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## FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ADULT EDUCATION

### Summary

In today's world built on knowledge based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies to improve quality of life. These goals will be realized by widening access to education and by improving the recognition of prior learning.

The aim of this paper is to present the main features of language learning in the adult education and the main reasons for learning the foreign languages.

The longitudinal research was carried on in language schools in the commune of Pula.

*Key words: foreign language, adult education, lifelong learning*

### Introduction

Learning one set of skills at schools or universities is no longer enough to obtain the necessary knowledge for person's career. Nowadays, one of the basic skills is being able to learn and to adapt to the new skills and training. Countries have been trying to introduce reforms in their education systems in order to stimulate the process of lifelong learning. Recently, all national higher education institutions in Europe are carrying out the reforms of Bologna Process. The Bologna process is one of the guiding principles for the development of all education and training policy in Europe. It covers all the aspects of European higher education, such as mobility, e-learning, programs, research, vocational education and recognition of qualifications. It has been identified by the European Union (EU) as the process which has a central role in achieving the EU goal of the Lisbon Strategy: „to make the EU world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world“. The introduction of such a process aims to improve the competitiveness of European educational systems and it is used as an



instrument of social cohesion (Johansson, Karlsson, Backman, Juusola 2007).

Lifelong learning has also been recognized as an essential element of the European Education Area since the Ministers' meeting in Prague in 2001. In a Europe built on a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies to improve quality of life. These goals will be realized by widening access to education and by improving the recognition of prior learning (Knapper, Cropley 2001).

### **Lifelong learning of foreign languages**

Lifelong learning and language learning have been major components of EU education policy and they were explicitly combined in the fourth objective of the Decision of the European Parliament. The main goal of lifelong learning of languages is encouraged from the early stages of education such as primary and secondary school, as well as in the third age. In other words, the factors such as age, background, social situation and previous educational experience are not important for enrollment in lifelong learning of languages. According to the president of European Language Council, Mackiewicz (Mackiewicz 2009: 9), lifelong learning is related to *democratization* of learning and it proposes the following strategies in that respect:

- making learning opportunities more accessible for all, on an ongoing basis,
- making traditional systems more open and flexible, so that learners can have individual pathways, suitable to their needs and interests,
- increasing learning opportunities,
- raising participation levels,
- stimulating demand for learning.

Regarding the specific aspect of lifelong learning of languages it encompasses the whole spectrum of learning, including learning outside formal educational settings. Tight (Tight 1998) states that lifelong learning requires a new pedagogy, a shift in emphasis from knowledge acquisition to competence development, as well as the shift from teaching to learning, i.e. from input to output (more emphasis on competencies, not on the way they are being acquired). It requires a new culture of learning, same as development of learning communities, cities and regions and the establishment of local multifunctional learning centers, linked to the internet. According to Edwards (Edwards 2001)

lifelong learning requires concentrated action on the part of all stakeholders, including the learners themselves: local authorities, schools, universities, research centers, enterprises, public environment services, etc. It requires a shift in attitude on the part of all providers of education, who have to cater for the variety of target groups and interact with other providers in the field. The quality of provision very much depends on the quality of teachers and of teacher education.

Knapper and Cropley (Knapper, Cropley 2001) believe that the framework for overall transfer of qualifications between levels of education and training across institutional, sectoral and national borders is needed for lifelong learning of languages to become more accessible and available for everyone within the European Union. One of the good examples regarding the learning outside of the formal education system is *Faillte Isteach*, a community in Ireland which involved older people in volunteering program in order to teach and hold conversational English classes to new migrants. The elderly people are involved in teaching English and in that way they can contribute to the whole community goals, by improving migrant's language skills. On the other hand, they also learn a lot from the migrants, such as their culture and language. In that way, there is a mutual learning process within the community, which is consistent with EU educational goals. According to the Third Age Foundation, establishing *Faillte Isteach* projects through the country can be beneficial for both, migrants and older people by promoting a sense of community, inclusion and belonging which are so vital nowadays in Ireland (Carey 2009).

Learning a foreign language improves a memory, analytical skills, math skills, problem solving and according to Asher and Garcia (Asher, Garcia 1969), learning the foreign language actually improves our reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in native language. Namely, learning another language gives you new knowledge and expands your existing knowledge of English, giving you the whole new way of understanding it. Many of the most widely spoken languages are related and share some vocabulary; even some are borrowing the words from each other.

### **Lifelong learning for the third age**

Wolff (Wolff 2002) states that there are around 590 million people in the world aged 60 and over. He argues that by the year of 2025, public policy needs to find ways to encourage lifelong learning opportunities for elderly. Lifelong learning can help retain the elderly in the workforce for a longer time period, by reducing the dependency ratio and poverty in

general. In that way lifelong learning can serve as an instrument for social and inter-generational cohesion.

As an essential part of the new set of public policies, a lifelong learning for the third age has four potential areas recognized by Wolff (Wolff 2002), which can help to meet the evolving economic and social needs of an aging population:

- for individual health,
- to strengthen community and family,
- for productive employment,
- for self-enrichment.

Learning for individual health is related to frequent psychical exercise, for the elderly who can prevent and reduce the possibility of illness. Namely, it has been proven that learning in older age is good for preventing the loneliness and a sense of lack of purpose, which can lead to mental illness. The well educated people can understand the importance of these actions and that can help them in ensuring the productive and healthy old age.

Learning can also mobilize the elderly as a resource to strengthen families and communities. In other words, elderly can be encouraged and trained to serve their own families as well as to undertake voluntary activities within their communities. For instance, they can be taught the developmentally-oriented childcare for their own grandchildren, and the other children in their community.

Furthermore, with the decreasing number of population aged 20 to 65, lifelong learning will help the elderly to increasingly remain in the work force, as a means of reducing poverty, increasing economic growth and giving a stronger sense of self value to the elderly themselves (Wolff 2002). Due to previously learned skills, elderly is able to engage in occupations ranging from the most rudimentary to the most sophisticated jobs. Instead of working in time-intensive and psychically demanding jobs, the work environment should be adapted to their needs. Regarding the current and future public policy, which tends to prolong work ages and conduct pension reforms which can encourage the elderly to remain in the labor force, these issues will be essential for the economic growth. Namely, the elderly will be able to use their skills if they are trained in obtaining new productive roles in areas, such as childcare, school assistance, security guarding and conflict resolution. These are areas in which elderly is able to use their experience and knowledge gained during the work ages.

Learning for self-enrichment can also be a path leading towards an increased role of elderly in the community and the labor market. Cross

(Cross 1981) believes that there are several advantages gained by including the elderly into a lifelong learning, regarding the personal and community interests. One of the examples is reducing the costs of illness, poverty and dependency ratio, and increasing social cohesion and productivity.

In this paper we are going to present the main features of lifelong learning for the third age, with emphasizes on learning English as a foreign language. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the lifelong learning process for the third age and to address the reasons for learning foreign languages.

### **The research**

A longitude study was conducted in the year of 2007, 2008, and 2009, among foreign language schools in the commune of Pula.

#### *Measures*

In order to see which foreign languages are the most common in life long learning we contacted foreign language schools in the area of the commune of Pula. A questionnaire was sent to them via e-mail, in order to acquire information about the number of attendants. All learners were asked to answer the following question: Why have you chosen to study English?

#### *Participants*

The research was carried out among the total of 285 subjects attending language schools. Those were adult learners, average age 56.

English language participants were divided in two groups: elementary and intermediate. It was interesting to notice that there were no adult attendants in upper intermediate and advanced English learning groups.

### **Results and discussion**

The ability to learn another language is not limited by economic, ethnic background, nationality, gender, race, religion, age or the grades people get in school. Everyone has language abilities to some degree, which includes communicating in other languages, besides our native language.

According to Smiljanić and Bradlow (Smiljanić, Bradlow 2009) the number of attendants in foreign language courses is growing since Croatia is conforming itself to EU regulations (education plans of the EU

emphasize that each citizen should at least be able to understand three foreign languages). On the other hand, one on four people in Croatia is not able to speak or understand any foreign language. That implies that although there is a growth in attendants of foreign language courses, still a lot of people in Croatia need to become known with foreign languages. The biggest interest is shown for English, especially Business English which is necessary to obtain computer skills at work. Furthermore, 58% of Croatian people said to know English, 37% German, 23% Italian, 9% Spanish and 7% Russian language.

In our research we wanted to investigate if the number of participants in foreign language schools is changing over the years. The findings are presented in the table 1.

Table 1. Number of participants in foreign language courses

	English	% changes
2007	87	
2008	93	0.07
2009	105	0.13
Total	285	

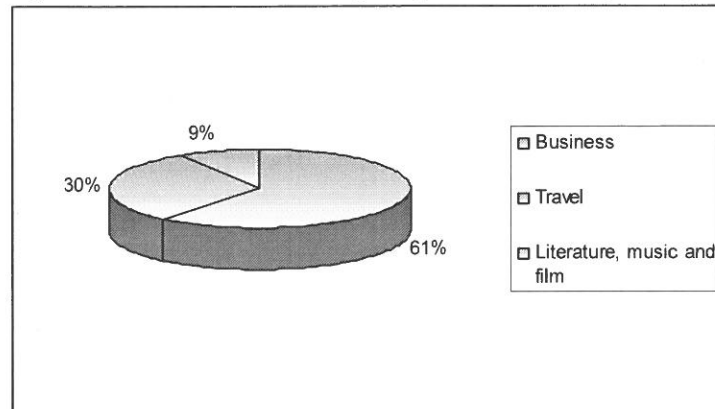
Source: Language schools in Pula, yearly data

The results of our research show that there is a yearly growth in the number of attendants of English as a foreign language courses in the commune of Pula. Our findings are similar to those presented in the work of Smilajnić and Bradlow (Smilajnić, Bradlow 2009). We also recorded a growth of the number of participants of English courses during last three years, with the raise of averagely 10%. Those were primarily mixed group of attendants with the equal number of males and females.

The participants were asked to explain the reason why they decided to study exactly that language. Our participants stated that the most common reasons for learning foreign languages are:

- for business,
- for travel,
- to appreciate literature, music, and film.

Graph 1. Reasons for learning English as a foreign language



Source: Language schools in Pula, yearly data

### Learning a language for business

Most of our participants (61%) stated that communicating with tourists is the main motive why they have chosen to study English as a foreign language. One group of them were owners of apartments and villas who wanted to rent their properties to tourists during summer. Another group of people aimed to open their own business, mainly agro tourism. Some of participants wished to get employment in tourism sector during the summer. All participants stated that they would like to learn how to communicate in English language.

According to Edwards (Edwards 2001) good language skills are imperative for business people in the last few decades. Good communication skills, improvement of memory, creativity and problem solving abilities are all considered as an advantage of learning a new language. However not just English is sufficient In order to truly cultivate business relationships and get ahead in the business world. A good example is the growing role of the Russian language in Croatian tourism; this has everything to do with the growing number of Russian tourists and businessmen coming and investing in Croatia (Mironova 2009).

### Learning for travel

There are a lot of opportunities for traveling in the twenty first century, which is one of the reasons why people want to learn a new language. In that way people can make themselves known in the countries they wish to travel to. Learning new languages also include getting to know different cultures. One of the reasons to learn English is

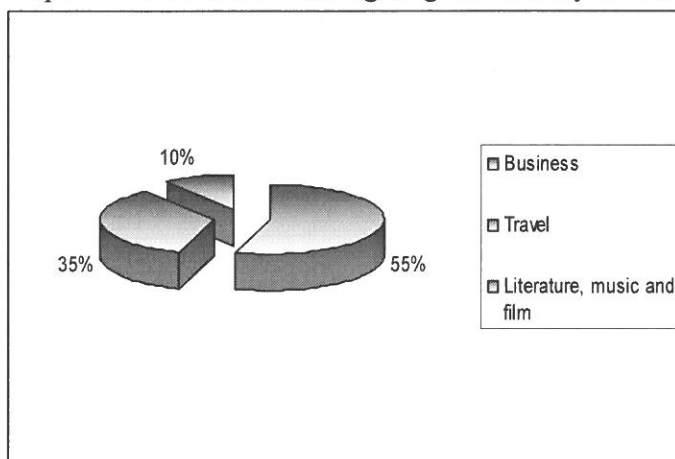
that English is the most widely spoken language in the world. So in most countries you will or can travel to, English will be sufficient to communicate effectively. Around 30% of all attendants took the English course because of the traveling reasons.

### **To appreciate literature, music, and film**

One of the most famous world's literary and artistic works have been written in English. A translation of a text in someone's native language can never be fully true to the intent, beauty, style, and uniqueness of its original. Word plays, metaphors, innuendoes, cultural references and culturally loaded vocabulary words, and formulations unique to the original language often get lost in translation. To be able to fully appreciate literature, theater, music, and film in other languages, one must be able to access them in their original form. 9% of participants made this course in order to understand English literature, music and films.

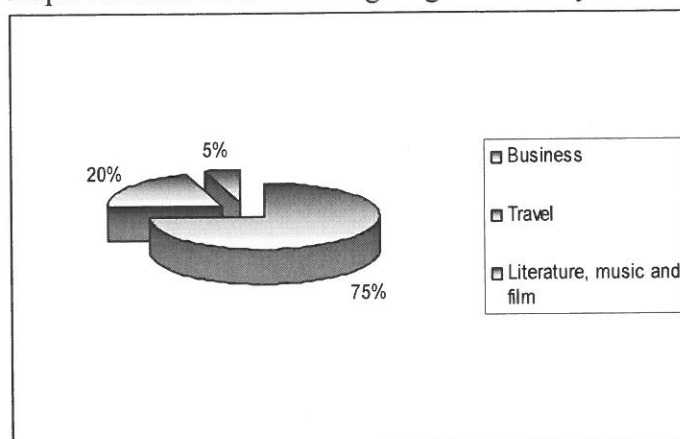
In order to see the changes in motives for learning English, we made a comparison between the years. The significant change in motives has been noted in the comparison between the year 2008 and 2009. The results are presented at the graphs below.

Graph 2. Reasons for learning English in the year 2008



Source: Language schools in Pula, yearly data

Graph 3. Reasons for learning English in the year 2009



Source: Language schools in Pula, yearly data

In 2009 compare to the year 2008, the significant increase is notable in the number of participants stating business as their motive, from 55% to 75% of attendants. In the year 2008 twenty seven percent of participants stated traveling as their main motive, while this number dropped from 35% to 20% in the year 2009. Only 10% of participants stated literature as a motive to learn English in the year of 2008, while that number has fallen to only 5% in the year 2009. Those results can be explained as a consequence of the current economic situation in the world and in our country. Because of the recession people are cutting down expenses on entertainment and fun, and regard to traveling they are more oriented on the local places (Figel 2006).

### Conclusion

The EU politics toward education and lifelong learning perspective is defined as Bologna process, which aims to make education and learning opportunities accessible for everyone. The main goal is to create a society with a high level of knowledge as means of a competitive advantage. Regarding the lifelong learning in the third age, it can be assumed that elderly people should be involved in community work where they can contribute by investing their experiential knowledge. In order to make the work environment suitable for elderly, the whole system should be adapted to them. That particularly means that they should be able to do less time-consuming and intensive psychical jobs. The lifelong learning process makes elderly people more useful for themselves and for others. Lifelong learning of foreign languages has been one of the major component of EU education policy. It enables



people to become more flexible and open towards new opportunities in the labor market.

According to the results of our research there is a growing interest in learning English as a foreign language. While observing the changes in the number of adult attendances in foreign language schools, we noted a raise of averagely 10% a year. The main reason for learning English is seen in communicating with tourists, while more and more people in Istria are involved in tourism business.

However good the quality of language learning at school may have been, the linguistic skills and competences acquired will not remain at the level achieved unless they are actively maintained and consolidated. Also, it is to be expected that the linguistic demands made on adults will increase in quantitative and qualitative terms as the European labor market becomes more integrated – in other words, higher levels of proficiency and more languages. The languages you learn at school may not be the ones you need for your job or for other purposes later in life. What this means is that language learning should not, cannot stop at the end of compulsory general education. If we want to achieve a breakthrough in this respect, we shall have to find ways of raising people's awareness of the importance of foreign languages and of motivating them to continue learning languages and we shall have to make sure that everyone has access to quality language learning opportunities.

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## UČENJE STRANIH JEZIKA U OBRAZOVANJU ODRASLIH

### *Sažetak*

U današnjem društvu baziranom na znanju, cjeloživotno obrazovanje postalo je neophodno kako bi se poboljšala kvaliteta ljudskih resursa, potaknuo održivi gospodarski razvoj s jačom društvenom kohezijom te povećao broj kvalitetnih radnih mjesta za građane.

Ovi ciljevi biti će ostvareni pružanjem većih mogućnosti i boljeg pristupa školstvu i poboljšanjem sustava priznavanja prijašnjih kvalifikacija.

Svrha ovoga rada je prezentirati glavne postavke procesa cjeloživotnog obrazovanja, s naglaskom na učenje stranih jezika u trećoj dobi, te utvrditi glavne motive učenja engleskoga kao stranog jezika.

Istraživanje je provedeno u školama stranih jezika na području grada Pule.

Ključne riječi: *strani jezik, cjeloživotno obrazovanje, obrazovanje odraslih*