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CRITERIA OF INTEGRATED FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Changes in higher education in Latvia and on a world scale are inextricably related to the national and social development on the whole. Education system and the processes involved exert a crucial influence on the developmental processes of the state. Improvements in higher education must go hand in hand with the development of the whole society. A deliberate, coherent educational policy fosters the increase of the level of employment and productivity of labour. The current situation testifies that after having graduated from higher educational institutions graduates have not always been adequately trained in compliance with the needs of the labour market. It is absolutely essential that study programmes pursuant to the interests of the society and the needs of the country are implemented in higher education in Latvia. Tendencies in the labour market are indicative of the fact that foreign language mastery and its professional use are indispensable, which manifests itself in different levels of particular language skills (listening, reading, taking part in conversations, monologue, and writing).

After having done the analysis of ideas propounded by different scholars on the acquisition of language skills, certain provisions emerge which are essential for language acquisition.

Scholars associate language acquisition with the term "language skill" and distinguish between four basic skills. Basic receptive and productive skills manifest themselves either orally or in writing. Acquisition of basic skills cannot be identified with the results of formal linguistic tests, but should be viewed in a wider social context. The basic skills do not exist in a standardized form, instead their acquisition is individual and diverse. For example, the language learner's ability to communicate, write or read in a particular foreign language may differ. The student who performs well in accuracy tests may perform worse in listening comprehension tests or may have poor speaking skills. In research papers the term "general language skill" is dealt with which is linked with the concept of two basic types of language skills – colloquial skill and academic language skill. It is the academic style which is commonly assessed in tests and should be differentiated from relatively superficial colloquial style. Colloquial skill can be acquired fairly quickly and is sufficient for communication in the street and shop, while academic

style takes 5–7 years to be mastered (Beikers 2002: 19). In language acquisition it is not only the language structure (lexis, grammar) that is essential; it is also the knowledge about communication that matters. For instance, language learners having limited language skills may be good communicators in diverse situations, while students endowed with good language skills may fail to communicate in real-life situations.

“There exists difference between a language skill and its usage.” (Beikers 2002: 16)

“Competence – represents difference between knowledge in a language (or a subject) and our abilities to use it and, among others, pass it on.” (Alijevs, Kaže 2001: 13)

“Language competence cannot be detected directly, but by observing the language learner participating in activities, consequently, by stating how language is used pursuant to thinking and understanding.” (Alijevs, Kaže 2001: 17)

Language usage has to be treated jointly with interlocutors of definite communicative situations, environment, it is dependent upon the place and time. Language usage embraces active language production and perception, it is determined by language usage targets, interlocutors and domains which, in their turn, presuppose differences of diverse study courses and individual needs of language learners. The prior experience testifies that language usage has not sufficiently been dealt with in language classes.

Language acquisition is a process wherein are humans bestowed with the ability to perceive, comprehend and use a language. Language is acquired naturally in a situation of free communication. Language is a means of information retrieval and communication.

In the study process language acquisition is a purposeful activity predetermined by the needs of the language use. As a result of their activity the students gain competences, ability to use a foreign language in diverse situations, attitudes, values.

Language learning is a process whereby students inherit socially accumulated experience, obtain knowledge, skills, attitudes, enrich their own experience by acting independently and reliably.

Language use and learning is a joint process.

The contents is claimed to predetermine the organization of the study process (the choice of the goal, tasks, forms, techniques and testing results). Foreign language study contents corresponds to foreign language acquisition needs which, in their turn, are determined by the ultimate goal: acquisition of language and professional competences (a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, experiences, awareness and values) which would provide for competent use of a foreign language in communication, life-long learning, interplay of cultures in modern society, in professional activity and other real-life situations.

The attitude towards a student as an active subject of the study process lays the basis for the organization of the foreign language acquisition process and content selection. Each student's needs, ambitions, language proficiency level, interests and experience differ. Being aware of students' current learning and life experience contributes to the identification of their needs, objectives, the choice of relevant and

significant contents. The evaluation activity (both self-appraisal and that of others) is of paramount importance which enables one to compare one's own performance.

Language learning occurs being integrated with its usage in different real-life situations and embraces activities which being performed develop diverse language and professional competences and contribute to gaining experience. In foreign language acquisition process positive attitude to foreign language acquisition and future profession is being adopted, new values occur, the student's personality grows.

Language learning, acquisition and usage entails activities when humans are engaged in them as individual and social beings achieve diverse competences.

Competence is an individual combination of abilities and experience based on the opportunities of gaining experience. In terms of a process it is progressing continuously, since the development of abilities is a lifelong process, experience is being enriched, and new opportunities of getting experience keep arising. Competence as a result manifests itself in the level of the quality of an activity in a particular situation. (Tijja 2005: 39)

In the foreign language study process the most significant language competences have to be mastered: communicative competence, intercultural competence and professional activity competence, foreign language content learning and usage competence.

The conceptual definition of the foreign language contents comprises the concept of competence, which was devised in the workshop of Flemish Community in 2001 and defined within the framework of OECD DeSe Co project.

Competence:

- integrates knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes;
- may develop in diverse situations: formal, informal, deliberate, unintentional;
- facilitates reaching a solution in diverse situations;
- presents itself as an indispensable prerequisite for productive performance in diverse real-life situations.

(Definition and selection of competencies: theoretical and conceptual foundation DeSeCo, country report for Flemish Community of Belgium, OECD, 2001).

In conformity with the current global developmental tendencies the notion of competence is complemented by a novel behavioural aspect which suggests the necessity of creative activity. Apart from skills and qualifications as major constituent parts of the concept of competence, the notion of a competent person is being viewed from a new perspective. Competence can be detected and evaluated only when being engaged in some kind of activity, in reaching creative solutions in diverse situations which, in its turn, is based on self-experience.

- Competence has to be referred to the subject. It is related to achieving aims which are significant for an individual.
- Competence has to be viewed from a perspective of the interplay between the personal and the impartial aspect.

Wider significance keeps being attached to the study process the ultimate goal of which are competences that testify to students' abilities to successfully perform in diverse situations.

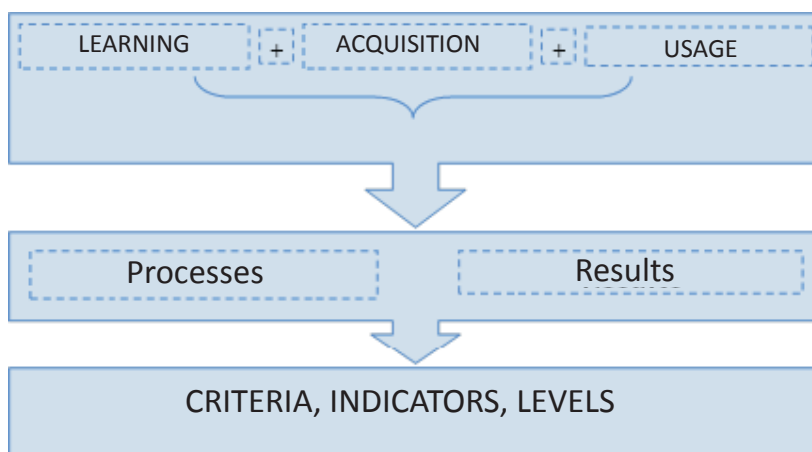
The foreign language study contents of adult education is closely linked with the most significant language competencies: communicative language competence, intercultural competence and professional activity competence.

The unity of foreign language content learning and usage competence represents knowledge and skills enabling one to perceive the informative contents in a foreign language and on the basis of the aforesaid develop one's own system of attitudes and values. Applying one's abilities, skills, knowledge one can achieve the anticipated goals and results, tackle problems, seek for new alternatives, collaborate with other people, listen, talk, write, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, and perform efficiently in diverse real-life situations.

The foreign language content acquisition and the development of the unity of content learning and usage competence, are implemented by integrating the components of the target language and a different study course, theme, problem or a contentious issue (objectives, tasks, contents, methodology, choice of teaching aids, assessment, self-appraisal) aimed at their functioning as a whole to foster the development of a free, creative, proactive, virtuous personality.

The qualification of higher education in the majority of European countries is still judged by entrance regulations, the length and the contents of the study programme. Information of this kind does not supply either national or foreign employers, either students themselves or the society on the whole with adequate insight into the qualification obtained, since it does not provide them with the information about study results, skills and competences. Lately several countries involved in the Bologna process have devised introductory structures of a new type of qualifications wherein are qualifications described reflecting the study results – the obtained knowledge, skills and competences. (Rauhvargers 2006: 28)

Consequently, in foreign language studies evaluation criteria, indicators and levels of integrated foreign language acquisition, learning and professional usage skills should be applied (see table 1). The sequence of establishing criteria, indicators and levels is shown in the model (see picture 1).



Picture 1. Criterion, indicator and level design model

Table 1. Assessment criteria, levels and indicators of students' foreign language skill acquisition, learning and professional usage integration

Criteria	A level	B level	C level
1. Foreign language content learning and usage competence	1.1. Ability to perceive and comprehend the subject matter in a foreign language with the help of a dictionary about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oneself, • family, • dwelling, • employment place. 	1.1. Ability to perceive and comprehend well the subject matter in a foreign language (sometimes with the help of a dictionary) about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oneself, • family, • dwelling, • employment place. 	1.1. Ability to perceive and comprehend the subject matter in a foreign language without the help of a dictionary about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oneself, • family, • dwelling, • employment place.
	1.2. Ability to use a foreign language with the help of a dictionary in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • real-life situations, • conversations in presence, • over the phone. 	1.2. Ability to use a foreign language well (sometimes using a dictionary) in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • real-life situations, • conversations in presence, • over the phone. 	1.2. Ability to use a foreign language (without the help of a dictionary) in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • real-life situations, • conversations in presence, • over the phone.
	1.3. Ability to write following a pattern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters, • notes, • presentations, • reports on professional issues, • filling out forms. 	1.3. Ability to write partly following a pattern: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters, • notes, • presentations, • reports on professional issues, • filling out forms. 	1.3. Ability to write creatively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters, • notes, • presentations, • reports on professional issues, • filling out forms.

2. Intercultural foreign language competence	<p>2.1. Be partly aware of the subject matter of diverse cultures.</p> <p>2.2. Ability to use a foreign language in real-life situations using a dictionary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in conversations in presence, • over the phone. <p>Ability to dwell on diverse culture issues following a pattern.</p> <p>2.3. Ability to write following a pattern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters, • notes, • presentations, • reports, • fill out forms. 	<p>2.1. Be well aware of the subject matter of diverse cultures.</p> <p>2.2. Ability to use a foreign language well (sometimes using a dictionary) in real-life situations):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in conversations in presence, • over the phone. <p>Ability to dwell on diverse culture issues partly following a pattern.</p> <p>2.3. Ability to write partly following a pattern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters, • notes, • presentations, • reports, • fill out forms. 	<p>2.1. Be perfectly aware of the subject matter of diverse cultures.</p> <p>2.2. Ability to use a foreign language in real-life situations (without the help of a dictionary):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in conversations in presence, • over the phone. <p>Ability to dwell on diverse culture issues creatively.</p> <p>2.3. Ability to write creatively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letters, • notes, • presentations, • reports, • fill out forms.
3. Professional activity competence	<p>3.1. Be able to partly comprehend the subject matter on the profession.</p> <p>3.2. Have difficulty in holding a dialogue on professional issues. Be able to construct a narrative out of professional issues following a pattern.</p> <p>3.3. Be able to write following a pattern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentations, • reports on professional issues. 	<p>3.1. Be able to comprehend well the subject matter on the profession.</p> <p>3.2. Be well able to hold a dialogue on professional issues. Be able to construct a narrative out of professional issues partly following a pattern.</p> <p>3.3. Be able to write partly following a pattern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentations, • reports on professional issues. 	<p>3.1. Be able to fully comprehend the subject matter on the profession.</p> <p>3.2. Be perfectly able to hold a dialogue on professional issues. Be able to creatively construct a narrative on professional issues.</p> <p>3.3. Be able to write creatively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentations, • reports on professional issues.

<p>4. Communicative foreign language competence</p>	<p>4.1. Face difficulty in using a foreign language in dialogical information retrieval.</p> <p>4.2. Face difficulty in using a foreign language in dialogical information exchange.</p> <p>4.3. Face difficulty in using a foreign language in communication culture.</p>	<p>4.1. Be able to use a foreign language without any difficulty in dialogical information retrieval.</p> <p>4.2. Be able to use a foreign language without any difficulty in dialogical information exchange.</p> <p>4.3. Be able to use a foreign language without any difficulty in communication culture.</p>	<p>4.1. Be able to use a foreign language fluently and creatively in dialogical information retrieval.</p> <p>4.2. Be able to use a foreign language fluently and creatively in dialogical information exchange.</p> <p>4.3. Be able to use a foreign language fluently and creatively in communication culture.</p>
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Exploration of students' real L2 needs, lecturers' as well as learners' own assessment was carried out based on integrated assessment criteria, levels and markers which reveal learners' L2 acquisition skills, their ways of learning and their professional use of L2. The assessment was performed while analysing the results within learners' study process as well as diverse assignments during the first 2 sessions (see picture 2).

Using statistical methods the results were analyzed on the basis of the examination of the interplay of data by means of the quantitative statistical program SPSS 17,0 (statistical package for Social Sciences).

The assessment results show that L2 content acquisition and its usage competences differed as regards different markers related to certain levels as markers of each level imply perception and comprehension as well as its usage. 137 learners of B-level can perceive and comprehend the L2 content about the family, home, its location and work; 72 A-level students can do it with the help of a dictionary and 3 learners can do it without using a dictionary.

152 A-level learners can use L2 in real life situations as well as on the phone using a dictionary, 58 B-level learners can occasionally use L2 with a dictionary; 2 learners can do it without a dictionary. 168 A-level learners can write a letter, memos, presentations and notes as well as fill-in forms regarding professional issues using samples and patterns; 40 B-level learners can partly do it using a sample whereas 2 learners can do it creatively.

The results of the data analysis show that the majority of L2 learners can understand the foreign language better than use it in real life situations. Receptive skills are mastered faster than productive skills.

Also, levels of L2 intercultural competencies and their acquisition differ as regards diverse markers. 126 B-level learners are aware of intercultural content; 84 A-level learners are partly aware of the content whereas 2 students are well aware of it. 151 A-level learners can use L2 in real life situations (conversations), on the phone with the help of a dictionary, 58 learners occasionally use a dictionary whereas 2 learners can use L2 without a dictionary. 170 learners can write letters, memos, presentations, notes, fill-in forms using samples and patterns, 36 learners can partly do it using samples but 2 students can do the assignments creatively. Assessing L2 professional competencies the learners partly comprehend the content related to their professional field; 108 learners have obtained high comprehension level but 1 student comprehends the content perfectly.

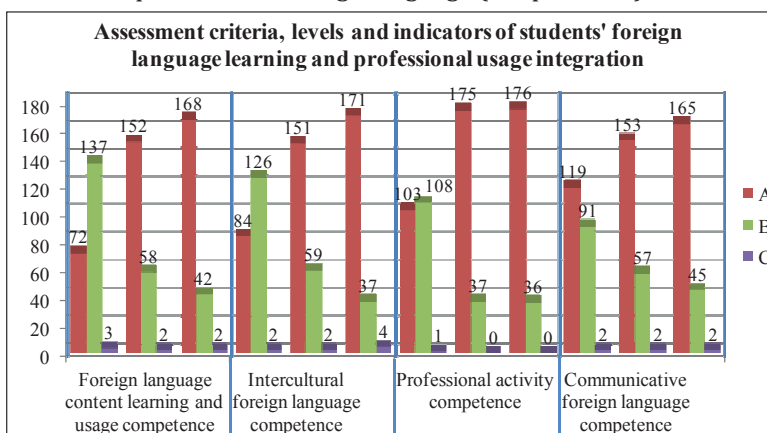
174 learners conduct a dialogue associated with their professional issues with difficulties and can talk about the mentioned issues using a sample or a pattern. 37 learners can make appropriate dialogues on professional issues very well. 175 learners can write presentations as well as notes on professional issues following a sample or a pattern. 37 learners can partly carry out the above mentioned assignments, i.e. write the necessary documents and fill in forms.

119 learners use dialogues in L2 with great difficulties to obtain the necessary information; 91 learners use it without any difficulties but 2 learners can use the foreign language fluently as well as creatively in the process of info interchange; 153 learners use dialogues with great difficulties to exchange and obtain the necessary information; 56 learners use it without any difficulties, 2 learners can use the

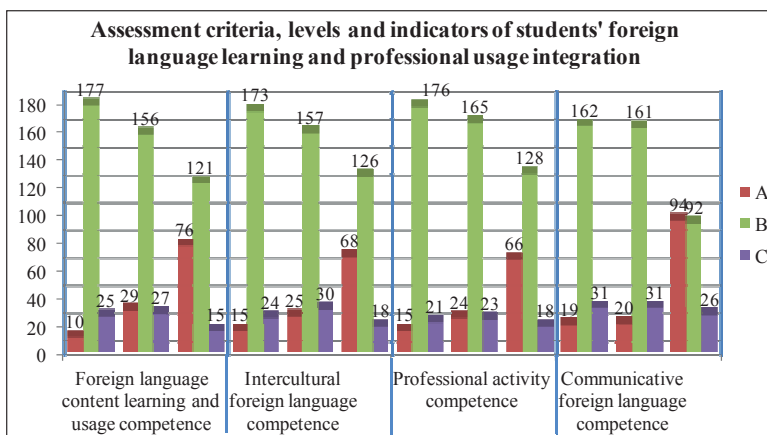
foreign language fluently and creatively in dialogues. Within the process of cultural interchange 165 learners use it with certain difficulties; 44 learners use it without any difficulties; 2 learners can talk fluently and creatively (see picture 2).

The acquired results show that learners feel safer and talk freely on previously mastered themes as well as well-known situations. Moreover, they are eager to participate in discussions. The majority of students experience difficulties in using L2 in various real-life situations. They lack experience of L2 usage on a daily basis. It explains the language difficulties in unexpected situations.

If the assessment results at the beginning of the study course and the final period of the study course are compared, it can be concluded that all competencies have been developed. Most difficulties do not occur within the learning and teaching process but in real life situations, i.e. intercourse with exchange students, lecturers and representatives of related professions should be promoted on a larger scale. Insufficient writing skills are due to the limited number of L2 sessions that are planned for the acquisition of a foreign language (see picture 3).



Picture 2. Assessment criteria, levels and indicators of students' foreign language learning and professional usage integration at the beginning of the study course



Picture 3. Assessment criteria, levels and indicators of students' foreign language learning and professional usage integration at the end of the study course

Conclusions

- Language acquisition occurs integratively. An integrated approach is adopted to the study process where the acquisition of the language system, thematic contents, communicative skills, cultural and linguistic knowledge is incorporated.
- Integration of foreign language acquisition components contributes to students' acquiring knowledge and skills intended to provide the accomplishment of the anticipated objectives and results, establishment of positive relationship, proactive and productive performance in diverse real-life situations.
- There is a difference between a language skill and its usage. Language use should be treated in connection with interlocutors of particular communicative situations and the changing environment dependent upon place and time.
- The result of language learners' performance is the bestowal of competences, ability to use a foreign language in diverse situations, attitudes and values upon each student.
- The development of foreign language competences occurs while integrating components of the target language and those of another study course or courses, subject, problem or a particular issue.
- To improve the foreign language study process, a new, integrated foreign language study conception is indispensable.
- In foreign language studies integrated assessment criteria, indicators and levels of students' foreign language skill acquisition, learning and professional usage are usable.

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Kryteria zintegrowanego przyswajania języka obcego

Streszczenie

Niedawno pojawiło się nowe podejście do integracji w przyswajaniu języków obcych. Teoria procesów integracyjnych proponuje cztery różne wymiary: procesy indywidualne, procesy interakcyjne, procesy instytucjonalne oraz procesy społeczne.

Nowe podejście do integracji wzajemnie łączy procesy indywidualne, instytucjonalne oraz społeczne. Następujące komponenty zostają zintegrowane w procesie przyswajania języka: uczenie się, treść, stosowanie w praktyce, doświadczenie oraz czynniki je wywołujące: potrzeby, wartości i cele. W ten sposób zdefiniowane zostały koncepcja zintegrowanych treści i struktur oraz kryteria oceny zintegrowanego przyswajania sprawności językowych, uczenia się oraz profesjonalnego stosowania języka.