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Acquiring Advanced Latvian: A needs analysis of Level C learners, pedagogical resources, and system support

Latvių kalbos mokymas: besimokančiųjų C lygiu poreikių,
pedagoginių išteklių ir sistemos palaikymo analizė

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Abstract

The article analyses data from the high-impact pilot project “Acquisition of Latvian as a Foreign Language – an Issue of Language Sustainability and State Security,” implemented in 2025 by the Department of Latvian and Baltic Studies of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia (hereinafter, the UL) within the UL Development Programme. One of the main goals of this project was to examine, from an interdisciplinary aspect, the opportunities for acquiring the Latvian language as a foreign language at Level C. The conclusions of not only linguists, but also sociologists, political scientists and statisticians were contrasted in relation to the preservation of the Latvian language and Latvian identity, as well as in the strengthening of civic education. The project was implemented in collaboration with several UL structural units and the Latvian Language Agency.

The article provides a closer examination of the findings of the UL pilot project's linguist group, which were obtained in spring 2025 through surveys of various focus groups. Initially, high school students from several Latvian regions were surveyed. Since 2025 teaching at these schools has been undertaken purely in the Latvian language, which is why the high school students' experience in acquiring the Latvian language was especially significant. Latvian language teachers at the mentioned schools were also surveyed, as were participants in the Latvian diaspora's distance education programme "The Latvian language teacher". Previously, translators of Latvian literature, whose native language is not Latvian and who live outside of Latvia were an uncharted audience with respect to acquiring the Latvian language at the highest-level, which is why this target group was included in the surveys. Valuable insights were also obtained from surveying language teaching centres which cater for the acquisition of the Latvian language at Level C.

The goal of the research analysed in the article is to examine the current opportunities for acquiring the Latvian language as a foreign language at Level C in Latvia, as well as to evaluate language acquisition programmes and the available teaching materials based on the current needs of those learning the language. The study reviews three main challenges in acquiring Latvian at the highest proficiency level: the currently available Level C teaching programme and the quality of the materials; the development criteria for new and contemporary teaching (including digital) materials; as well as factors that influence the acquisition of Latvian at Level C.

KEYWORDS: Latvian language acquisition, role of the state language in Latvian language acquisition, highest level of language proficiency, Latvian language learners' survey, learning materials, language acquisition difficulties.

Introduction

In the first half of 2025 the Department of Latvian and Baltic Studies of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia implemented the UL Development Programme high-impact pilot project "Acquisition of the Latvian Language as a Foreign Language – the Issue of Language Sustainability and State Security" (No. ZDA-2025/3, 01.02.2025.–15.09.2025., Principal Investigator – Prof. Dr. Philol. Andra Kalnača). One of the main goals of the project was to examine, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the opportunities for acquiring the Latvian language as a foreign language at Level C by analysing a variety of issues linguistically, sociologically, statistically and from a language policy perspective in relation to the preservation of the Latvian language and Latvian identity, as well as the strengthening of civic education. Several structural units of the University of Latvia collaborated in the pilot project: the Faculty of Humanities (hereinafter FH) Department of Latvian and Baltic Studies, the FH Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, as well as the Faculty of Science and Technology's Statistical Research and Data Analysis Laboratory. The Latvian Language Agency also participated as an external partner.

The conclusions of the UL pilot project's linguist group are examined more closely in the article. These were obtained through surveys with heterogeneous focus groups: high school students from various Latvian regions whose schools transitioned to instruction in Latvian in 2025; Latvian language teachers at these schools; participants in the Latvian diaspora's distance-learning programme "Latvian Language Teacher"; translators of Latvian literature whose native language is not Latvian and who live outside Latvia; and teaching centres that offer courses for acquiring Latvian language at Level C.

To get a better understanding of the current situation in Latvia and to highlight issues related to the quality of the acquisition of the Latvian language as a foreign language, the goal of the article is to descriptively analyse the current opportunities to acquire the Latvian language as a foreign language at Level C in Latvia, as well as to evaluate language acquisition programmes and the available teaching materials, bearing in mind the current needs of language learners. Three research questions were posed in the analysis, for which answers were sought as material for the article:

- 1 Do the currently available teaching programmes and learning materials ensure the acquisition of the Latvian language at Level C to a reasonable quality?

- 2 What criteria should be considered when developing new and contemporary teaching materials, including digital, for Level C acquisition?
- 3 What factors motivate or hinder language learners in reaching Level C?

In turn, the group of sociologists, political scientists and statisticians from the UL pilot project “Acquisition of the Latvian language as a foreign language – the issue of language sustainability and state security” conducted a nationally representative survey of the Latvian language as a foreign language among learners, as well as a range of in-depth interviews. These results have been analysed in more depth in the summary prepared by Mieriņa et al. (2025) as well as in the article by Koroļeva and Mieriņa (2025).

The Latvian Language as the State Language and its Role in the Sustainability of Latvian Society

The state language of the Republic of Latvia is the Latvian language (Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, Article 4) and is to be used for various sociolinguistic functions by all residents of the country, regardless of their native language. The Cabinet of Ministers’ Regulation No. 157 “Regulations regarding the extent of the knowledge of the official language and the procedures for examining the proficiency in the official language” (08.03.2022) stipulates that that state language proficiency is divided into three levels (see Sections 10, 12), in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):

- 1 beginner – Level A,
- 2 intermediate – Level B,
- 3 proficient – Level C.

In recent years, the strengthening of Latvian language proficiency has come to the forefront in Latvia due to both foreign policy considerations (especially after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022), as well as domestic political reasons. Special attention has been devoted to Levels A and B of language proficiency (see, e.g., “Teach and Learn the Latvian Language”, available: <https://maciunmacies.valoda.lv/>), including the development of diverse teaching and learning materials (e.g., Kaija & Laizāne, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Whereas Level C, which means very good Latvian language skills approaching native proficiency, remains insufficiently developed, with very little materials available, while some are specialised for particular fields (e.g., Laizāne & Berķe, 2021). It should be emphasized that Level C teaching materials and acquisition programmes (for example, Kalnača et al. 2026) require a different approach and level of preparation not only from language learners but also from teaching staff. At this level, a broader and deeper perspective on the Latvian language itself becomes essential, including its origins, grammatical, semantic and stylistic structure, as well as an understanding of Latvian literature and culture.

The Latvian language, and at the same time an understanding of and acquisition of the Latvian cultural space associated with it, is an issue of state security, as in fact there is no other means of uniting the diverse members of society: both those for whom the Latvian is the native language, as well as those whose native language differs (see also “Latvian National Development Plan 2021–2027”). As evidenced by statistics from recent years about Latvia’s ethno-demographic situation, the number of recent arrivals is growing significantly as is the linguistic and cultural diversity of the recent arrivals (Kļava & Rozenvalde, 2021, 462; see also OCMA, 2025). There are many citizens of other countries living in Latvia for work, study or private reasons, and the number of Ukrainian civilians has increased, as have refugees from war. It is important for them to learn the Latvian language at the highest possible level to obtain work opportunities and to feel well in Latvian society. There are many professions in Latvia which require knowledge of the state language at the highest level, for example, those of an officer, an elected local government member, architect, designer, doctor’s assistant, teacher, higher education institution academic personnel and many others (MC Regulation No. 157). Therefore, one cannot get by in the labour market with the highest qualifications without a good knowledge of the Latvian language.

One cannot get by without knowledge of the Latvian language at the highest level in education either, as amendments to Latvian legislation prescribe a gradual transition to instruction solely in the state language beginning on September 1, 2023. These amendments represent the next phase following the long-stand-

ing bilingual education system, which is now being phased out. On September 29, 2022, the Republic of Latvia's Parliament adopted changes to the Education Law and the General Education Law, mandating a full transition to Latvian as the language of instruction within three years. The transition is intended to ensure the successful implementation of the updated curriculum and a unified education approach in all educational institutions of Latvia. This transition will be completed in the 2025/2026 academic year, after which general education will take place exclusively in the state language. This means that people from several generations who live in Latvia will require a high level of proficiency in the Latvian language.

As shown by the summary of the statistical analysis of Latvian language skills and the use of Latvian and other languages in Latvia (Kļava & Vītola, 2024), commissioned by the Latvian Language Agency, respondents whose native language is not Latvian continue to demonstrate quite varying levels of Latvian language proficiency, as well as varying attitudes towards learning the language. This type of diversity, especially in relation to higher language proficiency levels, does not facilitate the development of a unified society and information space, and may be viewed as a state security risk. Simultaneously, it slows the formation of a cohesive national identity and the sustainability of Latvian society. With a proportion of the society not knowing the Latvian language sufficiently well, they linguistically associate themselves poorly with the Latvian language and its cultural space, and the opportunity it offers in education, culture, political processes and in the labour market.

The regular monitoring of the language situation conducted by the Latvian Language Agency (Kļava & Vītola, 2021, 2024) shows that, overall, Latvian language proficiency among residents of Latvia whose native language is not Latvian has improved. Since 1989, when only 23% of this group knew the Latvian language, the percentage has increased to approximately 90%. However, improvements in proficiency levels are not occurring rapidly enough, taking into account factors in the linguistic environment (for example, the prevalence of the Russian and the English languages in individual regions and cities, in various areas of public life and also in the working environment), the ethno-demographic situation (for example, the ever increasing diversity of immigration), and the influence of Latvian linguistic behaviour patterns on the motivation of Latvian language learners, opportunities, and habits of language use (see also Mieriņa et al., 2025 on this issue).

Data on the acquisition of the Latvian language from 2024 (Kļava & Vītola, 2024) shows that, according to respondents self-evaluations, very good and good language skills, comparable to the higher proficiency level, are exhibited most often specifically in the youngest generation group – 53.9% of respondents aged from 18 to 34 years, while 24.7% of respondents in this group evaluated their Latvian language proficiency at the medium level. However, the qualitative, accessible and sequential provision of opportunities for acquiring the highest language proficiency level is also required for other target groups.

Language Acquisition in Adult Education

According to the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001, for language acquisition: learning, teaching, evaluation”, at the highest Level C1 a user “can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of proficient meaning even in more complex situations”. Meanwhile, at the Level C2, a user “can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices” (CEFR, 2001).

There is no doubt that to reach Level C in the language acquisition process, learning materials and teaching programmes require a different approach and preparation, not only for language learners, but also from teaching personnel. At this level, a much greater role is played by the development of a broad perspective on the Latvian language itself, its origins, grammatical system, semantic and stylistic structure, as well as an understanding of Latvian literature, culture and traditions.

It is important to research and understand the language acquisition process itself in order to create suitable teaching programmes and learning materials, as well as to select suitable approaches to language teaching methodology. Research (e.g., Gass & Selinker, 2001; Ortega, 2009) reveals that the acquisition of any language is a complex, multilayered process shaped by numerous linguistic and extralinguistic factors: a language learner's previous foreign-language learning experience, age, motivation, individual perceptual and learning characteristics, and many others.

In the theory about the acquisition of a second language, there are viewpoints suggesting that not all learners can reach Level C, for various reasons. Hulstijn (2011, pp. 229–249), for example, argues that this level is achieved only by those learners who possess the highest cognitive abilities.

Much research in the field of language acquisition analyses the differences between language acquisition in children and in adults, while at the same time attempting to evaluate the role of age as a factor (see, among others, Montrul, 2006; Slabakova, 2006, 2009; Herschensohn, 2007). The language acquisition process of children and adults are fundamentally different, which means that the mechanisms of acquisition differ as well. The main distinction is that adults acquire a second language by using cognitive strategies such as repetition, practice, translation, juxtaposition of language structure, and transfer from the first language to the second. These strategies compensate for the language acquisition mechanisms no longer available in adulthood (Oxford, 1990; Herschensohn, 2007).

However, it would be incorrect to maintain that adults cannot learn a foreign language. Some can achieve quite a high level of proficiency, comparable to that of native speakers. In their study “Is adult second language acquisition defective?” Dąbrowska et al. (2020) examine whether the acquisition of a second language by adults is defective when compared to the acquisition of language by children. The authors point out that adults are often able to achieve results like native proficiency, and the research, therefore, challenges the traditional views that adults are inherently unable to fully acquire a language (Dąbrowska et al., 2020). Moreover, adult language learners have a string of advantages, for example, greater life experience and maturity in cognitive abilities. However, language acquisition is quite often influenced by a lack of time, a low self-assessment of one's abilities, and even anxiety (see Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). Still, each language learner is different, which is why individual characteristics, especially motivation, have great importance in achieving a positive result (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Spolsky, 2000; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

Research Methodology, Respondents, and Description of the Results Obtained

As mentioned previously in the introduction to the article, surveys and in-depth interviews of groups of respondents defined in the UL Development Programme research in the high-impact pilot project “Acquisition of the Latvian language as a foreign language – the issue of language sustainability and state security”, were carried out in the spring of 2025. The purpose of the research was to clarify the opportunities for learning Latvian at Level C, to identify existing challenges, considering current language acquisition programmes and available teaching materials, and to assess the present needs of language learners. The study involved four groups representing complementary perspectives on Level C Latvian language acquisition: learners, teachers, translators of Latvian literature, and language teaching centres. Since the aim of the study was to explore the current situation regarding Latvian language acquisition at Level C from different perspectives, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. Rather than seeking statistical representativeness of the general population, the study targeted respondent groups directly involved in Level C language acquisition or possessing relevant professional experience. Potential participants were approached through educational institutions, professional networks, and partner organisations, and participation was voluntary. In this way, relevant and diverse data were obtained, providing insight into the process of learning Latvian at Level C from linguistic, pedagogical, and methodological perspectives.

The surveys and interviews were carried out from March to May 2025 with the following groups of respondents:

- 1 high school students (10th–12th year) studying at schools that transitioned to Latvian as the language of instruction in 2025 (n = 128);
- 2 Latvian language teachers (n = 64);

- 3 interpreters and translators of Latvian literature whose native language is not Latvian and who live outside Latvia (n = 30);
- 4 teaching centres offering the acquisition of the Latvian language at Level C (n = 11).

Selection of respondents was implemented as follows. Students: invitations were sent to more than 20 secondary schools and vocational education institutions in all regions of Latvia that had recently transitioned to Latvian as the language of instruction. Seven institutions agreed to participate, and students completed the questionnaire voluntarily. Teachers were recruited through participating schools and through the Latvian diaspora distance-learning programme “Latvian Language Teacher”. Translators were contacted through the Latvian Literature platform, which distributed the questionnaire among translators of Latvian literature. Language teaching centres known to offer Latvian language courses were contacted directly and invited to participate in the survey. Participation of all respondent groups was voluntarily.

In addition to the planned interviews and surveys, utilising the opportunity and teachers’ interest, 17 Latvian language teachers with extensive experience teaching the Latvian language in heterogeneous classes were also surveyed: 5 in the Latgale region, 3 in the Zemgale region, and 9 in Rīga and Pierīga.

The questionnaire included open, closed and mixed-type questions, while the in-depth interviews were semi-structured. Qualitative content analysis was used in the data analysis, as well as comparisons between the open-ended questions and in-depth interview data. A descriptive statistical method was applied for the description, analysis, and interpretation of data. Responses to open-ended questions and interview data were analysed using an inductive qualitative content analysis approach. The researchers repeatedly read the responses, identified recurring topics and patterns across respondent groups, and organised them into broader thematic categories relevant to the research questions. As the purpose of the study was exploratory and descriptive, no formal coding scheme or intercoder reliability procedures were applied. To strengthen the credibility of the analysis, themes were discussed among members of the research team and interpreted in relation to findings from the different respondent groups.

The findings should be interpreted as reflecting the experiences and opinions of selected stakeholder groups rather than as statistically representative of all Latvian language learners. The purpose of the study was to identify needs, challenges, and priorities among groups directly involved in Level C language acquisition. Credibility of results was enhanced through triangulation of data from several respondent groups, comparison of questionnaire and interview responses, and discussion of the identified themes within the research team.

Students’ Survey Data

In total, 128 questionnaires were completed by 11th–12th year students from schools that transitioned to Latvian as the language of instruction following the recent amendments to legislation in the Republic of Latvia. The schools from which these respondents were drawn had previously implemented a bilingual education model; in 2022, approximately 20% of schools in Latvia operated under this model, and the native language of most students in these settings is Russian. The student group was defined primarily by the institutional context rather than by respondents’ first language. The survey targeted students attending schools that had recently transitioned from a bilingual education model to Latvian as the sole language of instruction. Consequently, the group included predominantly students for whom Latvian was not the first language, but also a small number of students who reported Latvian as their first language or as one of two first languages. These respondents were retained in the dataset because they formed part of the same educational environment and could provide relevant contextual information about linguistic diversity within the participating classes. The group was therefore not treated as a homogeneous sample of learners of Latvian as a foreign or second language. Respondents’ language backgrounds were considered when interpreting the findings, and conclusions concerning difficulties in Latvian language acquisition were based primarily on the responses of students who reported Latvian as a non-native language. The responses of native and bilingual speakers were used mainly to characterise the linguistic composition of the classes and to provide contextual comparison. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent out to more than 20 different regional secondary schools and vocational schools. Seven educational institutions confirmed their willingness to take part in the survey.

The native language of the majority of respondents was Russian (see Fig. 1).

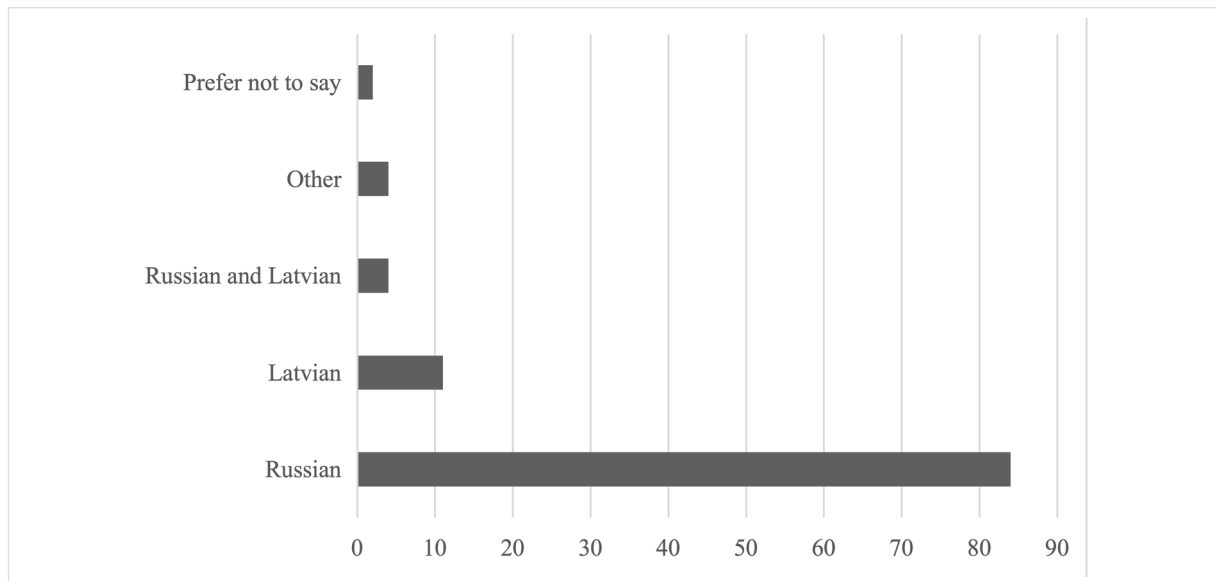


Fig. 1 Students' native language

Only 11 respondents indicated Latvian as their native language, whereas four respondents identified themselves as having two native languages – Latvian and Russian; another four respondents reported a different native language (English, Lithuanian, Spanish, Ukrainian).

Students reported using Latvian in various everyday life situations ($n = 67$), and for communication in interest-based extracurricular activities ($n = 50$) (see Fig. 2).

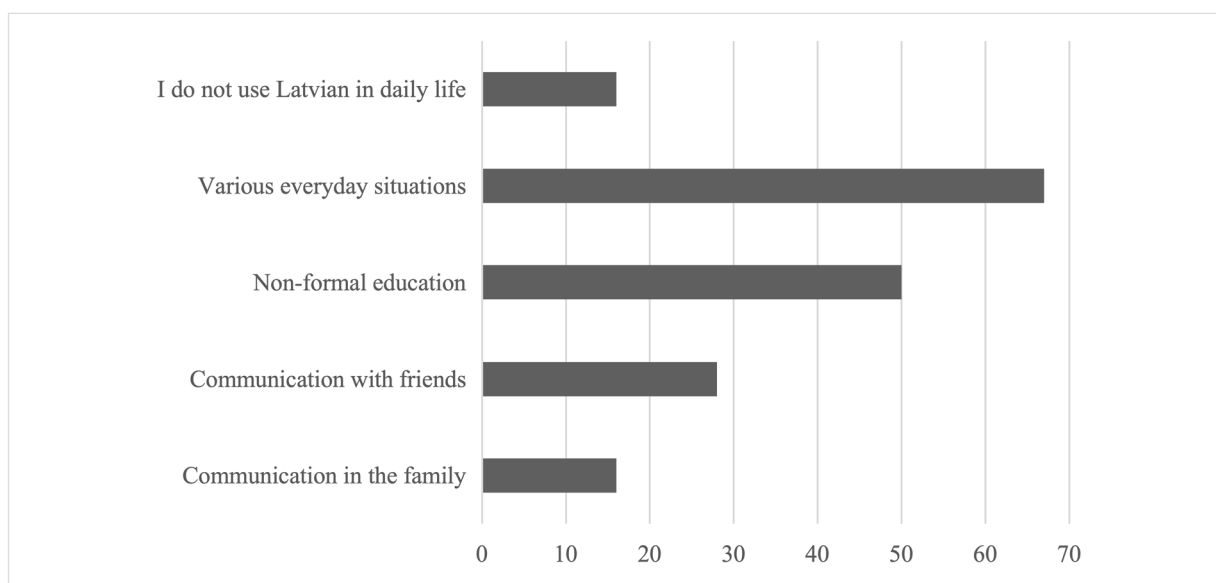


Fig. 2 Use of the Latvian language in everyday situations as indicated by students

Only 15 respondents reported using Latvian within the family, and communication among friends in the Latvian language was not very widespread – 28 respondents used the Latvian language in this situation. 16 respondent students indicated that they do not use Latvian at all in everyday communication.

The student survey data show that students with very different levels of knowledge of the Latvian language are studying in the same classes – both pupils for whom the Latvian language is native, as well as those who rate their proficiency as corresponding to Levels B1 or B2. Consequently, a situation arises in which some students have limited opportunity to fully master the learning content and to receive a qualitative education due to their insufficient knowledge of the Latvian language.

Students also pointed out that their greatest difficulties with Latvian relate to spelling, as they are unsure how a particular word should be written correctly. These challenges arise from difficulties in distinguishing features of the Latvian sound system, which in turn lead to spelling mistakes, for example, the recognition and spelling of traditional long vowels and palatalised consonants. Students also experience difficulties with punctuation and grammar.

The linguistic heterogeneity of the student group should not be interpreted solely as a methodological inconsistency. It also reflects the actual composition of the participating classes, in which students with Latvian as a first language, a second language, or one of two first languages study together. This diversity is pedagogically relevant, as teachers are required to address markedly different levels of linguistic competence within the same classroom.

Teachers' Survey Data

There were 64 teachers in the research who completed the survey questionnaires. In-depth interviews also took place with several teachers.

The majority of the surveyed teachers teach Latvian language in diaspora schools (see Fig. 3).

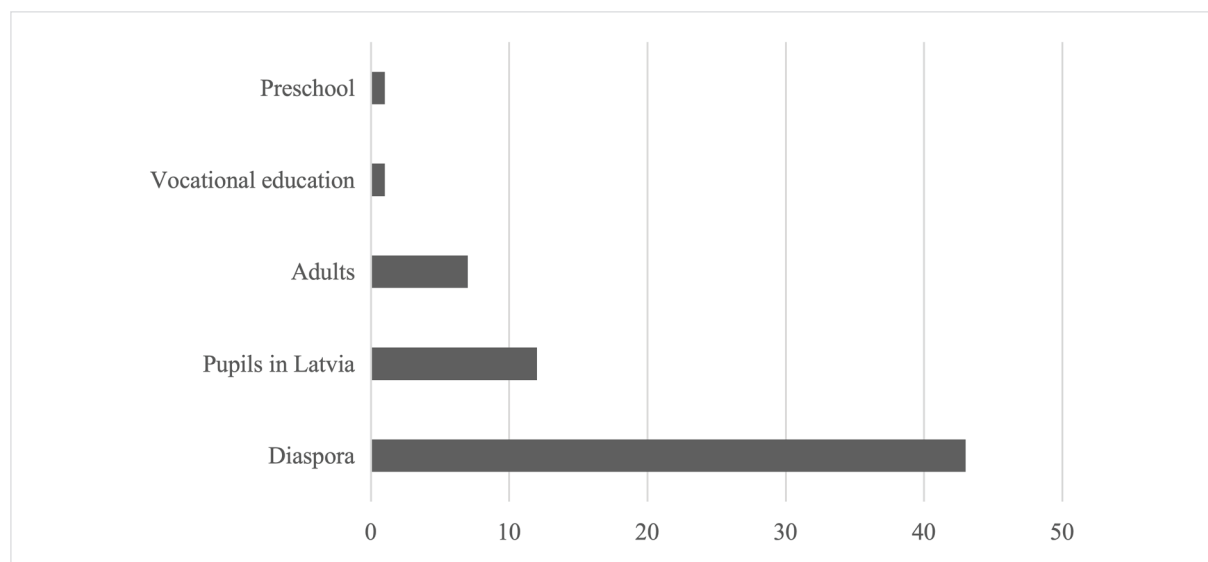


Fig. 3 Stage of education in which the teacher survey respondents teach the Latvian language

The teacher respondent group was internally heterogeneous, as it included teachers working in diaspora schools, general education institutions in Latvia, non-formal and adult education, and private teaching settings. This diversity was intentional, since the study sought to identify recurring challenges in advanced Latvian language teaching across different educational contexts rather than to describe a statistically homogeneous population of teachers. The teachers' responses were analysed as professional and experience-based

perspectives. Where similar observations occurred across different teaching contexts, they were interpreted as recurring themes. Context-specific responses were retained and interpreted in relation to the setting in which the respondent worked. The data were not used to make statistical comparisons between diaspora teachers and teachers working in Latvia, as the sizes and recruitment procedures of the respective sub-groups did not permit such comparisons. The internal diversity of the group should therefore be regarded both as a source of broader contextual insight and as a limitation on the generalisability of the findings.

The native language of more than 50 respondents who took part in the survey is Latvian, but there are also teachers with Russian or English as their native language (see Fig. 4).

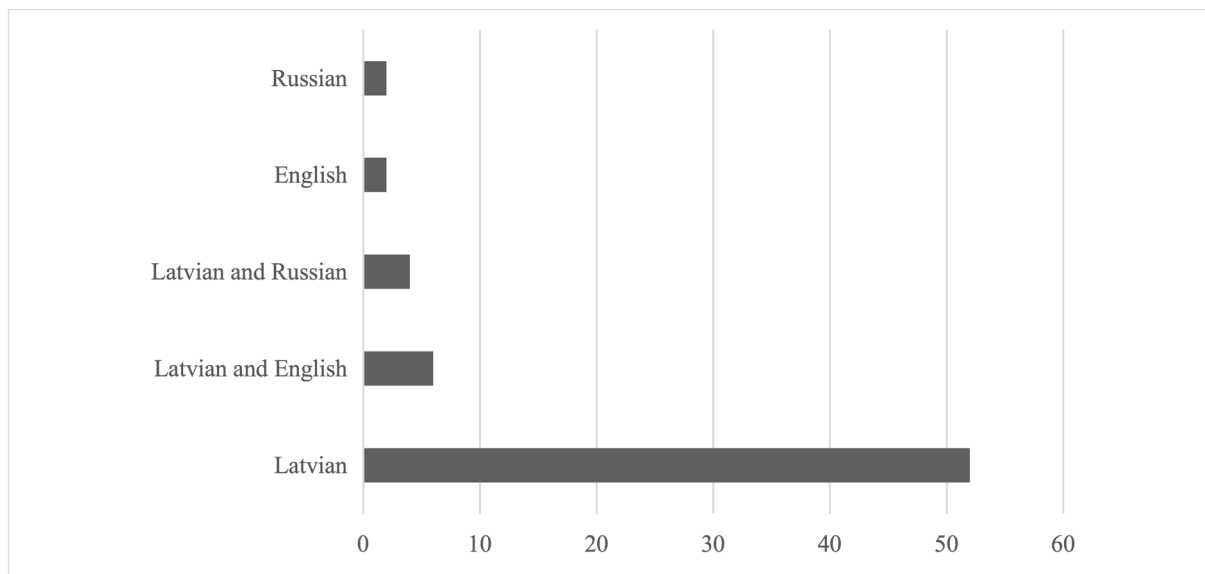


Fig. 4 Teacher survey respondents' native language

Respondents who did not report Latvian as their first language generally described their Latvian proficiency as corresponding to C1 or C2. As these data were based on self-assessment and were not independently verified, they are used only to describe the respondents' perceived linguistic competence and not as an objective measurement of proficiency. However, the teachers' language proficiency was not independently analysed as an outcome variable and did not serve as a basis for comparisons between respondents. Their responses were included primarily as professional observations concerning the teaching and acquisition of Latvian.

Teachers emphasized that, in terms of vocabulary, difficulties arise from idioms, neologisms, archaic words, and vocabulary that is no longer current in today's environment but is still sometimes included in textbooks. Young people are affected by the excessive influence of the English language and often replace Latvian words they do not know with English equivalents. Teacher observations also reveal that the greatest difficulties with grammar in the Latvian language are caused by verbs, especially irregular and first conjugation verbs, as well as prefix verbs, participles and perfect tense forms. The understanding and use of Latvian indefinite and definite adjectives is likewise problematic.

Translators' Survey Data

The survey was carried out in collaboration with the *Latvian Literature* platform (available at <https://latvian-literature.lv>), which is engaged in promoting Latvian literature, including through translation and international publication. The survey questionnaire was sent out to 50 translators who translate Latvian literature into other languages, and 30 responses were received.

The Latvian language was not the native language of the majority of respondents ($n = 23$) (see Fig. 5).

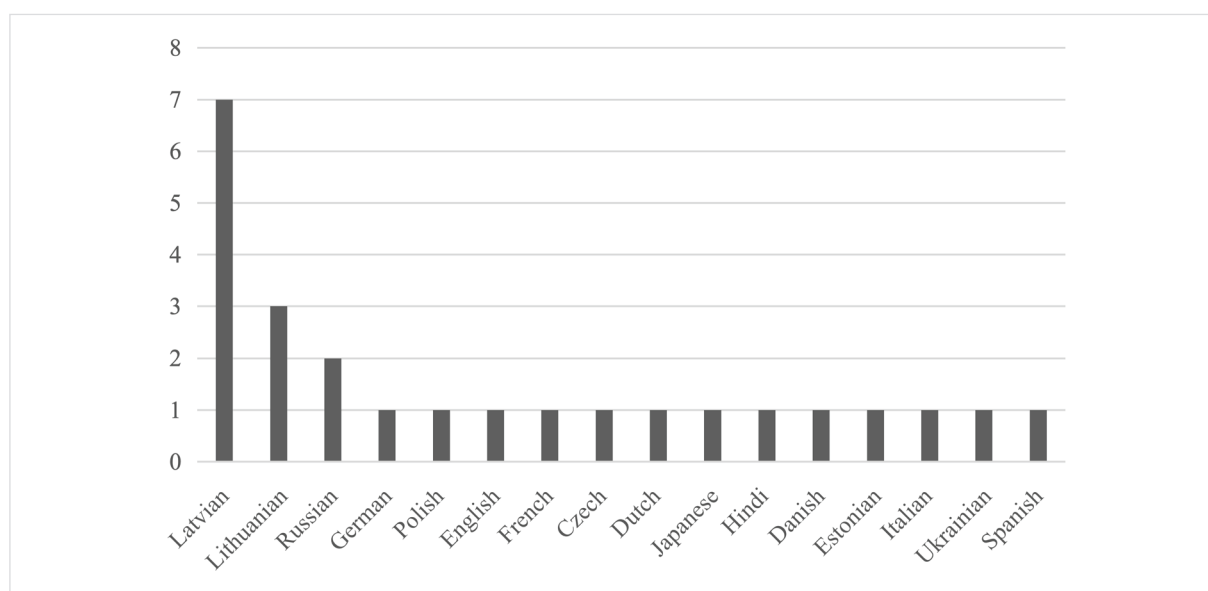


Fig. 5 The native language of translators of Latvian literature

Only 7 respondents indicated that their native language was Latvian. Furthermore, it was not the language used within their family for the majority of the respondents ($n = 19$).

Respondents had acquired the Latvian language through various stages of formal education, as well as through self-directed learning, often combining these acquisition types (see **Fig. 6**).

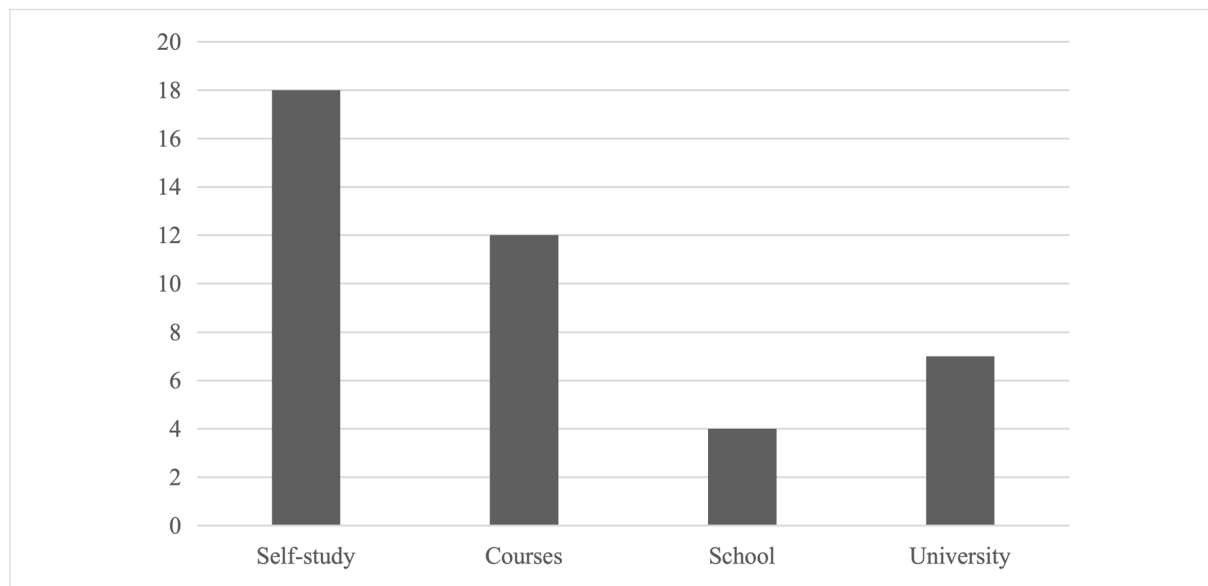


Fig. 6 Method of Latvian language acquisition in the responses of literature translators

According to the survey data, respondents' motivation to become Latvian literature translators had been determined by several factors: an interest in languages, the opportunity to express themselves creatively,

professional competence, a desire to help others understand the content, education in linguistics or translation, and sometimes incidental circumstances.

The translators indicated that they improved their Latvian language proficiency through self-education, and many specifically used digital resources and tools.

Language Teaching Centres' Survey Data

Responses were submitted by 11 language teaching centres. Most of these centres offer programmes at Levels A1–B2, with Level C1 being offered less frequently and Level C2 – even more rarely (see Fig. 7).

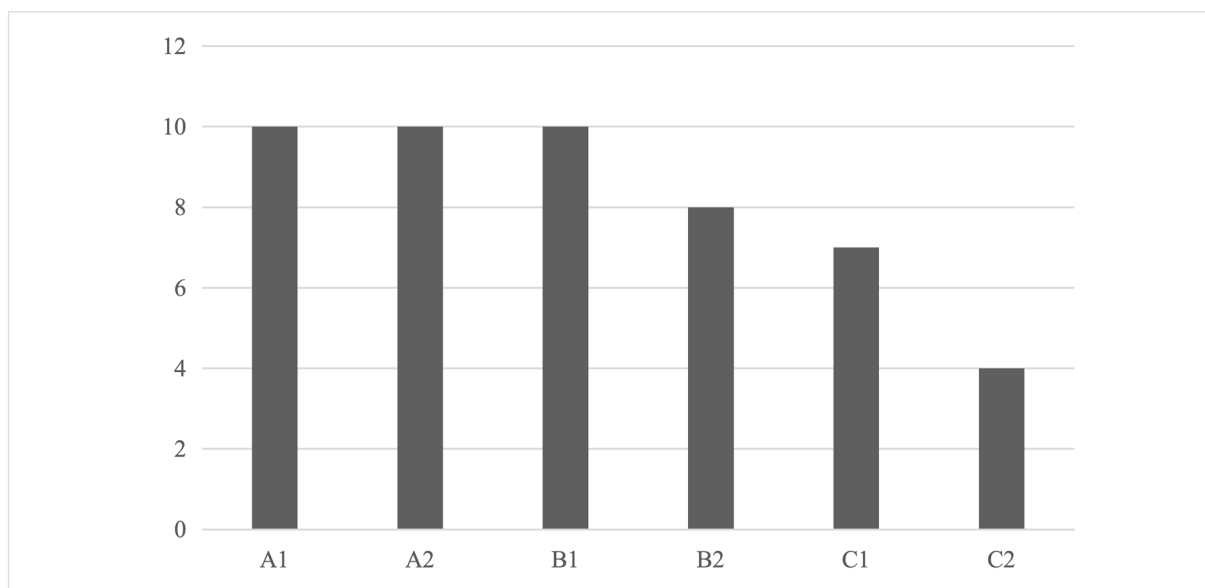


Fig. 7 Set of levels for acquiring Latvian language as a foreign language at language teaching centres

This is evidence of limited access to the highest levels of language proficiency, which is an essential consideration if one looks at the development of the provision of Level C. Programmes for Levels A1, A2 and B1 are implemented most frequently during the year, reflecting greater demand and broader coverage at the beginners and intermediate levels. Three centres implemented Level C1 programmes during the year, while Level C2 was offered in only one case. Therefore, even though there is theoretical provision, implementation of programmes for the highest language acquisition level is rare in practice. Furthermore, this fact indicates an indisputable emphasis on the learning of language at the beginner's level.

Discussion

The survey and in-depth interview data collected during the UL pilot project “Acquisition of the Latvian Language as a Foreign Language – the Issue of Language Sustainability and State Security” reveal several problem areas that require broader analysis, and it is important that a suitable solution be proposed soon.

First, it should be emphasised that opportunities for acquiring Latvian at Level C in Latvia continue to be limited. Overall, an investigation of this situation shows that a shortage of qualitative teaching programmes and learning materials can be observed, and that there is an insufficient number of teachers that have been adequately trained to teach at Level C. The acquisition of Latvian at Level C for foreigners at universities is offered very rarely or is not offered at all.

Opportunities to acquire Latvian at Level C are also rare in language teaching centres. There are several reasons for this. First, the low demand for courses at Level C, which makes it difficult to form groups. As a result, a language learner who has the desire or need to acquire the Latvian language at the highest level, often learns the language through self-education. Second, there is a noticeable shortage of professional teachers, because, as it was already mentioned in the introduction, the teaching of language at Level C requires a different approach and commensurate professional preparation. This means that teachers who successfully teach the Latvian language at Levels A and B may not in all cases be able to do so at Level C. Consequently, a situation has arisen in which Latvian at the highest level is sometimes taught by private individuals who are not professional teachers or Latvian philologists.

The acquisition of Latvian at the highest level in the community is also not facilitated overall by the fact that foreign students at Latvian universities can study in programmes, which are offered mainly in the English language (Laizāne, 2019). Thus, for them, the acquisition of the Latvian language is required mainly at Level A, so that they can converse at a basic level at a shop, market, public transport etc., in everyday situations. Furthermore, they usually only stay in Latvia during their period of study, planning to return to their original country of residence after their study period. This obviously does not promote deeper engagement with Latvia or with the Latvian language and culture.

The research conducted within the UL pilot project “Acquisition of the Latvian Language as a Foreign Language – the Issue of Language Sustainability and State Security” shows that there is an acute shortage of qualitative and contemporary teaching materials capable of providing a systematic overview of grammatical, stylistic, and semantic issues necessary for the acquisition of the language at Level C. This shortage not only makes teachers’ work more difficult but also reduces language acquisition opportunities for those who wish to learn Latvian at the highest level via self-education.

For example, the teachers surveyed emphasised that their greatest difficulties in teaching the Latvian language stem from the mismatch of the teaching materials and the goals to be reached, as well as the surfeit of various level, but mutually uncoordinated materials, and at the same time the shortage of reliable, competently developed, and systemic sources. This affirms that the development of new teaching materials, including those online, which are useful for teachers and for self-education, should be urgently considered. It should be emphasised that the majority representatives from language teaching centres indicated problems with Level C teaching materials too (see Fig. 8).

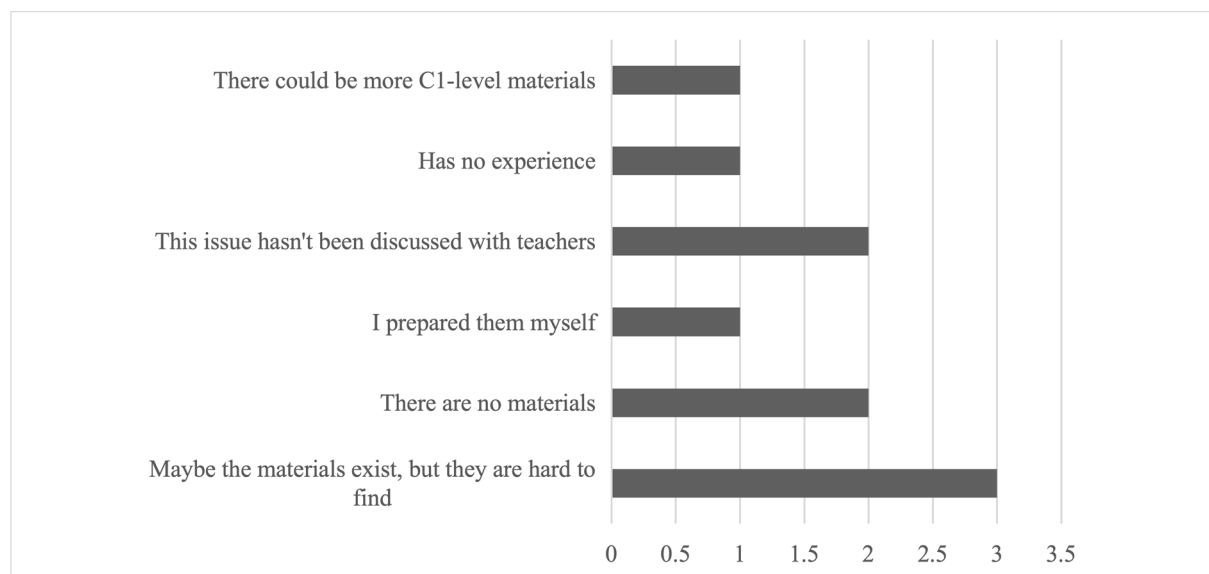


Fig. 8 The views of language teaching centre teachers about the available Level C teaching materials

The responses from three language teaching centre teachers indicate that the available material is not sufficiently structured or is difficult to find. One respondent stated that there are no materials, while two responses – that the materials are prepared by them each individually. The survey data reveals that language teaching centre teachers come up against a shortage of, or a lack of uniformity in Level C teaching materials, which is one of the main problems at the highest level of the Latvian language teaching process.

The results of the questionnaires revealed that the desire and motivation of language learners to acquire the Latvian language at Level C is high. For example, respondents in the student survey classify their Latvian language skill as being at Levels B1 or B2 on average, yet more than 80% indicate that they want to improve their Latvian language proficiency (see Fig. 9).

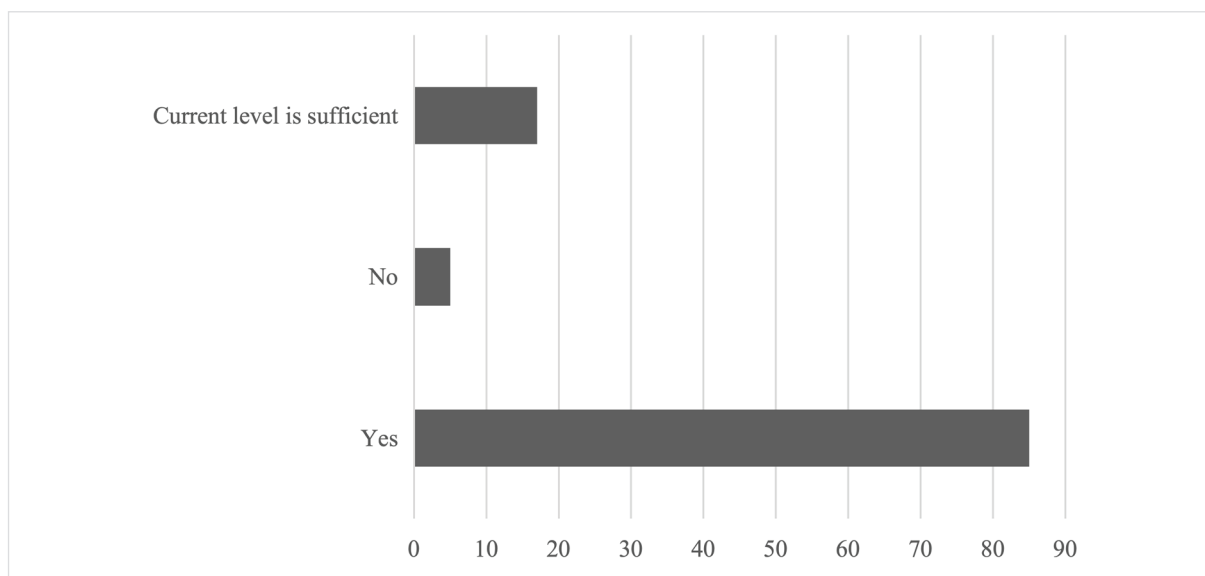


Fig. 9 Students' desire to improve their Latvian language knowledge

Students, when explaining why they wish to improve their Latvian language proficiency, mentioned various pragmatic factors, such as the importance of state language proficiency for obtaining education and participating successfully in the labour market etc., as well as integrative factors such as sense of belonging to the nation and Latvian culture. A selection of responses is provided below, see examples 1–9:

- Ex 1** *I live in Latvia, and the state language here is the Latvian language.*
- Ex 2** *I want my Latvian language to be at a good level so I could freely communicate in it about any topic like the Latvian language of native language speakers.*
- Ex 3** *So that I could continue learning and studying in Latvia and pass exams.*
- Ex 4** *The Latvian language is important in everyday life.*
- Ex 5** *The Latvian language is required for work.*
- Ex 6** *It is good to know several languages.*
- Ex 7** *The Latvian language is a very beautiful language.*
- Ex 8** *I would like to make better sense of / understand Latvian culture and adapt to Latvia.*
- Ex 9** *So that I can feel confident in the Latvian environment.*

These responses show that members of the younger generation understand the importance of the Latvian language both in the socio-political context of the state and in their individual growth (see also Mieriņa et al., 2025).

However, the results of the survey also reveal a tendency to acquire the Latvian language at Level C mainly through self-education. Namely, those who wish to improve their Latvian language proficiency to the highest level usually do this independently or use the assistance of a private teacher. Overall, this does not facilitate the development of qualitative education in Latvia. Digital tools and resources, for example, various video materials and social media platforms (*YouTube*, *TikTok*, *Reddit* and *Facebook*), school information platforms (*Mykoob*, *Soma.lv*, *Skolo.lv* and *Uzdevumi.lv*), general explanatory dictionaries (*Tezaurs.lv*), and machine translation tools (*Google Translate*), which are not meant in a direct way for language learning, are also widely used in the self-education process.

Latvian language acquisition at Level C is closely linked to state financial support, the flexibility of the teaching process, and its adaptability to the needs of individual learners. Language acquisition at the highest level is required by people who are employed in state or local government institutions, including state administration, educational institutions and similar, or who work in specific professions. Unfortunately, the language teaching process at this level is organised very sporadically or is left to the devices of each individual person, because, as already mentioned previously in Section 3, language teaching centres are often unable to provide groups for learning the Latvian language at Level C (see Fig. 10).

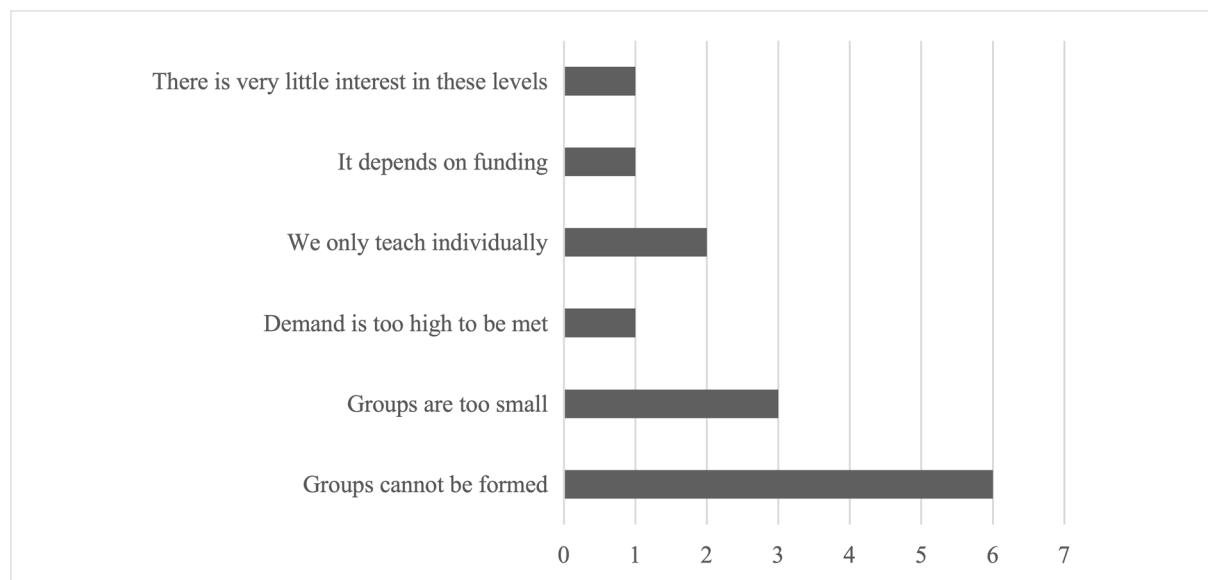


Fig. 10 Possibilities of putting together groups for learning Latvian language at Level C

Most representatives of language teaching centres indicated that groups for Levels C1 or C2 could not be formed (54.5%), which points to low demand and structural barriers to the organization of groups at this level. However, almost a third (27.3%) mentioned that they teach very small groups, whereas a fifth (18.2%) – that instruction takes place only individually. This indicates that although interest exists, it is insufficient to create stable and larger groups. They also indicated that external funding needs to be attracted to provide such groups. Overall, the establishment of Level C Latvian language learning groups is possible only in very flexible or specially funded circumstances. Furthermore, a regular model for such groups can rarely be implemented.

A comparison of the students and translators' surveys shows that the difficulties in the acquisition of language at Level C are essentially the same. The greatest challenges in learning the language at Level C are created by the acquisition of peripheral vocabulary, for example, various terms, neologisms, archaic words, as well as the understanding of slang and other non-literary language forms. Similarly, respondents pointed to the need to pay particular attention to phraseology, idioms, and the cultural codes embedded in language, as well as to the understanding of cultural experience. These aspects should be addressed in detail in the content of Level C teaching materials.

Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that successful acquisition of Latvian at Level C depends on a combination of interrelated factors rather than on any single determinant. These include:

- 1 learners' motivation;
- 2 qualitative and easily accessible, purposefully developed teaching resources, including the availability of digital materials;
- 3 an enabling language environment and opportunities to actively use the language.

The survey data indicate generally positive attitudes towards advanced Latvian language learning, particularly among younger respondents, who expressed a strong willingness to further improve their language proficiency. Responses from both students and teachers suggest that the transition to Latvian as the sole language of instruction has created pedagogical challenges, particularly regarding differences in students' language proficiency and the availability of appropriate methodological support.

The study visits undertaken during the UL pilot project to various Latvian schools and the responses provided by the Latvian language teachers and pupils there about Latvian language proficiency reflect difficulties, which are encountered by both pupils and teachers. The findings indicate that the long-term effectiveness of the education reform will depend not only on the language of instruction itself but also on sustained investment in teacher preparation, methodological support, and appropriate learning materials.

The findings also have implications for current language policy discussions regarding public support for advanced Latvian language learning. In Latvia, there are discussions about whether it be possible to allocate public funding for the acquisition of all levels (including Level C) of Latvian language proficiency for certain professions that are in high demand in the labour market, for example, doctors and pharmacists (description of the public services' situation in the strengthening of the use of the state language, see "On the improvement of public services and the institutional system with the aim of strengthening the use of the state language", 2025). The discussions also relate to university teaching and research staff, with respect to whether these groups should be included among those professions or trades which could qualify for state funded instruction at Levels C1 and C2. The engagement of foreign lecturers and academics is also fundamental for maintaining and facilitating Latvia's competitiveness in the education field. Findings of this study support further discussion regarding targeted public funding for strategically important professional groups.

The data obtained in this research and its analysis identify several priorities for further development of Latvian language acquisition policy and support measures:

- 1 facilitation of demand: the dissemination of focused information for emphasising and explaining the advantages which are provided by the achievement of language proficiency at Level C;
- 2 development of teaching materials: high quality, contemporary and freely available materials, including digital resources, the creation and summarization of these for both the formal education process, as well as for self-education;
- 3 support for language teaching centres: provision of funding for teaching in small groups, hybrid formats for activities, licenses for the use of materials and similar initiatives.

The findings also suggest that advanced language acquisition should extend beyond grammatical competence and include Latvian culture, literature, and sociocultural knowledge. Respondents across several groups emphasised the importance of understanding cultural references, idiomatic language, and broader cultural con-

text for achieving advanced language proficiency. From a language policy perspective, these findings support the development of Level C programmes that integrate linguistic competence with cultural knowledge, thereby promoting more meaningful participation in Latvian academic, professional, and social life.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the current provision of Level C Latvian does not yet fully meet learners' needs. Consequently, the systematic development of opportunities for acquiring Latvian at the highest level is essential for ensuring the resilience, inclusiveness, and cultural continuity of Latvian society.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Declaration on the Use of AI

During the preparation of this article, the authors did not use any generative AI tools.

Abbreviations

MC – Cabinet of Ministers

OCMA – Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

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Santrauka

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Latvių kalbos mokymas: besimokančiųjų C lygiu poreikių, pedagoginių išteklių ir sistemos palaikymo analizė

Straipsnyje nagrinėjami Latvijos universiteto (LU) Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto Latvistikos ir baltistikos skyriaus 2025 metais vykdyto LU didelio poveikio plėtros programos bandomojo projekto „Latvių kalbos kaip užsienio kalbos mokymasis – kalbos tvarumo ir nacionalinio saugumo klausimas“ duomenys.

Vienas pagrindinių projekto tikslų – tarpdisciplininių požiūriu išnagrinėti latvių kalbos kaip užsienio kalbos mokymosi C lygiu galimybes atsižvelgiant tiek į lingvistų, tiek į sociologų, politologų ir statistikų įžvalgas,

susijusias su latvių kalbos ir latvių tapatybės išsaugojimu, taip pat pilietinio ugdymo stiprinimu. Projektas įgyvendintas bendradarbiaujant keliems LU struktūriniais padaliniais ir Latvių kalbos agentūrai.

Straipsnyje išsamiau nagrinėjamos LU bandomojo projekto kalbininkų grupės įžvalgos po 2025 m. pavasarį atliktų įvairių tikslinių grupių apklausų. Pirmiausia apklausti mokiniai iš kelių Latvijos regioninių vidurinių mokyklų. Nuo 2025 m. šiose mokyklose ugdymas vykdomas tik latvių kalba, todėl ypač svarbi vidurinių mokyklų mokinių patirtis mokantis latvių kalbos. Taip pat buvo apklausti ir šių mokyklų latvių kalbos mokytojai ir nuotolinio mokymosi programos „Latvių kalbos mokytojas“ dalyviai, atstovaujantys latvių diasporai. Ankstesni tyrimai apie aukštesnio lygio latvių kalbos mokymąsi neapėmė latvių grožinės literatūros vertėjų, kurių gimtoji kalba nėra latvių ir kurie gyvena už Latvijos ribų, todėl ši tikslinė grupė buvo įtraukta į apklausas. Vertingų įžvalgų taip pat suteikė kalbų mokymo centrai, siūlantys mokytis latvių kalbos C lygiu.

Straipsnyje analizuojamo tyrimo tikslas – apžvelgti dabartines galimybes Latvijoje mokytis latvių kalbos kaip užsienio kalbos C lygiu, taip pat įvertinti kalbos mokymosi programas ir prieinamą mokymosi medžiagą atsižvelgiant į aktualius besimokančiųjų kalbos poreikius. Tyrime aptariamos trys pagrindinės aukštesniojo lygio latvių kalbos mokymosi problemos: šiuo metu prieinamų C lygio mokymo programų ir medžiagos kokybė, naujos ir modernios mokymosi medžiagos (įskaitant skaitmeninę) rengimo kriterijai ir veiksniai, darantys įtaką latvių kalbos mokymuisi C lygiu.

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