

**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA
FACULTY OF APPLIED LANGUAGES**

Registration number: 106006/B/2023/3612216771268

**Learning English and German as Foreign Languages –
Comparative Analysis of Learners' Perception**

Bachelor Thesis

2023

Hana Krausová

**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA
FACULTY OF APPLIED LANGUAGES**

**Learning English and German as Foreign Languages –
Comparative Analysis of Learners' Perception**

Bachelor Thesis

Study Programme: Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication
Field of Study: Philology
Consultation Centre: Department of Linguistics and Translation
Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Beáta Biliková PhD.

Bratislava 2023

Hana Krausová

AFFIRMATION

I hereby affirm that this bachelor thesis is the result of my own research and writing, and that all sources used in this work have been properly cited and referenced.

Date:

.....

Hana Krausová

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mgr. Beáta Biliková, for her constant professional assistance, invaluable guidance, and esteemed advice throughout the process of writing this bachelor's thesis.

ABSTRAKT

KRAUSOVÁ, Hana: *Osvojovanie si angličtiny a nemčiny ako cudzích jazykov – komparatívna analýza ich vnímania u učiacich sa.* – Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave. Fakulta aplikovaných jazykov; Katedra jazykovedy a translatológie. – Vedúci záverečnej práce: Mgr. Beáta Biliková, PhD. – Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2023, 47 s.

Bakalárska práca zhrňa teoretické poznatky a praktické zistenia týkajúce sa oblasti učenia sa a osvojovania si jazyka. Hlavným cieľom je analyzovať, ako študenti anglického a nemeckého jazyka vnímajú tieto jazyky a aké postoje k nim zaujímajú. Práca skúma náročnosť, obľúbenosť a spokojnosť slovenských študentov pri učení sa oboch jazykov a ako tieto faktory ovplyvňujú samotný proces učenia sa. Z komparatívneho hľadiska sa práca zameriava na porovnanie javov, ktoré sa učiacim javia ako najťažšie zvládnuteľné. Prieskum bol realizovaný prostredníctvom dotazníka s vysokoškolskými študentmi anglického a nemeckého jazyka na Slovensku. S cieľom získať komplexnejšie poznatky o jazykovom vzdelávaní na slovenských vysokých školách je práca doplnená o podrobnú textovú analýzu. Výsledkom tejto práce je komplexný rozbor náročných jazykových a gramatických vlastností anglického a nemeckého jazyka a návrh možných riešení a učebných pomôcok, ktoré by mohli byť prínosom pre študentov i učiteľov jazykov na Slovensku. Zistenia štúdie majú potenciál zlepšiť súčasný vzor učenia sa a vyučovania cudzích jazykov a vytvoriť ho pre učiacich sa pútavejším a prístupnejším.

Kľúčové slová: učenie sa jazykov, nemecký jazyk, anglický jazyk, študent jazyka, sebahodnotenie, komparatívna analýza

ABSTRACT

KRAUSOVÁ, Hana: Learning English and German as Foreign Languages – Comparative Analysis of Learners' Perception. – University of Economics in Bratislava. Faculty of Applied Languages; Department of Linguistics and Translation. – Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Beáta Biliková, PhD. – Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2023, 47 p.

The bachelor thesis encompasses both theoretical knowledge and practical insights pertaining to the domain of language learning and acquisition. The primary objective is to analyse how English and German language learners perceive these languages and what attitudes they hold towards them. The thesis investigates the difficulty, popularity, and satisfaction with the learning process of Slovak learners in both languages and how these factors affect the learning process itself. The comparative aspect of the thesis focuses on the comparison of the phenomena which appear to be the most difficult to handle by the learners. A questionnaire was used to conduct the survey with undergraduate students studying English and German languages in Slovakia. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of language learning in Slovak universities, the thesis is supplemented with a detailed textual analysis. The result of this thesis is to present a comprehensive analysis of the challenging linguistic and grammatical features of English and German and propose potential solutions and learning aids that could be beneficial for both language learners and teachers in Slovakia. The findings of the study have the potential to enhance the current language learning and teaching paradigm, making it more engaging and accessible to learners.

Keywords: language learning, German language, English language, language learner, self-assessment, comparative analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	9
1. Key concepts and definitions	10
1.1. Overview of language learning theories	11
1.2. Factors Affecting Learning Efficiency	12
1.3. Learners' perception of language learning	14
1.4. Self-Assessment in Language Learning	15
2. Comparative analysis of English and German as foreign languages	16
2.1. English Language	16
2.2. German Language.....	17
2.3. Differences in English and German.....	17
2.4. Learners' Attitudes toward English and German as Foreign Languages	19
3. Aim and Methodology	24
3.1. Method of conducting the survey	25
3.1.1. <i>Instrument and procedure</i>	25
3.1.2. <i>Respondents</i>	28
3.1.3. <i>Data Analysis</i>	28
4. Results and Discussion	33
4.1. Results.....	33
4.2. Discussion.....	35
Conclusion	38
Resumé	40
Bibliography	43

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Perception of Language Difficulty	29
Figure 2: Comparison of Time Spent Learning English and German	30

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Respondent's English evaluation based on self-assessment	30
Table 2: Respondent's German evaluation based on self-assessment	31

Introduction

The thesis focuses on exploring of various aspects of language learning and their significance in gaining new knowledge in the field of linguistics. The study aims at investigating the attitude of Slovak students towards learning English and German, and how their learning style and use of aids can impact the speed of acquiring new language skills. Additionally, the thesis underscores the importance of teaching methods used by teachers and the learning style adopted by students. The current importance of foreign languages, and the ability to speak fluently, should be emphasised as the ability to speak multiple foreign languages, which is an asset not only for students, but also for future employment opportunities.

The primary objective of this thesis is to determine the relative difficulty of learning English and German among undergraduate students in Slovakia. The thesis focuses on the specific challenges associated with acquiring these languages and aims to propose potential solutions or improvements in language learning and teaching, drawing on insights from other linguistic studies in the field. By synthesizing both theoretical and practical knowledge, the thesis aims to arrive at a comprehensive conclusion on this important topic.

The thesis comprises both a theoretical and practical section, with several chapters and subchapters contained within each. The initial chapter delves into fundamental language learning terminology such as language acquisition, second and third languages, and briefly discusses language learning theories, including behaviourism, innatism, constructivism, and sociocultural theory. It also addresses factors that impact language learning, such as age, gender, aptitude, and motivation, as well as learners' perceptions of language learning. The final section of the chapter concentrates solely on self-assessment in language learning, as it is a crucial aspect of language learning and a significant component of this thesis' research. The second chapter examines English and German in greater depth, comparing different linguistic aspects and presenting various language learning theories and research studies that support the thesis' hypotheses and ideas. The third chapter describes the study's methodology, including the questionnaire survey, its questions, and the respondents, and presents an analysis of the results. The last chapter focuses on the data collected from the questionnaire, comparing the outcomes for English and German. The thesis author attempted to propose potential solutions to the identified issues based on the information gathered from the research presented in the second chapter.

1. Key concepts and definitions

In terms of language learning, a few key terms need to be distinguished. Krashen proposes that there are two distinct systems for how people perform in their second language (L2): one is “acquired system,” and the other is the “learned system” (Schütz, 1998).

The term acquisition represents spontaneous use of a language that one can acquire through communication with native speakers or others who have a command of a particular language. We can compare this process to the one that children encounter when acquiring their first language (L1) (Yule, 2020). Language learners are often not aware of the process of acquiring language and perceive it as everyday use. They typically do not consciously apply the rules of the language they have acquired, but instead have an intuitive “feel” for it. This allows them to naturally recognise whether sentences are grammatically correct or not. Acquisition can also be described using terms such as implicit, informal, or natural learning, which Krashen (1982) simply calls “picking up” a language.

The second method to develop proficiency in a L2 is through language learning. Learning is the process of gaining new information, which is then converted into knowledge through memorisation. Unlike learning, the acquisition does not require a teacher and does not emphasise whether knowledge is acquired during the use of language (Yule, 2020). This bachelor thesis will primarily focus on the learning, and henceforth the term “learning” will be used to refer to a conscious understanding of a L2, which includes knowledge of its rules, awareness of their application, and the ability to articulate them (Krashen, 1982).

L2 acquisition and language learning involve the acquisition of new linguistic and communicative abilities. While language acquisition is a more natural and implicit process, foreign language learning is typically more conscious and explicit. Nevertheless, these two processes are interrelated and contribute to the overall development of language skills (Lightbown, Spada, 2013).

Although some L2 theorists have assumed that children acquire language through acquisition, whereas adults can only learn it through a conscious process, the acquisition-learning hypothesis asserts that adults are also capable of acquiring language and retaining the ability to “pick up” new languages even after puberty. While it is not certain that adults can achieve native-like fluency in a L2, it is possible for them to access the same innate “language acquisition device” that children use during language acquisition. (Krashen, 1982).

Regardless of age, L2 learners are individuals who have already acquired proficiency in at least one language. This prior linguistic knowledge can be beneficial as it provides learners with a basic understanding of language structure. However, it can also have negative consequences as it may cause learners to make incorrect assumptions about the target language, leading to errors that would not occur in L1 acquisition (Lightbown, Spada, 2013).

Not only do L1 acquisition and second language acquisition (L2) differ, but the third language acquisition (L3) is distinct from L2 as well. This is because L3 learners have already acquired at least one foreign language and have some knowledge and experience with learning it, which can assist them with the L3 (Bardel, Falk, 2007). Williams and Hammarberg (1998) and Hammarberg (2001) have put forward that the L2 status is a crucial factor in the acquisition of L3. According to their proposal, among the languages known to the learner (L1 and L2), the L2 is more likely to influence the process of L3 acquisition.

1.1. Overview of language learning theories

There are several language learning theories that have been proposed over the years. Mohamad Nor and Rashid (2018) argue that a single, definitive linguistic theory that explains L2 learning does not exist, as there are numerous interdependent factors that impact language acquisition and learning success.

One of the earliest and most influential theories in language learning is behaviourism, which emphasises the role of reinforcement and repetition in the learning process. As stated in this theory, language learning occurs through a process of imitation, practice, and reinforcement, with the environment playing a crucial role in shaping both behaviour and language acquisition (Skinner, 2015).

Innatism is a language learning theory that argues that humans are born with an innate ability to acquire language. This theory suggests that language learning is a natural process that occurs through exposure to language. Chomsky (2002), one of the most famous innatists in language learning, propounded that the innate ability to acquire language is facilitated by a universal grammar, which is present in all human brains.

Another related theory is the constructivist theory, which refers to the importance of learners constructing their own understanding of language through meaningful activities and experiences. This theory assumes that learners construct knowledge through a process of active

engagement with the world around them. It points out to the role of the learner's prior knowledge and experiences in shaping language learning (Piaget, 1963).

In recent years, sociocultural theory has gained prominence in the field of language learning. This theory emphasises the social and cultural context in which language learning takes place and argues that learning is a collaborative process that involves interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

All of the above mentioned theories provide diverse outlooks on language learning and acquisition, which impact the level of receptiveness towards the teaching and learning methods of L2 (Mohamad Nor, Rashid, 2018).

1.2.Factors Affecting Learning Efficiency

It is important to acknowledge that there are dissimilarities among learners. As explained by Zafar and Meenakshi (2012), differences among learners can arise due to various factors such as age, gender, aptitude, motivation, learning styles, and strategies. This chapter will examine some of these factors in greater depth.

Language aptitude, also termed as special “ability”, “gift”, or “feel” for languages, belongs to a significant feature of learning efficiency. Language aptitude is a crucial component of intelligence that impacts the speed and effort required to learn a new language. Individuals with high language aptitude tend to learn the L2 with relative ease, while those with lower aptitude may require relevant effort and persistence to achieve the same level of proficiency. However, it is worth noting that a person's ability to learn a new language cannot be solely determined by their language aptitude. Even if a learner does not have a natural aptitude for language learning, they can substitute it with other factors such as strong motivation and effective language learning strategies. In fact, with enough determination and effort, most people can attain a working knowledge of a L2, irrespective of their language aptitude (Cohen, Dörnyei, 2010).

Apart from aptitude, motivation is the second most considerable predictor of success in learning a foreign language. Differences in the speed and efficiency of language learning among learners can be attributed to individual motivation as a contributing factor. A learner's level of motivation greatly influences the amount of effort they put into their L2 development, which is often a crucial factor in determining their level of proficiency in the language. Motivation is pivotal in determining the level of effort that learners put into various stages of their L2

development, which can substantially impact their level of proficiency. Motivation is a multifaceted construct that encompasses several components, including a clear goal, consistent effortful behaviour (which involves the drive to succeed, beneficial study habits, motivation to satisfy others, etc.), a strong desire to achieve the goal, and positive attitudes towards the learning activity (Zafar, Meenakshi, 2012). The motivation to learn L2 cannot be compared with that of any other school subject. Unlike other subjects, a L2 is not merely a means of communication, but rather it reflects the culture of its native speakers and serves as a reflection of their way of life. Hence learning a L2 inevitably entailed gaining some degree of familiarity with a second culture (Cohen, Dörnyei, 2010).

According to Oxford (1990), language learning strategies are defined as “the specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that learners use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills.” Learning strategies are seminal for language learning because they comprise resources for dynamic, self-initiated engagement, which is significant for cultivating the ability to communicate effectively. Improved proficiency and greater self-confidence are outcomes of using suitable language learning strategies. Strategies can include cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies play a part in mental processes among which are memorization, inference, and elaboration. Metacognitive strategies refer to learners’ awareness and management of their own learning processes. Social strategies are used in interaction with others, such as seeking feedback or clarification (Oxford, 1990).

Styles are learners’ enduring characteristics that distinguish each one from the other, whereas strategies are specific approaches to tasks or problems used to achieve a goal. While strategies can differ, styles tend to be more consistent and foreseeable (Zafar, Meenakshi, 2012).

Both educational psychologists and L2 researchers have noted that learners have unique approaches to learning, which are commonly referred to as “learning styles.” As individuals, we learn differently and what may work for one learner may not work for another. Although learning styles tend to be relatively invariable, teachers can adjust their teaching tasks to cater to the preferences of learners with specific styles. With time, learners can also be motivated to practice so called “style-stretching,” which involves integrating various learning approaches they may have previously rejected (Cohen, Dörnyei, 2010).

1.3.Learners' perception of language learning

Attitudes towards learning context encompass an individual's perception and reaction to various aspects of the immediate environment where language learning occurs. When it comes to learning attitudes, there are numerous agents that must be considered, including the assessment of the teaching environment, the English class, and classmates. Based on Ellis (1994), learners' attitudes are an important set of variables that affect the language learning process. The attitude is a significant individual element that influences learning behaviours, affecting the learning process and outcomes. Therefore, it plays a crucial role in determining a learner's success or failure (Zhao, 2015). The perception of language learning is considered a fundamental aspect of comprehending human behaviour, defined as a mental state that encompasses beliefs and emotions. Without a positive attitude and sufficient motivation, individuals with highly developed intellectual abilities will not be able to attain their long-term goal of success in learning a foreign language (Mašić, Bećirović, 2021).

Attitude variables can be classified into two categories, namely educational and social attitudes. Educational attitudes refer to attitudes towards the teacher, the course, learning the language, and other aspects related to the educational process of L2 learning. In contrast, social attitudes focus on the cultural implications of L2 learning. Both educational and social attitudes are significant factors in the process of learning a L2. Attitudes towards learning the L2 are considered as educationally relevant attitudes, while attitudes towards the L2 community are primarily social attitudes (Gardner, 1985).

These attitudes are shaped by social factors, which ultimately impact the learner's outcome. There exist both negative and positive attitudes towards the target language, with the latter usually being linked to the culture and speakers of the language. It is reasonable to assume that learners with positive attitudes are more motivated to learn since they want to communicate with native speakers (Ellis, 1994). For instance, Noels et al. (2003) suggest that students interested in the countries where the language is spoken are more motivated to learn. Conversely, negative attitudes, which are commonly caused by a lack of interest or challenges with the teacher, can hinder language learning. Despite this, negative attitudes may also have a constructive impact on language learning if learners have a strong desire to learn the language (Ellis, 1994). Moreover, students' initial negative attitudes towards learning a language may transform into positive attitudes upon recognizing the advantages of learning it.

1.4. Self-Assessment in Language Learning

Self-assessment plays a pivotal role in measuring the progress of language learners. The accuracy of self-assessment rests largely on the learner's autonomy in the process of language learning. Significantly, self-assessment fosters motivation, critical thinking, and reflective practices in language learning. It also aids in the acquisition of language knowledge across different language skills, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary. This phenomenon will be a crucial aspect of the research conducted in the next part of this thesis.

Self-assessment can be a valuable source for learners to provide feedback, and it is an important element of formative assessment. Self-assessment is rooted in the idea of self-regulated learning, which refers to the methods individuals use to manage their own cognitive processes within an educational context (Jamrus, Razali 2019).

Zimmerman (1990) outlines three main components of self-regulated learning, which include the learner's implementation of self-regulated learning strategies, their willingness to accept self-directed feedback regarding their learning progress, and their motivation to learn in an interdependent manner. Self-regulated learning involves not only cognitive and metacognitive processes but also motivational and behavioural aspects. Students who engage in self-regulated learning are strongly motivated to enhance their learning progress, utilize diverse thinking strategies such as organizing, reflecting, and self-evaluating, and take specific actions to achieve their objectives.

Self-assessment is a powerful tool that helps learners take ownership of their language acquisition journey. By reflecting on their own learning progress and identifying areas for improvement, learners can develop a sense of autonomy and take charge of their learning process. This, in turn, fosters their commitment to learning process, making it more likely that they will achieve their goals of learning a L2. Proper and correct self-assessment, as well as effective self-regulated learning strategies, are key to maximizing the benefits of self-assessment and achieving success in language learning (Jamrus, Razali 2019).

2. Comparative analysis of English and German as foreign languages

The following chapter analyses both English and German language in more depth. The author of the thesis would like to provide an overview of two languages and their linguistic characteristics, including differences in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and compare the attitudes and perceptions of learners toward English and German as foreign languages i.e., motivations for learning and perceived difficulty.

2.1.English Language

As indicated by Crystal (2003), English is a widely spoken language around the world and its spread is due to several historical, political, and social factors. In terms of linguistic characteristics, English is a Germanic language that has evolved over time and has been influenced by other languages, particularly Latin and French.

Regarding the pronunciation system, English is characterised by a relatively simple vowel system, a complex consonant system, and stress-timing, which means that stressed syllables occur at regular intervals. English also has a complex system of intonation patterns that convey meaning.

English exhibits a complex morphological system for both verbs and nouns. Verbs possess multiple inflectional forms that convey tense, aspect, and mood, while nouns have a variety of inflectional forms to convey number, case, and possession.

Along with its subject-verb-object word order, English allows for a range of sentence structures such as passive constructions, cleft sentences, and questions. Additionally, the language has a complex complementation system, enabling verbs to take various complements like infinitives, gerunds, and subordinate clauses.

Semantically, English has a rich vocabulary drawn from diverse sources e.g., Old English, Latin, and Greek. Furthermore, English utilizes a complex system of tense and aspect, allowing for the expression of different temporal relationships between events (Huddleston, Pullum, 2002).

2.2. German Language

German is the most widely spoken mother tongue in the European Union, and it is also used as a L2 by many people around the world.

Linguistically, German is characterized by its complex grammar, including a system of four noun cases (nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative) and three genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter). In addition, German has a complex system of verb conjugation that comprises irregular verbs, separable and inseparable verb prefixes, and a wide variety of verb tenses and moods.

Although the phonology of German might pose challenges to non-native speakers, it is a system that operates systematically and adheres to rules. The speakers may face some difficulty with the occurrence of voiceless consonants at the end of German words. For example, German includes umlauted vowels, which are formed by adding two dots above a vowel (i.e., ü or ö) and change the pronunciation of the vowel, which can be sometimes complicated for pronunciation. Stress in German is usually placed on the first syllable, with exceptions like prefix words that are typically stressed on the syllable that precedes the prefix (Fagan, 2009).

German language is characterized by lengthy compound words and a flexible word order where the verb generally comes in the second position. The speaker can alter the word order to emphasise specific words. Additionally, German language tends to create new words by merging them together to convey particular meanings.

Another notable characteristic of German is its complex word order. In a sentence, the verb usually comes in the second position, and the word order can change depending on the emphasis that the speaker wants to put on certain words (Sanders, 2010).

2.3. Differences in English and German

In comparison with English, German as a synthetic language, has a more extensive inflectional morphology. In essence, all the grammatical distinctions that exist within English's inflectional morphology are also present in German, but the reverse is not true. To name a few similar grammatical features, English and German language ascertain singular and plural form on nouns (E: *car/cars*; G: *Auto/Autos*), the difference between present and past tense in verbs is conveyed in both languages (E: *play/played*; G: *spiele/spielte*), and the

masculine/feminine/neuter forms are distinguished by the third person singular pronouns (E: *he/she/it*; G: *er/sie/es*).

However, German inflectional morphology features several grammatical distinctions that are absent in English. For instance:

- English displays two surface falls, whereas German exhibits four: German distinguishes four cases within the noun phrase using inflectional morphemes. In contrast, English has combined its nominative, accusative, and dative forms into a single form “the man,” but still maintains a distinct genitive form “the man’s”.
- German still has an indicative/subjunctive distinction in its verb (*furh/führe*), whereas English employs a single form for both (*drive*).
- The German verb carries markings for person and number, whereas in English, the bare stem is used for all persons and numbers except for third person singular, as well as for both imperative and non-imperative forms. As a result, the English stem “play” is used for all the following forms in German: “*spiele, spielst, spielt, spielen, spielt, spielen*,” while “plays” is equivalent to “*spielt*” in German for the third person.
- The past tense, English does not distinguish between third person and non-third person, and the single form “played” stands in for all forms “*spielte, spieltest, spielt, spielten, etc.*” in German (Hawkins, 2015).

The author of the bachelor thesis believes that the difficulty of the grammar structure affects the amount of time spent learning foreign languages and this, in turn, affects the popularity of the language among students. Specifically, Slovak students might spend more time learning German compared to English because German has more complex language rules, which they find more challenging to learn.

On the authority of the Gast and König, there are multiple dissimilarities in the vocabulary of English and German. One major difference is that German has a much more complex system of word formation, including many compound words. English, on the other hand, often relies on borrowing words from other languages. Another difference is that English tends to have more words with Latin and Greek roots, while German has more words with Germanic roots. There are also many false friends (*faux amis*) between the two languages, where words may look or sound similar but have different meanings (e.g., *gut, gross, fast* which in German mean good, big, and almost). Additionally, German has longer words due to its system of compound words,

while English tends to have shorter, simpler words. While there is significant overlap in vocabulary between English and German, there are notable differences that can pose challenges for language learners.

English and German differ in their phonological systems in several ways. One of the most noticeable differences is the contrast between voiced and voiceless consonants, which is much more prominent in German than in English. German also has a larger inventory of consonant phonemes, including some that do not exist in English, namely the uvular fricatives /χ/ and /ʁ/.

In the realm of vowel phonemes, English has a larger inventory than German, with many diphthongs and vowel length distinctions that do not exist in German. German has a more regular and predictable system of vowel pronunciation, with fewer irregularities and exceptions than English.

Stress and intonation patterns also differ between the two languages. English is a stress-timed language, where stressed syllables occur at regular intervals, while German is a syllable-timed language, where each syllable takes roughly the same amount of time to pronounce. Intonation patterns differ too, with English having a wider range of pitch variations to convey meaning than German (König, Gast, 2018).

German and English have many similarities in terms of their inflectional morphology, notably singular and plural forms on nouns, present and past tense on verbs, and gender distinctions in pronouns. However, German has a more extensive inflectional morphology, with additional grammatical distinctions that are absent in English, such as four cases within the noun phrase, indicative/subjunctive distinction in verbs, and markings for person and number in verbs. These differences, along with dissimilarities in vocabulary and phonological systems, can pose challenges for language learners. The complexity of the grammar structure in German may result students spending more time learning German compared to English.

2.4.Learners’ Attitudes toward English and German as Foreign Languages

Mastering a foreign language is a challenging task, with some aspects being more manageable than others. Nevertheless, with diligent effort, drive, determination, and a constructive outlook towards the language, one can succeed. As a result, numerous research

studies have been carried out to identify the crucial factors in language learning, with attitude and motivation emerging as the most significant ones. It is invariably a suitable commencement to possess a positive attitude towards acquiring a language (Mašić, Bećirović, 2021). The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how learners perceive English and German as a foreign language and how these perceptions may shape their learning experiences, it will review some important studies on this topic and provide an analysis of the findings.

The level of difficulty in learning a foreign language can be influenced by various factors, including vocabulary, sentence structure, cultural characteristics, and individual differences in readiness and learning level. Furthermore, learners may experience different challenges and difficulties depending on their attitudes, beliefs, awareness, and motivation. Therefore, foreign language teachers should address these issues and help students develop their own learning strategies, as motivation is a crucial factor that can impact learners' success of language learning and attitudes towards the language. Researchers have suggested that learners who are highly motivated and interested in the language and its culture are more likely to have a positive attitude towards foreign language learning and develop their own learning strategies (Tanir, 2020).

Motivations and attitudes towards learning a foreign language can greatly affect learners' success and overall language acquisition experience. While some learners are motivated by practical reasons, like improving job prospects or personal communication with English or German speakers, others are motivated by more intrinsic factors, such as love for language or a desire to learn about a different culture. Regardless of the motivation, the positive attitude and willingness to develop their own learning strategies are essential to learners' success in language learning. Consequently, it is important for foreign language teachers to take into consideration learners' motivations and attitudes towards language learning and to provide a conducive learning environment that fosters positive attitudes towards language learning (Dörnyei, Kubanyiova, 2014).

Danansooriya's (2010) study investigates the challenges encountered by Sri Lankan university students who are learning German as a foreign language (GFL). The research includes gathering data on the learners' language learning experiences, their perceptions of the language, and the methods they use to overcome any challenges they face. The study reveals that Sri Lankan learners encounter several difficulties when learning GFL, including issues with

grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. Furthermore, learners report struggling to understand spoken German and to use the language in real-life situations. The study recommends that language instructors create more opportunities for learners to engage in genuine communication in German and develop their speaking abilities. Moreover, the research proposes that learners can benefit from creating their own learning techniques and receiving personalized assistance from language instructors.

The study by Ahmed (2015) explored the attitudes of learners of English as foreign language, commonly referred to as EFL learners, towards learning English at a university in Malaysia. The results of the study suggest that learners have a generally positive attitude towards English language learning, but there are certain factors, e.g., motivation and self-confidence, that play an imperative role in their language learning process. The study recommends that language instructors should take these factors into consideration when designing language courses and activities to enhance learners' attitudes towards learning English.

At Leeds University, a study was conducted with the purpose of examining Middle Eastern Arab students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. According to the study's findings, the students displayed a favourable attitude towards learning English and were motivated by both practical and cultural reasons, such as advancing their career prospects and enhancing their intercultural communication skills. However, the study also showed that the students faced some obstacles, such as language anxiety and difficulties in acquiring new vocabulary, which had a negative impact on their motivation and attitude towards learning English. As a result, the study recommends that language teachers should factor in these challenges when creating language courses and exercises to improve students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language (Drbseh, 2015).

Tanir (2020) aimed to investigate the difficulties Turkish undergraduate students face when learning German as a third language. The study focused on the perceived difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and speaking skills of the participants. The findings disclosed that Turkish students faced various difficulties while learning German as their third language. The most common challenges reported by the participants included vocabulary acquisition, sentence structure, grammatical rules, and cultural differences. Additionally, the study found that the participants perceived German as a challenging language due to its complex grammar and extensive vocabulary. It also revealed that students' motivation and attitude

towards learning German played a significant role in their language learning experiences. The students who reported higher motivation and a positive attitude towards learning German were found to be more successful in their language learning endeavours.

Mašić and Bećirović (2021) examined the perceptions of Bosnian EFL students towards learning English. Their study explored the attitudes of students towards learning English, their motivations for studying the language, and their comprehended levels of proficiency. The results showed that majority of students had a positive attitude towards learning English and believed that it was important to learn the language for academic, professional, and personal reasons. The study suggests that language learning should not only focus on cognitive and linguistic aspects but also on social and affective factors that can influence language acquisition.

Zhang's study (2022) probed the challenges encountered by students in acquiring proficiency in diverse aspects of the German language like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking abilities. The study found that these difficulties often stem from the differences between German and the students' native language, as well as the complexity of the German language itself. To overcome these difficulties, students employ various learning strategies, such as memorisation, communication with native speakers, and self-correction. These strategies enable students to develop their German language proficiency and improve their overall language learning experience. The study recommends that language teachers should consider these difficulties and strategies when designing language courses and activities to enhance students' German language learning experience. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to practice using the language in real-life situations to help them become more confident and fluent in speaking as well.

According to the study by Ishag, Altmayer, and Witruk (2015), Sudanese students perceive English as a more challenging language to learn than German. They investigate the self-assessed difficulty levels of Sudanese students in learning English and German as foreign languages. The students reported facing more difficulties in English pronunciation and comprehension, while they experienced more challenges in German grammar and vocabulary. The study also demonstrates that the students use different language learning strategies to cope with the perceived difficulties in each language. The findings of the study advise that language teachers should take these difficulties and strategies into consideration when designing language courses and activities.

The studies reveal that learners encounter various difficulties while learning a foreign language, such as issues with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. However, it can be concluded that learners who possess a positive attitude towards language learning and are highly motivated are more successful in their language learning experiences and that language instructors or teachers should consider the challenges faced by learners when creating language courses and exercises to improve their motivation and attitude towards learning a foreign language.

The author of the present bachelor thesis suggests that Slovak university students tend to view German as a more challenging language to learn compared to English. This perception could be caused by students' more favourable attitudes towards English, which is likely influenced by their greater exposure to English language learning over German. In other words, students in Slovakia typically have more opportunities to study and practice English from an earlier age and at various educational levels, such as primary, secondary, and tertiary education, whereas the exposure to German may be more limited. As a result, this extended exposure to English and its familiarity may lead students to perceive it as easier to learn and thus more popular than German.

3. Aim and Methodology

The bachelor thesis aims to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Slovak learners towards the English and German languages. The thesis seeks to investigate the factors that impact the attitudes towards languages, difficulty, popularity, and satisfaction with the learning process of both languages. Through this research, the thesis will also explore how these factors affect the learning process itself and whether there are significant differences between these two languages.

The following research questions will be addressed in the present bachelor thesis:

- What motivations and attitudes do students have towards learning English and German?
- What difficulties and challenges do learners perceive in learning English and German?
- Which of the two languages is perceived by Slovak undergraduates as easier to learn?
- What measures can be taken to moderate learning difficulties and enhance perception of the less popular language?

One of the critical aspects of this study is the comparative analysis of the most challenging linguistic or grammatical features encountered by the learners of English and German. By focusing on the areas where learners struggle the most, the thesis will provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the language learning process.

Additionally, this study will contribute to the existing research on language learning by shedding light on the impact of prior exposure to English or German on learners' attitudes and perceptions. Furthermore, it will also explore whether longer exposure to learning English among Slovak learners influences their perceptions of the language and whether this has an impact on their attitudes towards learning German.

By identifying difficulties that Slovak learners face while studying English and German, this research could provide valuable insights for language teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers. Based on the findings of this study, language instructors can adjust their teaching strategies and materials to address the most challenging aspects of both languages, making the learning process more efficient and enjoyable for students.

3.1.Method of conducting the survey

The author of this thesis would like to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the perceptions and attitudes of Slovak learners towards English and German, offering insights into the factors that impact the learning process and identifying the most challenging areas for learners.

The research methodology chosen for this bachelor thesis involved the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire is a widely used method of data collection to investigate the attitudes and opinions of many respondents. It has proven to be a valuable tool for examining a variety of research questions in L2 research. The administration of questionnaires can take various forms such as e-mail, phone, mail-in-forms, or in-person, which provides the researcher with a greater degree of flexibility in the data collection process. The questionnaire's structure enables it to provide both qualitative insights and quantifiable data, making it a versatile tool for use in a range of research studies (Mackey, Gass, 2005).

The questionnaire survey method was chosen as it is well-suited for empirical research and allows for easily quantifiable data collection. It is important to stress that the respondents who completed the questionnaire were relying on self-assessment, which indicates that the results obtained may not be entirely objective and impartial, however that is one of the issues with sociological studies, to rely on respondents to provide honest and accurate replies.

3.1.1. Instrument and procedure

The survey questionnaire consisted of 18 closed and multiple-choice questions in Slovak language designed to explore respondent's attitudes towards English and German and their perceptions of these two languages.

The first four questions collected the fundamental information on the questionnaire respondents, including gender, degree of study, and the language levels in English and German. Questions 5, 6, and 7 investigated which language the respondents had learned for a longer time, which language they favoured, and which they found easier to learn. Subsequently, question 8 focused on the reason why one language was perceived as easier to learn than the other one. Questions number 11 and 12 were the aforementioned self-assessment questions, where students evaluated their own language skills. Questions number 9 and 10 pertained to the amount of time students spent learning. Finally, questions number 13 up to 18 addressed specific difficulties

encountered while learning English or German, the tools and aids used in language learning, and the forms of work applied by teacher during lessons.

As the questionnaire was in Slovak, the following set of questions will be gone through, and the author's intended goals will be explained. The questions were as follows:

1. *What is your gender?*
2. *Which level of degree are you currently studying?*
3. *What is your English language level?*
4. *What is your German language level?*
5. *Which of the following two languages have you been learning longer?*
6. *Which language do you consider to be more favourite?*
7. *Which language do you perceive as the easier one to learn?* Questions 6 and 7 aims to explore the respondent's attitudes and perceptions of English and German language. Question 6 specifically asks which language the respondents consider preferable. Question 7 focused to find out which language the respondents consider as simpler one to learn. By asking these questions, the study aimed to gain insights into the learners' preferences and attitudes towards the two languages, which could potentially impact their motivation and engagement in the learning process.
8. *What influences your choice in the previous question?* Question 8 offers few choices, such as: I have been learning the chosen language for a longer time (several years); the chosen language has a simpler grammar; the chosen language has easier pronunciation; I use the chosen language in everyday communication; All of the points mentioned above; or the option "Other..." where students could write their own thoughts and reasons. In every multiple-choice question of the questionnaire that asked about the reasons, an option labelled "Other..." was included, giving the respondents an opportunity to provide their own input.
9. *Which language do you spend more time learning?*
10. *For what reason do you devote more time to the chosen language?* This question provides various options for students to choose from, i.e., insufficient vocabulary; pronunciation problems/poor pronunciation; more difficult grammar; listening comprehension problems; all of the above mentioned, other...
11. *How would you rate your English language skills?*

12. *How would you rate your German language skills?* The aim of questions 11 and 12 is to assess the respondents' self-perceived level of proficiency in English and German languages, respectively. They could evaluate their language skills in five areas: listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction, and writing (all areas were valued based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages levels, from A1 to C2.). These questions provide insight into how the respondents view their own language abilities and can give an indication of their confidence level in using the languages. It can help to identify a potential correlation between the respondent's attitudes towards language learning and their assessed level of proficiency.

13. *What specific difficulties do you encounter while learning English?*

14. *What specific difficulties do you encounter while learning German?* Both questions, number 13 and 14 includes four fields: vocabulary, grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and the choice "Other..." as well.

15. *What tools or aids do you utilize during your English language learning process?*

16. *What tools or aids do you utilize during your German language learning process?*

In these question, 15 and 16, respondents are able to choose from different tools they might be using during their language process. The following options are offered: (a) Books, dictionaries; (b) Internet books, dictionaries; (c) Watching series or movies in the language; (d) YouTube; (e) Listening to songs in the language; and (f) Other... The purpose of questions 15 and 16 is to investigate the level of creativity exhibited by Slovak students in their language learning process, as well as to explore the strategies they use to aid themselves in learning.

17. *In what ways did your English teachers conduct their classes?*

18. *In what ways did your German teachers conduct their classes?* Questions 17 and 18 aim to gather information about the different teaching methods and techniques used by English and German teachers. The questions include a variety of possible teaching methods that the respondents can choose from: (a) Working with text – reading, discussion; (b) Working with text – translation, vocabulary; (c) Grammar exercises; (d) Vocabulary and phraseology exercises; (e) Listening comprehension; (f) Watching video, Watching videos, films – discussion; (g) Working in groups, pairs

– discussion on different topics; (h) Writing – creating written compositions; (i) Presentations on different topics; (j) Independent projects; and (k) Other... These questions intend to improve comprehension of various teaching methods utilised for teaching English and German and to identify potential strengths and weaknesses of some methods.

3.1.2. Respondents

The target group involved 121 Slovak undergraduates who were studying English and German languages at all degree levels. Among the respondents, there were 22 males and 99 females. Most of them, 76% (92), were pursuing bachelor's degrees, while 24% (29) were pursuing master's degrees.

According to CEFR levels, 57.9% of the respondents had intermediate to upper-intermediate level proficiency (B1 – B2) in English, 38.8% had advanced to proficiency level proficiency (C1 – C2), and a small number of respondents, 3.3%, had beginner to pre-intermediate level proficiency (A1 – A2). In contrast, the level of German language proficiency varied among the respondents. Specifically, 43% had beginner to pre-intermediate level proficiency (A1 – A2), 40.5% had intermediate to upper-intermediate level proficiency (B1 – B2), and 16.5% had advanced to proficiency level proficiency (C1 – C2).

3.1.3. Data Analysis

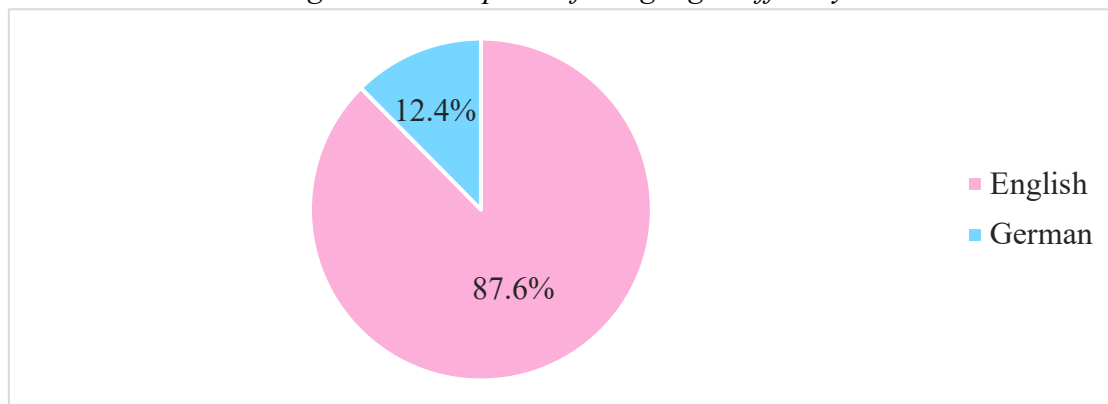
This chapter presents the findings of the questionnaire and provides an analysis of them. The examination of the collected data offers an overall overview of the Slovak learners' perspectives on English and German language learning in the researched domains.

The vast majority of the participants (86.8%) state that they have been studying English for a longer period compared to German. However, a small fraction of respondents (10.7%) reports studying German for a longer period, while only a few (2.5%) mentioned studying both languages for an equal amount of time.

63.6% respondents show a preference for English over German, while 17.4% claim to love both languages equally. Only 14.9% express a greater liking for German compared to English, and a mere 4.1% of students do not show any preference for either language.

As can be seen in the chart no. 1, question number 7 yields a clear result with 87.6% of the respondents perceiving English as an easier language to learn compared to German, while only 12.4% consider German to be simpler during the learning process.

Figure 1: Perception of Language Difficulty



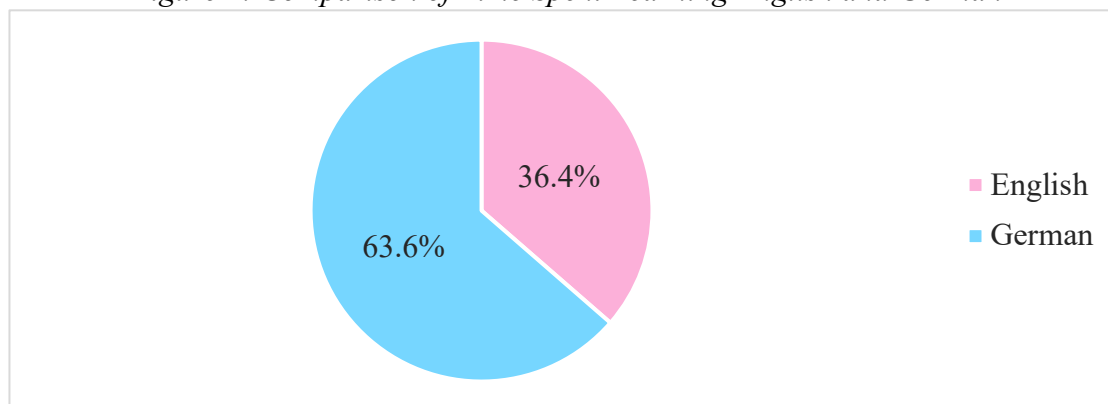
Source: Author's own Creation

Question 8 aims to discover the reasons behind the language preferences identified in the previous question. The largest factor, according to 56.2% of respondents, is the length of time they had been studying the language. Additionally, 47.1% of respondents believe that their chosen language is easier in terms of grammar. 34.7% of people report encountering the language on a daily basis, and 14.9% cite a combination of all the reasons mentioned above. Some students also mention that they find overall language structure easier to learn (2.4%), grew up bilingual and had known the language since childhood (1.6%), encounter the language at work, or have a stronger personal connection to the language.

Referring to the chart no. 2 below, 77 respondents take more time learning German than English. On the other hand, 44 respondents indicate a longer learning time for English, despite perceiving German as more difficult based on their answers to the questions about language simplicity. Students mostly note insufficient vocabulary (48.8%), complexity of the grammar (46.3%), and difficulties in comprehending spoken language (29.8%) as the reasons for spending more time learning their chosen language. Out of the remaining respondents, 19% select all of the options provided in the question, while 9.1% specifically identify pronunciation as a challenge. Other reasons mentioned include a greater enjoyment of the language or more

frequent exposure to it at work or school. A few respondents indicate they are learning the language more to improve their skills.

Figure 2: Comparison of Time Spent Learning English and German



Source: Author's own Creation

In questions 11 and 12 respondents evaluated their own language skills based on their self-assessment. In English most of the respondents value their skills on B2 and C1 level, in German, on the other hand, persists more levels, mostly A1, but also A2, B1, and B2 level. Two tables are used to record the number of student's answers.

The following table shows the number of students who assess their English language proficiency from A1 level to C2 level and it provides a clear overview of the distribution of self-assessed proficiency levels across different language skills. The students' English language proficiency is assessed across levels A1 to C2, with the results indicating a low number of students at the lower proficiency levels (A1 and A2). The data display that listening, reading skills, and writing are the most rated at the B2 and C1 levels, whereas the highest numbers of students rate their spoken production and interaction skills at the B1 and B2 levels.

Table 1: Respondent's English evaluation based on self-assessment

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Production	Spoken Interaction	Writing
A1	2	1	2	2	2
A2	12	5	12	16	14
B1	13	20	35	30	23

B2	45	46	42	39	42
C1	41	44	28	26	34
C2	8	5	2	8	6

Source: Author's own Creation

The table below offers the count of students who evaluated their language skills in the German language, ranging from A1 level to C2 level. Students mostly rate their language skills at A1 level. Values at levels A2, B1, and B2 are approximately equal. The highest self-assessment ratings for listening are at A1 and B1 levels while reading received the highest ratings at A1 and B2 levels. Spoken production receive the highest number of evaluations at A1 and A2 levels, while spoken interaction rates most at A1 and B2 levels. Writing is the most frequently rated at A1 level, but also at B1 and B2. However, self-assessment ratings for all categories are relatively low for C1 and C2 levels, with the lowest numbers record for spoken production, spoken interaction, and writing.

Table 2: Respondent's German evaluation based on self-assessment

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Production	Spoken Interaction	Writing
A1	38	27	40	42	38
A2	21	24	25	23	19
B1	24	23	23	22	25
B2	23	26	23	25	24
C1	12	19	6	5	12
C2	3	2	4	4	3

Source: Author's own Creation

Based on the results, it can be inferred that the respondents' proficiency in German is significantly lower than their proficiency in English. According to questions 13 and 14, most participants struggle with German grammar (71.9%) and vocabulary (66.1%). The next most challenging areas are spelling (35.5%) and pronunciation (27.3%). Only three respondents declare not having difficulties in any area. The results for English were relatively similar, with

45.5% of participants struggling with grammar and 38.8% with vocabulary. Pronunciation is identified as problematic for 22.3% of respondents, and spelling for 19.8%. A small percentage (4.8%) asserts not having difficulties in any area, and two students note struggling with speaking due to a lack of confidence.

Multiple-choice questions 15 and 16 asks students about their preferred aids for learning English and German. 85.1% of respondents indicate using English-language series and movies, and 70.2% help to listen to English-language music. In addition, students report using a variety of resources to help them learn, including YouTube (67.8%), e-books and online English dictionaries (52.1%), and traditional books and dictionaries (57.9%). Some students also mention communicating with native speakers, listening to podcasts, or even the use of TikTok. In case of German, respondents rely more heavily on books and dictionaries, both online (57%) and physical (55.4%), followed by YouTube (42.1%), and watching German-language movies or TV series (40.5%). Other resources cited by respondents include German magazines, podcasts, the Drops language learning application, and websites such as “DW Learn German” or “Deutsch-to-go”.

The final two survey questions focus on teaching methods. According to the respondents, English teachers primarily use grammar exercises (90.9%), text-based activities involving reading and discussion (88.4%), translation exercises to learn new vocabulary (81.8%), listening and comprehension exercises (80.2%), and teamwork with discussion (75.2%). Additionally, popular exercises include writing compositions (70.2%), phraseology and vocabulary exercises (69.4%), presentations on various topics (64.5%), and individual projects (45.5%). One of the respondents presents unique methods such as performing in theatrical skits, participating in a film club, joining a poetic club, and reading selected English literature which are not so common in Slovak schools nor universities.

German language teachers rely on grammar exercises (88.4%), translation and vocabulary exercises (78.5%), and text-based activities (75.2%). Other common exercises include listening and comprehension (69.4%), phraseology and vocabulary exercises (67.8%), teamwork and writing exercises (56.2%), diverse presentations (49.6%), and watching movies followed by discussion (38%). Some respondents recommend innovative teaching methods such as collaborating with older students or adopting “dynamic classroom management” techniques, where students engage in creating, speaking, and building their vocabulary.

4. Results and Discussion

The following chapter encompasses a conclusion of the gathered information. Firstly, a summary and an appraisal of the collected data is presented to evaluate the validity of the hypotheses proposed in this thesis. In the final section of the chapter, potential solutions and new ideas are provided to address challenges and obstacles in language learning.

4.1. Results

Most of the surveyed students have studied English for a longer time than German. This phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that the vast majority of Slovak students commence their English language education in the early years of their primary education. Based on a report by the European Commission, English is the most widely taught foreign language in Slovakia, with over 98% of primary and secondary school students learning it (European Commission, 2019).

The data from the questionnaire reveals a clear preference for English among the respondents, with 63.6% expressing a greater liking for this language compared to German. This outcome is in line with previous studies that have found English to be the most popular foreign language worldwide (Crystal, 2003). However, it is interesting to note that 17.4% of respondents claimed to love both languages equally, suggesting that some students value the benefits of being bilingual and appreciate the unique qualities of each language.

The results of question 7 provide insight into the perceived difficulty of learning each language, with 87.6% of respondents stating that English is easier to learn than German. This finding is consistent with the literature, as English has been reported to have a simpler grammar structure in comparison with German (i.e., Ishag, Altmayer, Witruk, 2015; Tanir, 2020).

Question 8 delves deeper into the reasons behind the language preferences and reveals that the length of time spent studying the language is the largest factor influencing language preference for 56.2% of respondents. Furthermore, 47.1% of respondents believed that their chosen language is easier in terms of grammar, indicating that perceived difficulty plays a role in language preference.

63.7% of respondents report spending more time learning German than English. Moreover, the data shows that students identify insufficient vocabulary, grammar complexity, and

difficulties in comprehending spoken language as the main challenges they face when learning a foreign language. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has identified vocabulary size and grammatical knowledge as key predictors of language proficiency (Tanir, 2020; Mašić, Bećirović, 2021). The fact that a considerable number of respondents (19%) selects all of the options provided in the question 10 suggests that language learning is a complex and multifaceted process that requires the development of multiple skills and strategies.

Interestingly, the self-assessment of language proficiency provided by respondents in questions 11 and 12 shows a discrepancy from the language level proficiency they choose in the first questions. In English, most respondents rate their skills at the B2 and C1 level, while in German, the majority reports proficiency at the A1 level, with a significant number also indicating A2, B1, and B2 levels. This suggests that self-assessment of language proficiency may be influenced by factors such as confidence, exposure to the language, and individual standards, rather than an objective measure of language proficiency.

The data presented in the tables for English and German language proficiency provide useful insights into the self-assessed levels of language skills among the surveyed students. In English, the data reveal a low number of students at the lower proficiency levels (A1 and A2), which could be attributed to the basic nature of these skills and the length of time that the respondents have been studying English. The highest self-assessed ratings for listening, reading, and writing skills in English are at the B2 and C1 levels, which suggests that students may have developed stronger comprehension skills at these higher levels. In German, the data show that students mostly rated their language skills at the A1 level, which can be attributed to the fact that students do not study German that long and they do not encounter with it so often as with English. However, self-assessment ratings for all categories are relatively low for C1 and C2 levels in both English and German. This suggests that students may need more targeted instruction and practice to develop higher levels of proficiency in these areas.

The obtained data clearly indicate that the respondents' proficiency in German is significantly lower than their proficiency in English. According to the results, most participants struggle with German grammar and vocabulary, which are crucial aspects of language learning. These outcomes are in line with previous research on language learning difficulties. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), vocabulary and grammar are two of the most difficult aspects of language learning. Danansooriya (2010) found that learners tend to struggle with

pronunciation and listening skills. Meanwhile, Ahmed (2015) highlights spelling as one of the most common challenges for language learners. The study's findings align with these results, indicating that language learners face difficulties with grammar and vocabulary acquisition in both German and English.

The survey does not only revealed that respondents employ diverse resources to aid them in learning English and German but also underscore the distinctive strategies and resources utilised by learners when acquiring these two languages. English-language media, such as series, movies, and music, are the most popular resources for English language. This is in line with the research by Drbseh (2015), which suggests that the use of authentic materials, such as media, can enhance language learning. In contrast, students in German language rely more heavily on books and dictionaries, which is consistent with the research by Tanir (2020), which propounds that language learners tend to use more traditional resources, such as textbooks and dictionaries, when learning a new language.

The results of the last two questions indicate that conventional methods, such as grammar exercises, translation, and text-based activities, are predominantly used in English and German language classrooms. English teachers primarily use grammar exercises, text-based activities, and translation exercises to learn new vocabulary. In contrast, German language teachers rely more heavily on grammar exercises, translation and vocabulary exercises, and text-based activities. While these methods have their merits, it is important to note that researchers suggests that they may not always be the most effective for language learning (Dörnyei, Kubanyiova, 2014; Danansooriya, 2010). For instance, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) argue that language learning should be an engaging and motivating experience, rather than a series of drills and exercises. They propose that language teachers should adopt a more communicative approach, encouraging learners to engage in authentic communication in the target language. This approach emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for learners to interact and negotiate meaning in the target language, which can help develop both fluency and accuracy in language use.

4.2. Discussion

Based on the presented survey questionnaire, it is clear that English is more widely preferred foreign language among Slovak students. Furthermore, the survey reveals that respondents

perceive English to be easier to learn compared to German, which is consistent with previous literature. The length of time spent studying a language is a significant factor influencing language preference, and the perceived difficulty of a language correlates with the amount of time students allocate to learning it. These findings support the hypothesis that the perceived difficulty of a language correlates with the amount of time spent learning it. They confirm that Slovak students allocate more time to learning German than English due to more intricate language rules perceived as more demanding to acquire.

The outcome also affirmed the assumption that university students have more favourable perception of the English language compared to the German language, possibly because of their frequent exposure to it in work or school environments. An effective approach to addressing this issue could involve providing primary school students in Slovakia with the opportunity to learn multiple languages. While this solution is not explored in the present study, increasing the frequency of German classes, and offering communication courses with native speakers could help undergraduate students develop their language skills and self-confidence in communication. Danansooriya (2010) similarly emphasises the importance of communicative activities, arguing that they can help to create a positive classroom atmosphere and motivate learners. She suggests that language teachers should incorporate more group work, role-play activities, and games into their lessons to encourage learners to use the language in a more natural and spontaneous way.

Slovak students encounter significant challenges when learning German, particularly with grammar and vocabulary. This aligns with previous research on language learning difficulties and reinforces the importance of addressing these areas in language instruction. Vocabulary and grammar are critical components of language learning, and students may struggle with these aspects regardless of the language they are learning. By identifying and addressing these difficulties, language educators can help students achieve their language learning goals and develop the skills they need to communicate effectively in the target language.

The study highlights that language learning is a complex process that requires the development of multiple skills and strategies. Students employ diverse resources to aid them in learning both English and German, and distinct strategies and resources are utilized when acquiring these two languages. The self-assessment of language proficiency may be influenced

by factors such as confidence, exposure to the language, and individual standards, rather than an objective measure of language proficiency.

When teaching a foreign language, it is important to consider the individual needs and preferences of learners, as stressed by the results of this study. Traditional teaching methods such as grammar exercises and translation drills can be effective in certain contexts, but language teachers should take into account a variety of methods and integrate more communicative and interactive exercises in their classes. This can help to create a more engaging and motivating learning environment, which may ultimately lead to better language learning outcomes for students and overcome learning difficulties. As Mašić and Bećirović (2021) suggest, it is crucial to use a variety of teaching methods and resources to meet the diverse needs of language learners. For instance, Ahmed (2015) emphasises the significance of incorporating technology into language learning, arguing that it can help to create a more engaging and interactive learning experience. This could involve using online resources such as interactive exercises, videos, and games, as well as social media and other communication tools to connect learners with native speakers and other language learners. Innovative approaches such as those recommended by the respondent who suggested theatrical skits, film clubs, and poetry clubs could also be beneficial. Research has shown that incorporating creative activities into language learning can help engage learners and make the learning experience more enjoyable (Zhang, 2022; Ishag, Altmayer, Witruk, 2015)

Conclusion

Language learning is a process of acquiring knowledge and skills in a new language. It involves a study and practice of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and other language components to develop the ability to understand and communicate effectively in the target language. It is an important aspect of cross-cultural communication and can enhance personal, academic, and employment possibilities. Knowing at least one foreign language can be beneficial in today's world, as it opens opportunities for communication and understanding of people from different cultures and can improve job prospects in many fields. English and German are both widely spoken languages, and proficiency in these languages can be particularly advantageous for those pursuing international careers or studying abroad.

The main aim of the thesis is to investigate the perceptions of Slovak undergraduate students towards the English and German languages, including their preferences and any difficulties encountered during language learning. The methodology employed in the thesis involved a questionnaire survey, which gathered responses from both bachelor and master students in Slovakia. The data obtained from the survey supported the author's assumptions made in the theoretical part of the thesis.

The survey results reveal that the length of time spent studying a language is a significant factor influencing language preference, and perceived language difficulty correlates with the amount of time students allocate to learning it. It has also been showed that English is preferred over German by university students in Slovakia, primarily due to their prolonged exposure to English and its use in their daily lives. The students hold a more favourable view of English as they perceive it to be less challenging in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension difficulties. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the respondents' proficiency in German is significantly lower than their proficiency in English. This highlights the challenges that learners face in acquiring grammar and vocabulary in both languages. The findings underscore the importance of addressing these areas in language instruction and exploring innovative teaching methods to make the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable.

It is worth noting that while the study focuses on German and English, the findings are likely relevant to other languages as well. Vocabulary and grammar are critical components of language learning, and students may struggle with these aspects regardless of the language they are learning. By identifying and addressing these difficulties, language educators can help

students achieve their language learning goals and develop the skills they need to communicate effectively in the target language.

The thesis provides valuable insights into the language learning tendencies, techniques, and obstacles encountered by Slovak students while studying English and German. Traditional teaching methods should be integrated with more communicative and interactive exercises to create a more engaging and motivating learning environment, which could lead to better language learning outcomes. These findings have the potential to offer valuable guidance to language educators and curriculum designers to tailor language teaching methods and programmes that cater to the individualised requirements and struggles of learners. By doing so, language instruction can be optimised to enhance the learning experience and ensure that learners receive the support they need to achieve their language learning objectives.

The author aims to reflect on the present state of language learning in Slovakia. While the current situation is not dire, there is certainly scope for improvement. It is crucial to explore and promote innovative teaching methods that can attract and engage future generations to pursue language learning and prevent the abandonment of this valuable area of study. The application of new learning methods can enhance the overall learning process and enable students to integrate these methods into their own learning. Consequently, we can ensure that learners receive a high-quality education that equips them with the necessary linguistic skills to navigate today's globalised world.

Resumé

Učenie sa cudzích jazykov sa môže v súčasnej dobe plnej prekladačov a rozvíjajúcej sa umelej inteligencie zdať ako nepodstatné a neprospešné. Nemalo by sa však zabúdať na to, že učenie sa cudzích jazykov prináša mnoho výhod, ktoré nie sú obmedzené iba na schopnosť rozprávať v danom jazyku. Jazyky nám umožňujú učiť sa a spoznávať nové kultúry, dozvedieť sa o nových zvykoch a tradíciách prostredníctvom rozhovoru. Znalosť viacerých cudzích jazykov nám otvára nové príležitosti v profesijnej sfére a takisto pri cestovaní. Ovládaním cudzieho jazyka vyjadrujeme rešpekt voči inej kultúre a môžeme tým vytvoriť pozitívne medzikultúrne vzťahy. Hoci sa strojové preklady a strojové učenie postupne stávajú súčasťou našich životov, nič nemôže nahradiť schopnosť priamej a účinnej komunikácie s ľuďmi v ich vlastnom jazyku.

Predkladaná práca sa zaoberá problémami, ktorým čelia vysokoškolskí študenti na Slovensku pri štúdiu anglického a nemeckého jazyka. Cieľom práce je identifikovať problémy a nedostatky súvisiace s učením sa angličtiny a nemčiny u študentov a navrhnúť možné riešenia a zlepšenia v oblasti vyučovania jazykov, pričom autorka vychádza z poznatkov iných lingvistických štúdií. Práca sa usiluje o zosúladenie teoretických a praktických poznatkov s cieľom vyvodiť komplexný záver týkajúci sa danej témy.

Jadro práce pozostáva zo štyroch kapitol. Prvá kapitola sa zaoberá základnou terminológiou, kde sa podrobnejšie skúma učenie a osvojovanie cudzích jazykov. Obsahuje krátky prehľad teórií učenia sa jazykov, menovite behaviorizmus, innatizmus, konštruktivizmus a sociokultúrna teória a aj aspekty, ktoré ovplyvňujú učiaceho sa. K týmto faktorom patrí vek, pohlavie, vlohy alebo talent, motivácia, štýly učenia sa a aj jeho stratégie. Za najdôležitejšie faktory však autori považujú vlohy a motiváciu. Jazykové vlohy sú súčasťou inteligencie, ktorá ovplyvňuje rýchlosť a úsilie potrebné na naučenie sa nového jazyka. Motivácia a jej množstvo zas výrazne ovplyvňuje úsilie, ktoré študent vynakladá na rozvoj cudzieho jazyka. Často ide o rozhodujúci faktor pri určovaní úrovne jazyka. Posledná podkapitola tejto časti je venovaná sebahodnoteniu v oblasti učenia sa cudzích jazykov, pretože predstavuje dôležitú zložku, bez ktorej by nebolo možné vykonať výskum danej bakalárskej práce. Sebahodnotenie zohráva dôležitú úlohu pri meraní vedomostí alebo aj pokroku učiacich sa cudzieho jazyka.

Druhá kapitola sa detailne venuje angličtine a nemčine a snaží sa porovnať lingvistické aspekty oboch jazykov. Anglický jazyk patrí medzi najznámejšie jazyky a dokonca je

považovaný za globálny jazyk. Nemecký jazyk je najrozšírenejším jazykom v rámci Európskej únie a takisto používaný mnohými ľuďmi na celom svete. Nemecká morfológia však obsahuje niekoľko gramatických rozdielov v skloňovaní, ktoré v angličtine chýbajú. Medzi hlavné gramatické rozdiely patrí napríklad to, že angličtina má dva pády, zatiaľ čo nemčina štyri; nemčina rozlišuje pri slovesách indikatív a subjunktív, a angličtina má jeden tvar pre obe formy; nemecké sloveso nesie označenie pre osobu a číslo, kým v angličtine sa holý kmeň slovesa používa pre všetky osoby a čísla (s výnimkou tretej osoby jednotného čísla); angličtina má v minulom čase pre všetky osoby jeden tvar slovesa a v nemčine sa rozlišuje pri každej osobe iný tvar. Záver druhej kapitoly pozostáva z rôznych výskumov v oblasti učenia sa anglického alebo nemeckého jazyka. Viacerí autori sa zhodujú v tom, že učenie by sa malo prispôbiť modernejším vyučovacím technikám, t. j. učiteľia by mali popri využívaní tradičných metód, poskytovať študentom príležitosti na precvičovanie používania jazyka v reálnych situáciách, aby im tak pomohli získať väčšiu istotu a plynulosť v komunikácii.

Tretia kapitola opisuje ciele, metodológiu a metódy práce. Predstavuje spôsob výskumu, hlavné a čiastkové ciele, ktoré znejú nasledovne: „Aké sú motivácie a postoje študentov k štúdiu angličtiny a nemčiny? Aké ťažkosti a výzvy vnímajú pri učení sa angličtiny a nemčiny? Ktorý z týchto dvoch jazykov vnímajú slovenskí vysokoškoláci pri učení ako jednoduchší? Aké opatrenia možno prijať na zmiernenie ťažkostí pri učení a ako zlepšiť vnímanie menej obľúbeného jazyka?“. Na spracovanie praktickej časti bakalárskej práce bola zvolená forma výskumu prostredníctvom dotazníka. V kapitole sú dôkladne opísané otázky, obsiahnuté v dotazníku, ich význam a tiež samotní respondenti. Posledná podkapitola tretej časti zobrazuje rozbor dotazníka a odpovedí.

Štvrtú kapitolu tvorí analýza výsledkov a spracovaných dát z tretej kapitoly, porovnanie odpovedí a pohľadov na anglický a nemecký jazyk, a diskusia. V tejto kapitole boli zhromaždené informácie o preferenciách a obťažnostiach študentov súvisiacich s učením sa angličtiny a nemčiny. Výsledky ukázali, že väčšina respondentov študovala angličtinu dlhšie ako nemčinu, keďže angličtina sa na Slovensku vyučuje už od prvých ročníkov základných škôl. Z výsledkov dotazníka vyplýva, že angličtina je považovaná za jednoduchšiu ako nemčina a najväčší vplyv na preferenciu jazyka malo dlhšie štúdium angličtiny a vnímaná obťažnosť gramatiky. Študenti uviedli, že medzi najväčšie prekážky pri učení cudzích jazykov patrí nedostatočná slovná zásoba, zložitá gramatika a problémy s porozumením. Dotazník tiež ukázal,

že sebahodnotenie jazykových schopností nemusí zodpovedať objektívnemu meraniu schopností. Najčastejšie využívanými prostriedkami pri učení angličtiny boli autentické materiály, ako sú seriály, filmy a hudba, zatiaľ čo pri učení nemčiny sa študenti opierajú viac o knihy a slovníky.

Výsledky tejto práce môžu mať prínos pre porozumenie procesu učenia sa cudzích jazykov a predstavujú nové nápady na zlepšenie výučby cudzích jazykov. Zistenia ukázali, že vyučovacie metódy by sa mali prelínať s komunikatívnymi a interaktívnymi cvičeniami na vytvorenie väčšieho sebavedomia a motivácie, čo by mohlo viesť k lepším výsledkom v jazykovom učení. Vzdelávacie programy by mohli byť viac prispôsobené individuálnym požiadavkám a potrebám študentov, aby sa zabezpečilo, že získajú potrebné jazykové zručnosti.

Znalosť aspoň jedného cudzieho jazyka je prospešná, pretože otvára možnosti komunikácie a porozumenia s ľuďmi z rôznych kultúr a môže človeku prilepšiť v pracovnej oblasti. Angličtina a nemčina sú obidva široko hovorené jazyky a ovládanie týchto jazykov je obzvlášť užitočné pre tých, ktorí sa zaujímajú o kariéru alebo štúdium v zahraničí.

Bibliography

AHMED, Shameem. Attitudes towards English Language Learning among EFL Learners at UMSKAL. In *Journal of Education and Practice*. Nairobi : CARI Journals USA LLC, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 8, pp. 6-16. ISSN 2222-1735.

BARDEL, Camilla – FALK, Ylva. The Role of the Second Language in Third Language Acquisition : the Case of Germanic Syntax. In *Second Language Research : Academic Journal in the Field of Linguistics*. Maryland : University of Maryland, 2007, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 459-484. ISBN 978-1-847-69270-3.

CHOMSKY, Noam. *Syntactic Structures*. 2nd Edition. Berlin, New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 2002. 117 p. ISBN 3-11-017279-8.

COHEN, Andrew, D. – DÖRNYEI, Zoltán. Focus on the Language Learner : Styles, Strategies and Motivation. In *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics : Book with overview of Applied Linguistics*. London : Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2010, pp. 161-178. ISBN 978-0-340-98447-5.

CRYSTAL, David. *English as a Global Language*. 2nd Edition. University of Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003. 212 p. ISBN 978-0-521-53032-3.

DANANSOORIYA, Malpathika. *Learning Difficulties Encountered in Learning German as a Foreign Language at the Universities in Sri Lanka*. University of Kelaniya, Faculty of Graduate Studies : Research Symposium – 2010, 2010.

DÖRNEY, Zoltán – KUBANYIOVA, Magdalena. *Motivating Learners, Motivating Teachers : Building Vision in the language classroom*. University of Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014. 184 p. ISBN 978-1-107-60664-7.

DRBSEH, Majed, M. H. Motivation and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language: a study of the Middle East Arab University students at Leeds University in UK. In *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*. New Delhi : IJSRP Inc., 2015, Vol. 5, No. 12, pp. 236-257. ISSN 2250-3153.

ELLIS, Rod. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Shanghai : Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1999. 824 p. ISBN 7-81046-579-1.

ELLIS, Rod. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition : Oxford Applied Linguistics*. 2nd Edition. University of Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2015, 376 p. ISBN 978-0194422048.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *Education and Training Monitor 2019 : Slovakia* [online]. In *Education and Training Monitor 2019 : Analysis of education and training systems over EU*. Luxembourg : Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, Vol. 2, pp. 1-12. [accessed on 2023-04-30]. ISSN 2466-9997. Retrieved from: https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-slovakia_en.pdf

FAGAN, Sarah, M. G. *German : A Linguistic Introduction*. University of Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2009. 332 p. ISBN 978-0521618038.

GARDNER, R. C. *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning : The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London : Edward Arnold Ltd, 1985. 208 p. ISBN 0-7131-6425-5.

HAWKINS, John, A. *A Comparative Typology of English and German : Unifying the Contrasts*. Abingdon : Routledge, 2015. 266 p. ISBN 978-1-138-91917-4.

HUDDLESTON, Rodney – PULLUM, Geoffrey, K. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. University of Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2002. 1860. ISBN 978-0-521-43146-0.

ISHAG, Adil – ALTMAYER, Claus – WITRUK, Evelin. *A Comparative Self-Assessment of Difficulty in Learning English and German among Sudanese Students* [online]. In *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*. Warsaw : Sciendo, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 32-38. [accessed on 2023-04-27]. ISSN 1339-4584. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279220802_A_comparative_self-assessment_of_difficulty_in_learning_English_and_German_among_Sudanese_students

JAMRUS, Mohd, H. M. – RAZALI, Abu, B. Using Self-Assessment as a Tool for English Language Learning. In *English Language Teaching : Academic Journal*. Toronto : Canadian Center of Science and Education, 2019, Vol. 12, No. 11, pp. 64-73. ISSN 1916-4742.

KÖNIG, Ekkehard – GAST, Volker. *Understanding English-German Contrasts*. 4th Edition. Berlin : Schmidt Erich Verlag, 2018. 369 p. ISBN 978-3503181421.

KRASHEN, Stephen. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. California : University of Southern California, 1982. 202 p. ISBN 0-08-028628-3. Clevedon : Multilingual Matters, 2001, pp. 21-41. ISBN 978-1853595509.

LIGHTBOWN, Patsy – SPADA, Nina. *How Languages are Learned*. 4th Edition. University of Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013. 256 p. ISBN 978-0-19-454126-8.

MACKEY, Alison – GASS, Susan, M. *Second Language Research : Methodology and Design*. Mahwah : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. 405 p. ISBN 0-8058-5602-1.

MAŠIĆ, Adela – BEĆIROVIĆ, Senad. Attitudes Towards Learning English as a Foreign Language. In *JoLIE : The Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education*. Alba Iulia : 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, 2021, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 77-98. ISSN 2065 – 6599.

MOHAMAD NOR, Norbahira – RASHID, Ab, Radzuwan. A review of theoretical perspectives on language learning and acquisition. In *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*. Bangkok : Kasetsart University and Development Institute, 2018, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 161-167. ISSN 2452-3151.

NOELS, Kimberly et al. Why Are You Learning a Second Language? : Motivational Orientations and Self-Determination. In *Language Learning : Journal of Research in Language Studies*. University of Michigan : Wiley-Blackwell, 2003, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 33-64. ISSN 0023-8333.

OXFORD, Rebecca, L. *Language Learning Strategies : What Every Teacher Should Know*. Boston : Heinle ELT, 1990. 342 p. ISBN 978-0838428627.

PIAGET, Jean. *The origins of intelligence in children*. 2nd Edition. New York : W.W. Norton, 1963. 419 p. ISBN 9780393002027.

SANDERS, Ruth. *German : Biography of a Language*. University of Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2010. 248 p. ISBN 978-0195388459.

SCHÜTZ, Ricardo. Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition [online]. In *English made in Brazil : Website of Studies and Discussion Forum about the Teaching of English in Brazil*. Santa Cruz do Sul : English made in Brazil, 1998. [accessed on 2023-03-14]. Retrieved from: <https://www.sk.com.br/sk-krash-english.html>

SKINNER, Burrhus, Frederic. *Verbal Behavior*. Connecticut : Martino Fine Books, 2015, 492 p. ISBN 978-1614278658.

TANIR, Ahmet. Learning Difficulties in German as a Third Language Experienced by Turkish Undergraduate Students. In *International Education Studies : An International Journal*. oronto : Canadian Center of Science and Education, 2020, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 131-145. ISSN 1913-9020.

VYGOTSKY, Lev, Semenovich. *Mind in Society : The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1978. 159 p. ISBN 978-0674576292.

WILLIAMS, Sarah – HAMMARBERG, Björn. Language switches in L3 production : Implications for a Polyglot Speaking Model. In *Applied Linguistics : Journal with Scholarly Discourses, Theories, and Research Methods in the Field of Linguistic*. University of Oxford : Oxford Academic, 1998, Vol. 19, No.1, pp. 295-333. ISSN 0142-6001.

YULE, George. *The Study of Language*. 7th Edition. University of Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2020. 420 p. ISBN 978-1-108-73070-9.

ZAFAR, Shahila – MEENAKSHI, Devi, K. Individual Learner Differences and Second Language Acquisition : A Review. In *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. Finland : Academy Publisher, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 639-646. ISSN 1798-4769.

ZHANG, Lequn. Undergraduate German as a second foreign language learning experience and improvement strategies. In *Science Insights Education Frontiers : Professional Journal in Education*. San Rafael : Insights Publisher, 2020, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 1719-1728. ISSN 2644-058X.

ZHAO, Lili. The Influence The Influence of Learners' Motivation and Attitudes on Second Language Teaching. In *Theory and Practice in Language Studies : International Journal in the Field of Language Studies*. London : Academy Publication, 2015, Vol. 5, No. 11, pp. 2333-2339. ISSN 1799-2591.

ZIMMERMAN, Barry, J. Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement : An Overview. In *Educational Psychologist : Journal with Educational Concepts, Practices, Teaching Methods*. Abingdon : Taylor & Francis, 1990, Vol. 25, No. 1, ISSN: 0046-1520.