

Assessment of Foreign Language Competence of Higher Education Institution Graduates

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Abstract. Foreign language competence is one of the general skills necessary for the European knowledge society. It is also an essential criterion for personality maturity subservient to mutual understanding, democratic stability, and communication with the world. Learning of foreign languages is perceived as a part of life-long learning. Therefore, higher education institutions (HEI) should, on the basis of what has been achieved in secondary education in the field of language teaching and learning, aim at further development of foreign language teaching and learning. Moreover, internationalisation of higher education (HE) all over the world, including Lithuania, enhances the provision of more and more programmes taught fully or partly in English as the interest of international students to acquire education abroad has been increasing constantly. Consequently, students of higher education institutions are required to be proficient in English. The authors of the article consider it purposeful to analyse the proficiency in English as a foreign language of higher education graduates. Taking into account the disparity in the language competence of graduates from different HEIs which is a major obstacle for not only their international mobility but also raises difficulties for academic mobility and choice as concerns the graduates' further studies at the level of Master's programme in their own country in the context of life-long learning, the study aims at determining language proficiency of the graduates from the first cycle studies at HEIs, applying for the Master's degree programmes in Lithuania, and comparing the level of graduates' English language proficiency among different HEIs. The analysis of the research findings revealed insufficient language competence of the higher education graduates as well as remarkably divergent range of language competence among graduates across HEIs. Therefore, the study argues for more attention to foreign language studies at HEIs by introducing specific language related courses and raising requirements for foreign language competence, also for the necessity to have a standardised instrument in Lithuania for HEI graduates' foreign language competence assessment to ensure efficient movement of students within the country's HEIs and comparability of their language competences, and to ensure foreign language competence development at the level of post-graduate studies.

Key words: *higher education; higher education institutions; higher education graduates; post-graduate studies; foreign language competence; professional, academic and personal mobility, life-long learning.*

Introduction

The Lithuanian society has been concerned about the most universal heritage of European nations, i.e. the retention of languages and the development of their diversity. Undoubtedly, social and cultural changes in Europe and the entire world have greatly influenced the policy of languages in Lithuania that has entered the era of rapid changes, fraught with new challenges. The gates opening broader and broader into the consolidating Europe, communication and cooperation with the world have made the Lithuanian policy makers to reflect over the processes of changes in teaching foreign languages with respect to the increasing importance of language knowledge and competence in the future. The attitude of society towards learning languages has also changed: the advantages of language knowledge and competence in diverse European Union, particularly increasing opportunities of international communication due to study, work and personal mobility have been perceived.

The topicality of the problem. Knowledge and competence in languages is one of the general skills necessary for the European knowledge society. Knowledge and competence in languages is an essential criterion for personality

maturity subservient to mutual understanding, democratic stability, and communication with the world. The European Council (EC) devotes a lot of attention to the language policy, emphasising the value of language diversity and the importance of possibilities for everybody to learn several languages.

Internationalisation of higher education. Universities all over the world, including Lithuanian universities, offer more and more programmes taught fully or partly in English as the interest of international students to acquire education abroad have been constantly increasing. Therefore, it is purposeful to analyse the achievements of higher education graduates.

The research problem. Not only the European universities have different study curricula, possibilities or political preconditions for the development of foreign language competences at tertiary level, but even the graduates from universities in one country, as is the case in Lithuania, acquire different level of foreign language competence because of different language study programmes, credits provided, language teaching and learning forms and methods applied, various limitations of possibilities as concerns course length, and etc. The latter disparity in the

language competence causes huge problems for the graduates from a higher education institution as it becomes a major obstacle for not only their international mobility but also raises difficulties for academic mobility and choice as concerns their further studies at the level of Master programme in their own country in the context of life-long learning. Also, hardly any university offers a formal foreign language study, language competence development or language competence maintenance programme at the level of Master's degree and Doctoral degree programme no matter how high the requirements for foreign language competence are set for the studies at post-graduate level.

Thus, **the object** of the research is language competence of the first cycle study programme graduates from higher education institutions applying for the Master's degree programme.

The research purpose is to determine the first cycle study programme graduates' language competence and compare it among the graduates of different Lithuanian HEIs.

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To present the results of literature and document analysis;
- To validate the methodology of the graduate language competence assessment tool;
- To determine if the English language competence of the graduates from different HEIs is adequate to the required B2 level according to CEFR;
- To compare the results of the graduates' language competence assessment in different HEIs;
- To draw the conclusions and provide recommendations based on the discussion of literature analysis and empirical research results.

The **research approach** used in this paper is analysis of literature resources, and confirming a research hypothesis (research design and research methodology presented below).

Theoretical background/literature review

The European Council invites all the European Union member states, with respect to the corresponding national conditions and priorities of political, legal, budget and education systems, to pursue various aims related to foreign language teaching and learning. Learning of foreign languages is perceived as a part of life-long learning. Therefore, higher education institutions should, on the basis of what has been achieved in secondary education in the field of language teaching and learning, aim at further development of language teaching and learning. The Communiqué of the European Commission (2002) states:

Language competence is a part of general competences that ensure every person's employability, education, and personal development possibilities. These competences have to be constantly refreshed and developed. The days when learning started and ended in secondary school have presently become

history – today language learning has become an activity of life-long learning (European Commission, 2002).

It is argued in Nancy's declaration (2006) that Bologna process objectives can only be achieved if all students irrespective of their specialisation, especially students at undergraduate level, **are given the opportunity to learn languages**, and if mobile students receive adequate linguistic support. It is also stressed that it is important to continue language learning at teaching at higher education and that language programmes as well as language provision "should be incorporated into universities' quality culture and included in internal and external quality reviews" (p.7).

The European Commission's Communication *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* (2005) emphasises the importance of language and intercultural skills for the achievement of the Lisbon goals. It is argued that higher education institutions should play a more active role in promoting multilingualism amongst students and staff, but also in the wider local community (p. 6). Universities have to therefore play their role in enabling all graduates in Europe to:

- be able to communicate in at least two languages other than their first language,
- know how to improve their proficiency in languages,
- have confidence, and know how to learn a new language when the need or opportunity arises,
- have first-hand experience in working and learning in, and collaborating with other countries, and
- be familiar with other cultures and intercultural skills (Nancy Declaration, 2005).

Mackiewicz (2009) discussing the fundamental changes of the first decade of the 21st century, asserts that European societies have become multilingual and multicultural; the inhabitants are bilingual and multilingual speaking over four hundred of languages and the use of the English language has expanded more than ever before due to the increasing European integration, intra-European mobility, emigration, globalization, development of ICT, and etc. These fundamental changes have inevitably caused some tensions, one of which is that English is becoming the core and usually the only language used in international programmes.

The dispositions of the Lithuanian national strategy of education for 2003-2012 („Dėl valstybinės švietimo strategijos 2003-2012 metų nuostatų“, 2003) state that proficiency in two-three foreign languages becomes a natural part of HE. The profile of the national language education policy in 2004-2006 (*Kalbų mokymo politikos aprašas*, 2006) summarising the implementation of the action plan for promoting language learning and linguistic diversity (*Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006*) and responding to the proposition of the Council of Europe for the member countries to reflect on national language policies (*Language Education Policy Profiles*, 2004) in its section

on Foreign Language Teaching Strategy devotes attention solely on language teaching in general and vocational education institutions. HEI are referred to only with regard to foreign language teacher education, international mobility programmes and providing some figures concerning the number of students studying foreign languages. It is presumed in the mentioned above sources as well as in the project of the Foreign Language Strategy in Lithuania (*Užsienio kalbų mokymo strategijos. Projektas*, 2009) that language learning is a prerogative and responsibility of general education whereas HEIs are not set any requirements to the provision of language

learning opportunities assuming that it should happen naturally.

The majority of universities in Europe set language requirements for applicants to Master programmes. Usually applicants have to demonstrate their English language proficiency by submitting the results of different standardised English tests. The lists of tests are usually provided in admissions requirements together with minimum test scores required by the study programmes. For instance, Central European University in Hungary accepts the scores of TEFL, IELTS, PTE, and CPE tests (see Table 1).

Table 1. Minimum test scores required by Master's programmes in European universities

Test Type	Minimum Score Required				
	Central European University (Hungary)	University of Warsaw (Poland)	Freie University, Berlin (Germany)	University of Oslo (Norway)	University of Turku (Finland)
TOEFL (Computer-based)	230	200	-	213	
TOEFL (Paper-based)	570	Over 500	550	550	575
TOEFL (Internet-based)	88	-	80 (Chemistry) 70 (Physics)	80	70
CEU-administered TOEFL (Paper-based)	570	-	-	-	-
International English Language Test (IELTS)	6.5	6.0	5.5 (Physics)	6.0 (Academic Test)	6.5 (no individual scores below 5.5)
Pearson Test of English (Academic)	59	-	-	-	
Cambridge Proficiency Examination	C	-	-	-	Pass grades A, B, C
Cambridge Advanced English Test	B	-	-	-	Pass grades A, B, C
Other		Essay (100-1500 words)	-	-	Test by the Finnish NBE, an average of 5

Other universities, for instance Master's degree studies in Political Sciences at University of Warsaw require a certificate confirming the knowledge of English - e.g. TOEFL, IELTS. A candidate who does not have a possibility to present any certificate of the English language proficiency is required to submit an essay written in English (between 1,000 and 1,500 words) on European Union issues. The Admission requirements at Freie University, Berlin, ask the applicants whose native language is not English and who have not acquired their qualifying degree at an educational institution where English is the language of instruction to present a certification of their proficiency in English at or above the level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (for applicants, e.g. in Physics) or level B2 (for applicants in Sociology).

Language requirements in Master's degree programmes at University of Turku ask all applicants to prove their proficiency in English by presenting the set minimum scores of internationally recognized English tests. Some programmes suggest other ways of indicating language skills, e.g. for the National Certificate of Language Proficiency in English set by the Finnish National Board of Education, an average score of 5 (a requirement in Baltic Sea Region, Asian Studies, etc. A good command of

English is required of all students attending the University of Oslo. International students who are not native speakers of English must document their proficiency in English by taking one of the internationally recognized tests.

The admission requirements set for entering Master programmes in VMU require English language competence of B2 level. Up to 2007 the entrants to all the faculties of VMU had to take a diagnostic test. Since 2008 only the faculties of Business and Economics, Law and Social Sciences have maintained this requirement. The graduates of VMU first cycle programmes while entering Master degree programmes at VMU are exempted from taking the test as four levels of English as a foreign language are compulsory in the first cycle studies at VMU, all undergraduate students reach level B2 usually by the end of the second year of studies or earlier/later.

Methods

The empirical research was carried out at Vytautas Magnus University during the period of 2003-2009. The participants of the research were the applicants for the Master degree programmes at this university. They all were the first cycle study programme graduates representing 18 higher education institutions in Lithuania. Regarding ethical considerations all the participant HEIs

were encoded and given conventional titles in this research paper.¹ The total number of the research participants was 638. They were rendered a test in an attempt to measure their achievements in the English language proficiency and to analyse the English language competence of the Bachelor degree graduates from a higher education institution in Lithuania given the fact that the applicants for the Master degree programme are usually the ones with the highest results of academic achievements.

A standardised general achievement test of English (GATE) was employed as the higher education institution graduate language competence assessment tool. The methodology of the standardised general achievement test of English preparation included several aspects as regards its quality and its purpose. Firstly, all the five criteria of test quality assessment criteria, i.e. objectivity, standardization of conditions, data normalisation, test score validity, and test score reliability (Kardelis, 2002), were taken into consideration. Also, given the purpose of the test, the content of the test was developed in conformity to certain requirements. Firstly, it was aimed at evaluating the candidate general English language competence as regards language activity skills necessary to capacitate successful studies at the level of Master programme. Secondly, it was developed to measure the candidate language competence at B2/C1 level with reference to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) and also taking into account the requirements of the general English language programme for the Bachelor degree graduates from Vytautas Magnus University. In addition, the content of the test was aimed at embodying topicalities of the present-day social, professional and academic life corresponding the experience and future academic and professional life expectations of the examinees. Moreover, it was composed with regard to the principles of clarity, transparency, unambiguity and homogeneity. Also, it was based on the variety of task types. Finally, it was designed in the user-oriented and user-friendly paradigm with its intended users in mind, i.e. the assessed as well as the assessors. It is noteworthy, having in mind the length of the research process, that the language competence assessment tool was constantly modified as regards the topicality of the context due to rapid changes in all spheres of life; however, the preservation and sustainability of the linguistic context and content was strongly attempted. Nevertheless, this fact might be considered as one of the major limitations of the empirical research.

Thus, **the method applied for the empirical research** was testing. The empirical research data was processed and statistical analysis was performed by operating the programme of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0 for Windows). The **methods** of descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, non-parametric chi-square criteria, and non-parametric median criteria were employed

for the analysis and discussion of the empirical research results.

Results and Discussion

Following the purpose of this research paper to determine and analyse the language competence achievements of the Bachelor degree graduates from a higher education institution applying for the Master degree programme, and to identify whether the obtained results can be generalised to prove the existing problem in the field of language competence development in higher education in the context of life-long learning, the hypotheses have been framed to help enable the above considerations by reasoning and to provide recommendations or possible solutions to the problem based on the observations explored.

Thus, the null hypotheses for the time being accepted are as follows:

- (1) H_0 : The graduates from a higher education institution Bachelor degree programme acquired the competence of foreign language achievements corresponding to level B2 language descriptors according to CEFR and the supposed university programme academic requirements.
- (2) H_0 : Higher education institutions provide equal possibilities for the Bachelor degree graduates to develop the language competence at the level corresponding to their needs for further academic life.

The alternative hypotheses to be proved are as follows:

- (1) H_1 : The graduates from a higher education institution Bachelor degree programme lag far behind the competence of foreign language achievements corresponding to level B2 language descriptors according to CEFR and the supposed university programme academic requirements.
- (2) H_1 : Higher education institutions provide few possibilities for the Bachelor degree graduates to develop the language competence at the level corresponding to their needs for further academic life.

The bellow research has been provided for the purpose of the analysis of the research data to provide a summary description of the situation that was studied; also, it has been aimed at data analysis using inferential statistics to determine whether the observed results generalise to other situations, i.e. to the population represented by the sample. The significance level that has been used in this research is an alpha level of .05 and our observed effect sizes have been reported along with the tests of statistical significance.

Distribution of respondents according to higher education institutions. The research participants were 638 graduates from 18 higher education institutions. The graduates from two institutions prevail (HEI 1 – 30.5% or 195 entrants, HEI 3 – 20.8% or 133 entrants) making up to 51.3% of the whole population of the research respondents. Other higher education institutions are represented by less than 10% of the entrants to VMU (HEI 4 – 8.1%, HEI 8 – 5.9%) and the rest by less than 5%.

¹ Participant higher education institutions (HEIs), regarding ethical considerations, have been encoded in this research paper as follows: HEI 1, HEI 2, HEI 3, HEI 4, HEI 5, HEI 6, HEI 7, HEI 8, HEI 9, HEI 10, HEI 11, HEI 1, HEI 12, HEI 13, HEI 14, HEI 15, HEI 16, HEI 17, and HEI 18.

Distribution of respondents according to test results.

The frequency count of the marks received by the whole sample of research participants shows that the highest mark 10 (excellent) was received by only 1 student, the percentage of positive marks (5 – 10) was 76.2%; however, even 42.6% were fair (5) – 19.6% (125) and satisfactory (6) – 23%. 19.1% were highly satisfactory and only 11.3% (72) and 3% (19) were good and very good. Even 23.9% of the marks were negative, thus indicating that entrants to Master programmes did not qualify for the position expected from the graduates of the first cycle students (level B2) and exhibited inadequate level of language proficiency (lower than B2). Given the number of 23.9% of negative marks and 14.5% of good or very good evaluations for the language achievements (38.3% in total), that constitutes only 1/3 of the total evaluations, the conclusion can be drawn that the language competence of the graduates from a higher education institution is very low as the results obtained revealed that 63.7% of the participants were assessed as having only a satisfactory competence of the foreign language.

Taking into account that Master students have to perform the assignments requiring highly demanding cognitive skills and exhibit high level of academic language proficiency, English as a foreign language competence at level B2 was set as the requirement for entrance into the second cycle study programmes at VMU. This consideration was based on the fact that the respondents whose test achievements are lower than satisfactory will presumably face difficulties in handling the majority of tasks at Master degree programmes. Therefore, such faculties as Economics and Management, Political Sciences and Diplomacy and Law set “highly satisfactory” as the passing mark for the entrants to their faculty as proficiency in English is an indispensable characteristic of the way of studying at these faculties due to highly developed international teacher and student exchanges, joint programme and curriculum requirements.

Comparison of test results among HEIs. The means of test results (marks 2 – 10) in the whole sample of research participants is 5.7 (Std. D = 1.656) and it indicates lower than satisfactory language achievement. The means of the test results across HEIs range from 4.33 as the lowest mean of marks (e.g. HEI 9 – 4.33; HEI 7 – 4.36; HEI 12 and HEI 10 – 4.88) to 6.31 points as the highest mean of marks (e.g. HEI 3 – 5.97; HEI 15 – 5.77; HEI 1 – 6.31) and prove different levels of language competence (see Figure 1).

This allows the presupposition that higher education institutions in Lithuania might provide different possibilities for the language competence acquisition. Also, this difference supports the previous presumption as concerns low language competence achievements. Moreover, the range of difference between the lowest and the highest test result within an institution suggests the existence of major flaws and drawbacks in the language subject programmes in practically all the higher education institutions under research.

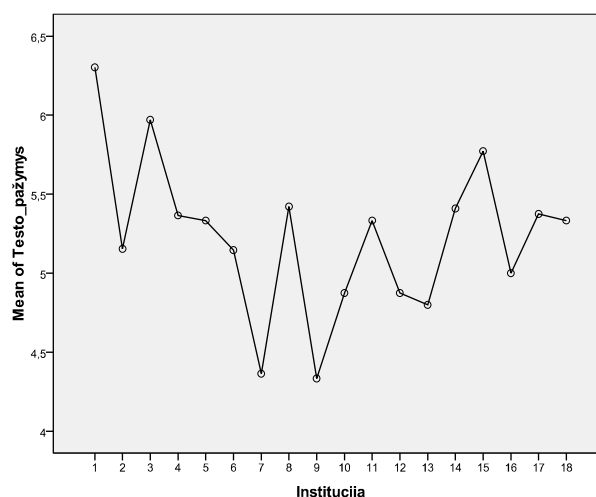


Figure 1. Distribution of means of test marks across institutions

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows statistically significant differences between the test scores received by the graduates from different HEIs at p-value 0,000 (i.e. $p < 0.05$; $F=4.325$, $df_1=17$, $df_2=620$). As in statistical hypothesis testing the p-value is the probability obtaining a test statistic at least as extreme as the one that was actually observed, assuming that the (1) H_0 and (2) H_0 hypothesis are true. The *lower* the p-value, the *less* likely the result is if the null hypothesis is true, and consequently the *more* “significant” the result is, in the sense of statistical significance. The null hypotheses can be rejected as the p-value is less than 0.05 corresponding to a 5% chance of an outcome at least that extreme, given the null hypothesis. Stating that the p-value is the observed significance level of a hypothesis test implies that the p-value is also the probability of making a Type I error because the significance level equals the probability of making a Type I error. P-value = Observed significance level. Observed significance level = Probability of making Type I error. Therefore, P-value = Probability of making Type I error.

Table 2. Means of test results

ANOVA					
Test Evaluation (Mark)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	185.205	17	10.894	4.325	.000
Within Groups	1561.806	620	2.519		
Total	1747.011	637			

Multiple comparisons of the means of test results exhibited by the research participants in different institutions yielded statistically significant differences (the mean difference significant at 0.05 value) among six HEIs: HEI 1 compared to HEI 2 ($p = 0.056$), HEI 4 ($p = 0.019$), HEI 6 ($p = 0.000$), HEI 7 ($p = 0.011$), HEI 9 ($p = 0.032$) and HEI 10 ($p = 0.005$) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of means of test results among HEIs

Multiple Comparisons (ANOVA)					
Test Evaluation (Mark)				Tukey HSD	
Institution	Institution	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	1,149	,056	-,01	2,31
	3	,333	,924	-,29	,96
	4	,937*	,019	,07	1,81
	5	,969	,992	-1,34	3,27
	6	1,157*	,000	,31	2,01
	7	1,939*	,011	,22	3,66
	8	,882	,146	-,10	1,87
	9	1,969*	,032	,07	3,87
	10	1,428*	,005	,22	2,63
	11	,969	,992	-1,34	3,27
	12	1,428	,536	-,58	3,43
	13	1,503	,821	-1,02	4,02
	14	,893	,529	-,36	2,14
	15	,530	,991	-,72	1,78
	16	1,303	,878	-1,00	3,61
	17	,928	,979	-1,08	2,93
	18	,969	,842	-,68	2,62

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Distribution of test results according to years. The analysis of the research findings allows the observation of decrease in language competence of the research participants within institutions. For instance, the incidence of marks in 2003 compared to the incidence of marks in 2009 is completely different. In 2003 the most incident marks were 7 and 6, whereas in 2009 the most incident marks were 4 and 6. The least incident marks in 2003 were 3 and 4, whereas in 2009 among the least incident ones were 8 and 9. The distribution of mark frequencies definitely indicates the downtrend of evaluations and, therefore, testifies constantly receding language skills and competence of the research participants.

The chi square tests (see Table 4) reveal the difference of mark distribution per year within an institution ($p = 0.000 < 0.005$; Chi-Square = 121.975, $df = 48$). The fact that the Pearson chi-square value under 'Asymp. Sig' is 0.000 and less than .05 indicates that the rows and columns of the contingency are dependent. In general this means that it is worthwhile to interpret the cells in the contingency table.

Table 4. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	121,975(a)	48	,000
Likelihood Ratio	125,990	48	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	26,608	1	,000
N of Valid Cases	638		

- a. 22 cells (34.9%) have expected count less than 5.
b. The minimum expected count is .08.

The comparison of test results according to years (2003 – 2009) showed that the means of marks tend to decrease during the last three years, e.g. from 6.02 in 2003, 5.92 in 2004 to 5.09 in 2009 (subset for $\alpha = 0.05$). Multiple comparison of the means of marks received in 2009 are significantly different from those received in 2003 ($p = 0.03$), in 2004 ($p = 0.016$) and in 2005 ($p = 0.000$). The decrease in test results is presumably caused by the tendency to devalue the teaching of languages at HEIs in Lithuania: the reduced credits for languages, shortened contact hours and/or exclusion the subject of foreign languages from compulsory/optional subjects in study programmes in different study fields.

The Median criterion helps to compare the test results in percent every year (see Table 5). In 2005 and 2008 the number of the participants with higher results than the Median was bigger (78 and 30 participants respectively). In the other years the participant results were lower than the Median, for instance, 42 participants in 2007 and 38 participants in 2009.

Table 5. Test results in % across years

		Year						
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Test results in %	> Median	42	45	78	43	32	30	30
	<= Median	74	63	34	64	42	24	38

The Median criterion shows statistically significant differences ($p = 0.00 < 0.005$; Median = 56, Chi-Square = 33.94, $df = 6$) among the groups (see Table 6).

Table 6. Test statistics (b)

	Test results in %
N	639
Median	56.00
Chi-Square	33.940(a)
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000

- a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 25.4.
b. Grouping Variable: Year.

Thus, both H_0 hypotheses have been rejected. The hypotheses H_1 were fully supported by the empirical research findings, data analysis and discussion. It was determined that the obtained results can be generalised to prove the existing problem in the field of language competence development in higher education in the context of life-long learning.

Conclusions

Thus, the following conclusion and theoretical implications can be drawn from the study:

1. Literature analysis on the importance of foreign language competence for graduates for higher education institutions indicates that European documents broadly address the issue of the necessity

of foreign language competence for the citizens of the 21st century. However, the Lithuanian language policy documents consider foreign language education to be the prerogative and sole responsibility of general education institutions. HEIs are not set any requirements with regard to language competence development.

2. Developing the General achievement test of English (GATE) employed in the study all the five criteria of test quality assessment criteria, i.e. objectivity, standardization of conditions, data normalisation, test score validity, and test score reliability (Kardelis, 2002), were taken into consideration. Therefore it can be concluded that the methodology of the graduate language competence assessment tool was validated and it is a valid instrument to assess the general achievement of English.
3. The analysis of test results of the graduates of the first cycle study programmes in HEIs revealed that 63.7% of the graduates exhibit only a satisfactory competence of the foreign language: 23.9% of the test results were negative and only 14.5% received very good and good results. Taking into account that second cycle study programme students have to perform the assignments requiring highly demanding cognitive skills and high level of academic language proficiency, the respondents whose test achievements are lower than highly satisfactory will presumably face difficulties in handling the majority of tasks. The results indicate that the English language competence of the majority of the graduates from different HEIs is inadequate to the required B2 level according to CEFR.
4. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows statistically significant differences between the test scores received by the graduates from different HEIs, as the p-value is 0.000 (i.e. $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the range of difference between the lowest and the highest test result within an institution suggests the existence of major flaws and drawbacks in the language subject programmes in practically all the higher education institutions under research.

Recommendations

1. Given the importance of foreign language proficiency in the globalised academic and professional environment and taking into consideration that language learning is part of life-long learning, more attention should be devoted to foreign language studies at HEIs by introducing specific language related courses and raising requirements for foreign language competence.
2. The findings of the empirical research reveal extremely diverse language competence levels across HEIs, therefore, the study argues for the necessity to have a standardised instrument in Lithuania for HEI graduates' foreign language competence assessment to ensure efficient movement of students within the country's HEIs and comparability of their language competences.

3. Taking into consideration low language competence of the Master programme entrants and the paradigm of life-long learning in the context of European knowledge society specific language courses should be introduced into the programmes of all the study fields at the level of post-graduate studies (Master and doctoral degrees) aimed at maintenance of general foreign language skills as well as further development of professional and academic foreign language competence.
4. Given the above recommendations further research in the field should be carried out to find out more specific and detailed insights and recommendations as regards introduction of specific language related courses, raising requirements for foreign language competence, developing standardised language competence assessment instrument, and developing foreign language competence at the level of post-graduate studies.

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Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų pagrindinių studijų absolventų užsienio kalbų kompetencijų vertinimas

Santrauka

Užsienio kalbų kompetencija yra viena iš bendrųjų kompetencijų reikalingų Europos žinių visuomenėje. Užsienio kalbų žinios ir gebėjimai yra vienas iš pagrindinių asmenybės brandos kriterijų, tarnaujantis savitarpio supratimui, demokratiniam stabilumui ir komunikacijai su pasauliu. Užsienio kalbų mokymasis – neatsiejama mokymosi visą gyvenimą dalis. Taigi, aukštojo mokslo institucijos, plėtodamos vidurinio išsilavinimo pasiekimus ir rezultatus užsienio kalbų mokymo ir mokymosi srityje, kelia tolimesnius užsienio kalbų mokymo ir mokymosi uždavinius mokymosi visą gyvenimą kontekste. Straipsnio autorės mano, jog yra tikslinga analizuoti aukštosios mokyklos absolventų užsienio kalbų pasiekimus, kadangi aukštojo mokslo institucijų internacionalizacija, tarptautinių studentų susidomėjimas ir poreikis studijuoti užsienyje nepaliaujamai didėja, todėl išauga būtinybė rengti ir siūlyti užsienio – daugiausiai anglų – kalba teikiamas programas. Deja, aukštojo mokslo absolventų užsienio kalbų kompetencijos ir jų lygmens skirtumai tampa didele kliūtimi ne tik tarptautiniam mobilumui profesiniame ir akademiniam lygmenyje, bet užkerta kelią akademiniam mobilumui ir studijų programų pasirinkimui antrosios ir trečiosios studijų pakopos lygmenyje gimtojoje šalyje. Taigi, šio straipsnio tikslas yra aukštosios mokyklos absolventų, pasirinkusių studijuoti Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto magistro studijų programose, užsienio kalbų kompetencijų lygmens nustatymas ir palyginimas tarp aukštojo mokslo institucijų. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiama šaltinių analizė probleminei klausimui pagrįsti, atvejo studija ir hipotezių pagrindimas. Empirinio tyrimo rezultatų analizė atskleidžia nepakankamą aukštosios mokyklos absolventų užsienio kalbos kompetenciją. Be to, tyrimo rezultatų analizė ir apibendrinimas rodo, jog egzistuoja didelis užsienio kalbos kompetencijų skirtumas tarp skirtingų institucijų absolventų. Taigi, straipsnio autorės rekomenduoja skirti daugiau dėmesio užsienio kalbų studijoms aukštojoje mokykloje trečiosios pakopos studijų lygmenyje.

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