time. They are, however, offered an opportunity to complete courses without sitting for the total number of stipulated hours. This comes in form of a standardized test called “Norskprøve 2”, and by passing this test the immigrant has documented that he or she has acquired the skills that the courses were intended to develop. The difficulty level of this test has remained unchanged by the recent changes to the Introduction Act, and is equivalent to level B1 in the CEFR categorization of language proficiency. The curriculum for the courses on the other hand aims as far as level B2.

If an immigrant should need more than 600 hours to acquire the skills needed to pass “Norskprøve 2”, it is possible to attend courses for longer periods of time. In fact, up to 3000 hours can be offered for free if necessary, but free tuition stops when the student reaches level B1. The reason some students need as much as 3000 hours to reach B1 level can most likely be found in the fact that the groups offered this education for free not only have a right, but also a duty to attend. In consequence, one can most likely expect great variations in motivation among the attendants. Regardless of this, the duty to attend courses extend to any member of the before mentioned groups aging from 16 to 55.

Such a duty does not apply to guest workers. This group was not primarily targeted by the Introduction Act, and as of yet not been given the right to attend courses free of charge. They did however show a considerable interest in attending, and in order to help finance the courses they are usually accepted as students in return for a nominal attendance fee. Their situation in the courses is also different from that of the other students, since they are free to come and go as they please. There are no minimum or maximum requirements with regards to how many hours of tuition they can receive, as long as they pay the attendance fee.

Since the Introduction Act did not specifically target guest workers, the government agency charged with evaluating the effects of the Norwegian language courses does not include this group in their statistics. In the official databases one can only find data concerning people who are compelled by law to attend such courses. People who pay for the courses themselves are not mentioned at all. In consequence, these databases only give a partial image of the effects of the Norwegian language classes as a whole. To illustrate just how partial this image can be, we can use the course offered in Austrheim as an example. In this municipality, only nine out of the 50 attendants at the Norwegian language course belonged to the categories compelled by law to attend. The remaining 41 attended on their own accord, and most were guest workers.

### Methodology Used in the Norwegian Language Courses

Norwegian Agency for Lifelong learning, Vox, provides substantial help both to teachers and learners of Norwegian. Among other things the Vox site contains a methodological guide, teaching aids, articles relating to the theoretical superstructure in the curriculum and the net based distance training that can be ordered by municipalities, employers and students who need an alternative for ordinary courses due to busy work schedule, locality or other circumstances, such as no available places at the local courses.

One of the more valuable approaches to teaching taken by educators in the Norwegian language courses is formative assessment. Formative methodology, or autonomous learning, requires the teacher to identify the individual needs of students and to use this information to further their motivation. This kind of approach to language learning fosters extensive discussions between teachers and students, and requires the teacher to produce a lot of feedback in form of oral or written comments. In turn, this stimulates the development of better self-evaluation skills and learner autonomy among the students.

The competing methodology of summative assessment constitutes a different approach. It puts more emphasis on elements of evaluation, such as giving grades and marking exams rather than focusing on giving comments on the improvement potential of students (Bergesen, 2008, p.4).

The summative approach represents the traditional way of teaching foreign languages in the classroom, and continues to dominate the methodology used in schools in large parts of the world. Hence, a considerable number of attendants at the Norwegian language courses will most likely be used to summative assessment rather than formative assessment. This might influence their understanding of how to utilize the tuition offered at the courses, and could in turn have consequences for results they achieve. Their teachers on the other hand will mostly have formative assessment as their natural approach to teaching. This was at least the case in the courses covered by our study. We found very little emphasis on grades and formal evaluation among the teachers, while the focus on using existing skills to further motivation among students was quite dominant.

### Motivation Among Students

The results from the survey reveal that the motivation among the majority of students attending the Norwegian language classes for learning the language was connected to their professional situation. Out of the 106 respondents, 51.8 % indicated that they were there to improve their chances of getting a job. Another 36.7 % answered that they wanted to learn the language since they were in the country already, which could also be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the fact that they see a practical use for such language skills. The remaining respondents either declined to answer or stated that they attended in order to further their general education (see Figure 2).

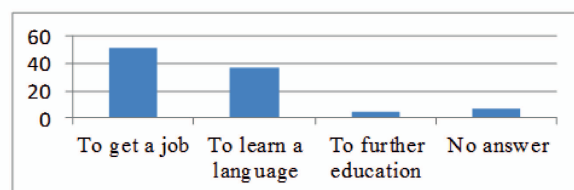


Figure 2. Distribution of Reasons Why People Attend Norwegian Language Courses

### Linguistic Habits and Expectations

Using a foreign language at home on a regular basis is perhaps the best way to learn it quickly. Such use of the language would also indicate that the learners were taking their language training seriously.

When asked about this, the majority (60.3 %) answered that they speak Norwegian at home on occasion. This could in part be explained by the fact that a large percentage of the respondents had Norwegian spouses, but this does not account for all the answers. More disturbingly, a rather large percentage of respondents, 26.4 %, answered that they never communicate in Norwegian at home. This is most likely due to the fact that they do not need to, since they live with their own native families and subsequently communicate more efficiently in their own native language. This is perhaps to be expected, but it does not contribute to furthering their language learning. As a result, one would expect the first category to learn Norwegian quicker. This tells us that immigrants such as guest workers have a disadvantage on the home front when it comes to language learning (see Figure 3).

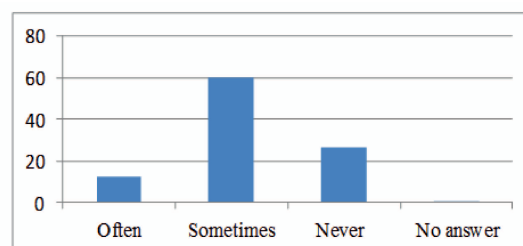
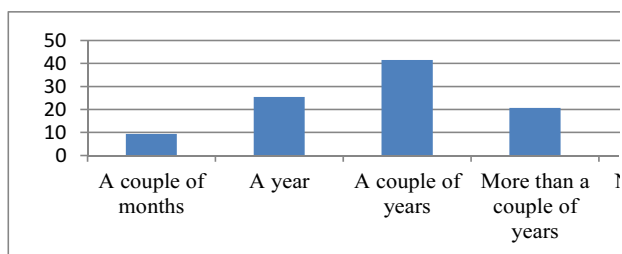


Figure 3. Distribution of Learners by How Often They Speak Norwegian at Home.

Based on these assumptions we found it interesting to examine how the respondents themselves viewed their chances of mastering Norwegian. As the Figure 4 below shows, most people assumed they would need a couple of years to do so.



**Figure 4.** The Time Participants Estimate They Will Need to Learn Norwegian Well.

The vast majority saw that the learning process would take a long time and since some of the respondents already had attended courses for quite some time, we can assume that most people saw that this would take years. As a consequence we can deduce that they were aware of the fact that learning Norwegian would demand an effort in one form or another.

#### When is the Right Time to Start Learning?

As Francis Bacon said:

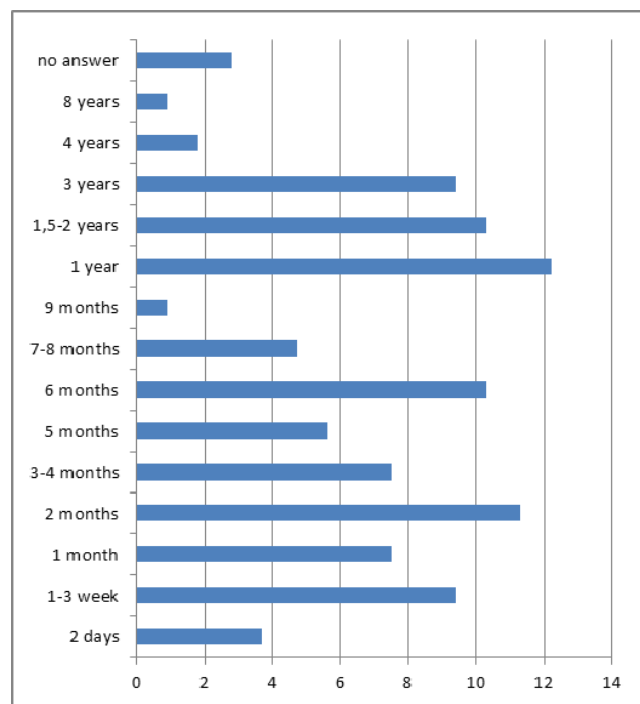
*He that travelleth into a country before he hath some entrance into the language, goeth to school and not to travel (Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 2006, p.23)*

As we can see from the Figure 5 below, there were certain breaking periods when people decided to start attending Norwegian language course. These make or break periods seem to be recurring every 2 to 6 months. Namely, after 2 months of staying in the country, after 6 months and, lastly, after 1 year. These seem to be the intervals after which the large numbers of respondents have chosen to enroll in Norwegian language courses. Peak attendance seems to be reached after about one year in the country. Later the willingness wanes or ultimately disappears as the person probably finds ways to survive without a local language or picks it naturally. However, two persons admitted starting a language course after 8 years, see Figure 5.

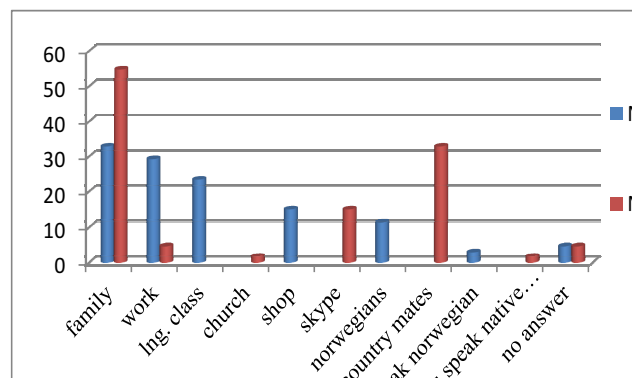
#### What is the Preferred Language?

As the Figure 6 below shows, immigrants mostly use the Norwegian language (blue column) within the confines of family (33.0%), at work (29.2%) and in the language classes themselves (23.5%). Native language (red column) is also most commonly used within the family (54.7%), with fellow countrymen (33.0%) and on Skype (15.0%). Generally speaking, most immigrants preferred using their own language when communicating, as opposed to Norwegian. Family setting is the winner in the category of both Norwegian and native language usages, but in both cases this means slightly different things. Those immigrants

who to the largest extent speak Norwegian in their families are, presumably, the ones who formed families with a Norwegian citizen. Those immigrants who speak their native language in their families are in turn presumably the people who have come to Norway with family members from their countries of origin. As the diagram shows, such families form a majority.



**Figure 5.** Persons Distributed by How Long They Lived in Norway Before they came to Norwegian Language Courses.

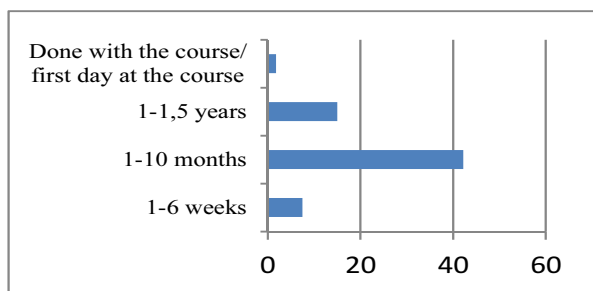


**Figure 6.** The Distribution of Norwegian or Native Language Usage Among Immigrants in a Variety of Settings.

#### How Much Language Training Do the Participants Feel They Need?

Most people are willing to attend these courses for up to one year. The majority of respondents (42.4%) had attended their course from 1–10 months. Later the number of

attendees diminished, and only 15.0% of respondents attended the course for 1 to 1.5 years. Keeping in mind that over 41.5% believed it would take them at least a couple of years to learn the language, this would indicate that many tend to lose their motivation over time. That is, if we are to take the students attending the courses at any given time as a representative selection of all attendants (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Duration of Attendance of Norwegian Language Course by Immigrants

The Norwegian language courses are aimed at achieving a standardized level of skill. In order to determine whether this level is achieved by students they are required to take before mentioned standardized tests. There are three such tests, only two of them are of any real significance. These are Norskprøve 2 (equaling CEFR level B1) and Norskprøve 3 (equaling CEFR level B2). The database provided by Vox publishes exam results from these tests in the form of statistics, and surprisingly it shows that the amount of training does not directly correspond to results. In fact, it seems that people are most likely to pass the standardized test with as little training as possible (see Table 1). The table shows the most striking tendency that language proficiency is not increasing with more hours of teaching. Though some learners received over 850 hours of training in 2010 and 2009, only 46 and 44% of them passed, respectively. However, 75% of learners passed their language exam in 2010 and 2009 with just 250 or fewer hours of training. Similar results are achieved in Norwegian language test 3. A larger percentage of students passed the test with 250 or fewer hours of training than with over 850 hours (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of Participants by Teaching Hours They Received and Their Results in Norwegian Language Tests, 2009–2010. (Source: The Vox Statistics Bank on Adult Learning).

| Tests           |                     | Norwegian language test 2 |                                | Norwegian language test 3 |                                |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Measuring value |                     | Number                    | Percentage of those who passed | Number                    | Percentage of those who passed |
| Year            | Hours of training   |                           |                                |                           |                                |
| 2010            | Total               | 7 389                     | 51                             | 3 825                     | 39                             |
|                 | <b>250 or fewer</b> | 1 721                     | <b>75</b>                      | 859                       | <b>61</b>                      |

|      |                     |       |           |       |           |
|------|---------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|
|      | 251–500             | 1 895 | 67        | 994   | 53        |
|      | 501–850             | 1 097 | 57        | 502   | 52        |
|      | <b>Over 850</b>     | 1 223 | <b>46</b> | 512   | <b>36</b> |
|      | No information      | 1 453 | -         | 985   | -         |
|      | Total               | 6 107 | 63        | 3 314 | 54        |
|      | <b>250 or fewer</b> | 1 314 | <b>75</b> | 812   | <b>61</b> |
| 2009 | 251–500             | 1 461 | 69        | 763   | 59        |
|      | 501–850             | 919   | 62        | 382   | 51        |
|      | <b>Over 850</b>     | 1 028 | <b>44</b> | 481   | <b>38</b> |
|      | No information      | 1 385 | 61        | 876   | 54        |
|      | Total               | 6 107 | 63        | 3 314 | 54        |
|      | <b>250 or fewer</b> | 1 314 | <b>75</b> | 812   | <b>61</b> |

### The Students Own Views of Their Learning Process

When asked how their language training process could be improved, 55.6% of respondents expressed no opinion or were satisfied with the situation as it was. The remaining respondents had suggestions regarding either the organization of courses, or the approach taken by them. Only a minority suggested changes to the courses, such as organizing the groups according to nationality, similar level of proficiency or increasing the number of classes per week. The majority however suggested various improvements that involved activity on their own part, such as studying more, making more use of Norwegian media or in other ways actively seeking ways of using the language every day. This also strongly suggests that the students were divided. A small majority reflected little on their own learning process, while a considerable minority was aware of the connection between their own efforts and the end results.

### Teachers' Perspective

The qualification requirements for teachers responsible for tuition in the Norwegian language courses are equal to those applying to ordinary teaching positions in Norwegian primary or secondary schools. The only difference is that a specialization in Norwegian or Nordic languages is needed, in addition to the obligatory specialization in pedagogics. Both these specializations can be on either bachelor's or master's levels. As a result of this, the education level of teachers in the Norwegian language courses is rather high. The six teachers participating in our study all had bachelor degrees, and were all experienced teachers with professional backgrounds from either primary schools or secondary schools. However, their experience with teaching Norwegian to immigrants varied immensely. Some had been doing this for over 16 years, while others were just starting out. Their knowledge of foreign languages also varied quite a lot,

although most admitted to knowing few such languages. Between them, the six teachers mastered English, German, French, Russian, Chinese, Swedish, Danish and Portuguese. These languages they tried to apply when teaching learners from different parts of the world. English, however, remained the language most commonly used when not communicating to students in Norwegian.

In order to compare and supplement their students' answers these teachers were also asked to fill in a questionnaire dealing with similar topics. According to their answers, neither nationality nor professional background was the determining factor when it came to the individual students' achievements. Although some answers to a certain extent pointed towards national differences, teachers were all united in the view that the students' educational background was the most important determining factor. The higher the education the better the results, and most teachers explained this with the assumption that people who are used to studying on their own in order to achieve results also would apply this approach to language learning. They were convinced that there was a connection between higher education from the students' homelands and a quick and successful completion of Norwegian language classes. They also pointed to the more obvious fact that students with native languages more similar to Norwegian, such as German and Dutch tended to complete courses earlier than others. Teachers also pointed out that a variety of different techniques is the best choice as different learners learn in different ways.

### **Conclusions**

Having done this research into the Norwegian language courses, learners and teachers, a few conclusions can be made. First of all it seems quite clear that language training for immigrants can be implemented on a large scale for diverse groups, and that this would further not only language acquisition but also integration. There is apparently no need to organize such courses according to such factors as nationality, age or previous education among the participants. On the other hand, it seems necessary to organize groups according to the level of proficiency in Norwegian among the students. The example from Norway also shows that such large scale language education programs can be undertaken successfully even by smaller nations, and being a nation of similar size to Norway this fact should also apply for Lithuania.

If introduced at some point, such national language courses for immigrants might well prove to fill a need in society not previously known to be there, as it might attract other groups than originally intended. In Norway the courses were primarily aimed at refugees who were compelled by law to attend, but ended up catering mostly to guest workers who were under no such obligation. This group even proved to have a higher motivation for language learning than the refugees, for whom the courses originally were organized.

From a Lithuanian perspective, the Norwegian language courses are also remarkable in the sense that they appear to be very democratically organized. They cater not only

refugees, but are also open for other groups if they are willing to fund themselves. There are few limitations as to how long a person can attend the courses, and the possibility to do so is open to people all over the country. This broad spread means that both immigrants and locals get to know each other better in the remotest areas of the country. Other features that cannot be found in the local language classes offered in Lithuania today include the element of societal orientation and the formative assessment approach to teaching. Sociocultural classes could, if introduced, assist language learners in also acquiring a basic understanding of Lithuanian culture. This understanding is a key factor in successful integration, and can also be used to stimulate motivation for language learning. Formative assessment, on the other hand might be a good alternative or supplement to the current emphasis on Lithuanian grammar and testing in language learning. The formative approach would help learners develop into independent language users who could continue to systematically develop their skills long after leaving the courses, rather than concentrate on many inflectional Lithuanian grammar points which only frighten the learner.

Educators could also see the benefits of the model presented in this study in terms of the outcomes. As experiences showed, immigrants tend to have a fresh and powerful start at the beginning of their stay in the country. Later, the enthusiasm wanes off or they are learning slower as a result of limitations brought on by work or other obligations. As a consequence of this, it seems that the best strategy is to be flexible. One should be prepared to provide the learners with a good portion of quality material from the very beginning, but also be prepared to put up with learners who only attend courses sporadically.

In terms of actual results, most participants in Norway can at present be expected to reach a somewhat functional level after about 250 hours of tuition. That is of course if they make the necessary efforts and receive sufficient tuition. Their individual achievements will however not correlate directly with their efforts or the amount of tuition they have received as the data from database provided by Vox agency showed.

As for the participants' own opinion about learning the language they turned out to be rather insightful when it came to their own learning process and most of them acknowledged the fact that it would take them a lot of effort to learn a new language, and since many wished for a higher intensity in their language training (in the form of tuition being offered more often) it also seems that they were willing to make this effort. Such findings should also be expected under similar circumstances elsewhere.

The results from our study show that educational background is by far the most determining factor when it comes to achieving results in language courses. This in turn can be explained as a natural result of the study habits and discipline that highly qualified individuals are bound to pick up during their education.



Whether the experiences gained in Norway will be of use to Lithuania or not remains to be seen. It is however clear that the language course system for immigrants used in Norway also could be adopted in Lithuania, and experiences from Scandinavia in general show that society could greatly benefit from assisting newcomers in learning the language in order to further integration. As the experience of big immigrant nations such as Australia or Canada show, society should help immigrants to learn the local language if they want to prevent alienated groups of immigrants from being rejected from the predominant society.

One possible direction for further research could be to analyze more closely the language courses offered for immigrants in Lithuania. Either in the form of a study looking into the way courses are organized, or a closer examination of the results achieved by students attending such courses. Perhaps even a combination of the two.

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#### Norvegų kalba imigrantams Norvegijoje

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjami norvegų kalbos kursai naujai atvykusiems imigrantams Norvegijoje. Tai empirinė studija, pagrįsta besimokančiųjų ir jų mokytojų apklausos analize. Čia piešiamas autentiškas norvegų kalbą besimokančių imigrantų paveikslas, jų įpročiai, kalbos mokymosi motyvai, sunkumai ir pasiekimai. Duomenų analizė taip pat atskleidžia stiprias ir silpnas norvegų kalbos mokymo imigrantams puses. Straipsnyje trumpai pristatoma, kaip Norvegijoje organizuojamas kalbos mokymas, kokias teises ir įsipareigojimus imigrantai bei prieglobsčio gavėjai turi siekdami išmolti šalies kalbą. Duomenys iš Norvegijos duomenų bazės Vox (Norvegijos mokymosi visą gyvenimą agentūros prie Norvegijos mokslo ir tyrimų ministerijos), vaizdžiai iliustruoja imigrantų mokymosi rezultatus.

Straipsnio tikslas yra pristatyti Norvegijos patirtį rengiant retai mokomos norvegų kalbos kursus didelėms ir įvairioms imigrantų grupėms iš viso pasaulio. Studija atskleidė, jog net ir nesant griežtiems reikalavimams, didžioji dauguma imigrantų renkasi kalbos studijas savanoriškai ir sąmoningai, idant pagerintų savo įsidarbinimo bei integracijos Norvegijoje galimybes.

Duomenys iš Pabėgėlių priėmimo centro Lietuvoje ir Norvegijos imigracijos direktorato rodo, kad imigrantų srautai į Norvegiją ir į Lietuvą labai skiriasi. Į Norvegiją kasmet atvyksta tiek imigrantų iš viso pasaulio, kiek į Lietuvą per dešimt metų. Nepaisant dabartinių tendencijų, situacija Lietuvoje gali greitai pasikeisti ir ją gali užplūsti imigrantų banga iš viso pasaulio, kuriems labai reikės vietinės retai pasaulyje mokomos lietuvių kalbos. Dėl to straipsnis turėtų būti įdomus mažesnių šalių edukologams, dėstytojams, mokytojams ir politikams, kurie norėtų sužinoti, kaip tokius kursus organizuoti, kaip mokyti ir sutikti tokias gausias gretas besimokančiųjų iš užsienio ir ko galima iš jų tikėtis.

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## APPENDIXES

**Table 2.** Questionnaire Presented for the Participants of the Norwegian Language Courses.

| <i>Language Learning Questionnaire for "Norsk kurs" Participants</i>  |   |
|---|---|
| <p>The goal of this questionnaire is to find out the participants' opinion about "Norsk kurs" – Norwegian language courses. The questions below are geared to find out what the learners know, do, feel and think while studying the Norwegian language in Norway. The results will be presented in a language learning conference and later in a scientific article.</p> |   |
| <p>Please put crosses next to the questions or fill in the necessary information:</p>   |   |
| 1.  | Are you a man or a woman?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Man <input type="checkbox"/> Woman  |
| 2.  | How old are you?<br>____ years old  |
| 3.  | Where were you born?<br>Country: _____  |
| 4.  | What is your native language? _____   |
| 5.  | Do you speak other languages than your native fluently?<br>No _____ Yes _____ List _____  |
| 6.  | What is your highest level of education?<br>A. Secondary school _____ Vocational education _____ College/ University _____  |
| 7.  | How long have you been in the country before you started Norwegian language course (Norsk kurs)? _____  |
| 8.  | What is the main reason you decided to go to Norwegian language course (Norsk kurs)?<br>A) For work _____ B) For studies _____ C) To apply for a residence permit in Norway _____ D) To get citizenship _____<br>E) Other (specify) _____ |
| 9.  | How long have you attended Norwegian classes? _____ week(s) _____ month(s) _____ year(s)  |
| 10.   | Have you attended Norwegian classes before you came to this country/ course?<br>Yes _____ No _____  |
| 11.   | If yes, where did you attend Norwegian classes?<br>Country _____ Type of school _____   |
| 12.   | How often do you speak Norwegian at home? Often _____ Sometimes _____ Not at all _____  |
| 13.   | Is learning Norwegian harder than you thought? Yes _____ No _____   |
| 14.   | Do you think you will stay in the country permanently?<br>Yes _____ No _____ I don't know _____   |
| 15.   | With whom and in which situations do you speak Norwegian? _____   |
| 16.   | With whom and in which situations do you speak your native language? _____  |
| 17.   | Would you like to study Norwegian for specific purposes (for example, Norwegian for carpenters, Norwegian for nurses, etc.)?<br>Yes, Norwegian for _____ No _____ I Don't know _____  |
| 18.   | How much time do you think it will take you to learn a new language well?<br>A couple of months _____ A year _____ A couple of years _____ More _____   |
| 19.   | How could Norwegian language courses (Norsk kurs) be improved, if at all? _____   |
| 20.   | Do you pay for Norwegian language classes yourself?<br>Yes _____ No (I get it free) _____   |
| 21.   | The reason you don't have to pay is one of the following:<br>A) Asylum _____ B) Refugee _____ C) Residence on humanitarian grounds _____ D) Family reunion with Norwegian or Nordic citizen _____<br>E) Other _____                       |

22. Do you work in Norway?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. Did this questionnaire ask all the right questions about the language learning?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Add \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire!*

**Table 3.** Questionnaire Presented for the Teachers of the Norwegian Language Courses.

*Language Teaching Questionnaire for Teachers of "Norsk kurs"*

The goal of this questionnaire is to find out the teachers' opinion about Norwegian language course "Norsk kurs". The questions below are geared to find out what the teachers think about the learners of Norwegian. The results of the questionnaire will be presented in a language learning conference and later in a scientific article.

1. Are there any noticeable differences when it comes to results and motivation between students from various parts of the world?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, which nationalities would you say achieve the best results \_\_\_\_\_

2. Would you say that foreign workers are more motivated to learn the language if they are planning to stay in the country for a long time?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which groups of students would you classify as the ones achieving the best results?

A) Foreign workers \_\_\_\_\_ Refugees \_\_\_\_\_ Spouses \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What are your favorite teaching techniques when teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the best technique when teaching Norwegian? What is something that really works? Please describe.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you usually satisfied with the results of the learners of Norwegian?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_ I never thought about it \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. How long have you taught Norwegian for foreign adults? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What other languages do you speak except Norwegian? \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire!*