Закарпатський угорський інститут ім. Ференца Ракоці II

Кафедра філології

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Кваліфікаційна робота

ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ТРУДНОЩІВ ЗАСВОЄННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ

ГЕЙЧЕ АНГЕЛИ- КАРОЛІНИ ПАВЛІВНИ

Студентки 4-го курсу

Освітня програма 014 Середня освіта (мова і література (англійська))
Ступінь вищої освіти: бакалавр

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Department of Philology

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Bachelor's Thesis

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ЗМІСТ

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing trend in Europe and around the world towards multilingualism, which can be attributed to the increased interconnectedness of nations and the changing attitudes of people. However, learning a foreign language is often a challenging process, even for those who are already bilingual or multilingual. It is therefore crucial to explore the various difficulties and obstacles that learners of English as a foreign language may face during the learning process, as well as investigate why some individuals may not even attempt to learn a foreign language.

The primary aims of this thesis are to provide a comparative analysis of the typical difficulties faced by learners of English as a foreign language and to explore solutions and strategies that professionals can employ to help learners overcome these challenges. Furthermore, it aims to be a valuable resource for future students of linguistics and second language acquisition.

The object of this research is the difficulties and obstacles learners face in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

The subject of this study is a comparison of difficulties experienced by EFL learners in the Carpathian basin and Europe.

The primary tasks of this study include conducting a comprehensive analysis of the common obstacles encountered by learners of English as a foreign language, investigating effective solutions and strategies that language professionals can employ to assist learners in overcoming these difficulties, and examining the reasons why some people may choose not to learn a foreign language. Additionally, the research seeks to evaluate the influence of motivation, learning styles, and teaching techniques on language acquisition and to investigate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities.

In addition to examining the common barriers that slow down or hinder the development of language proficiency, this thesis delves into research on the impact of motivation, learning styles, and teaching methods on language learning, as well as the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. The study focuses initially on

people living in the Carpathian Basin, with a later expansion to encompass the entire European Union.

To achieve these aims, this study utilizes exploratory and mixed methods research, drawing on both primary and secondary data. The third chapter presents the results of a questionnaire exploring the experiences of Hungarian residents of the Carpathian Basin in relation to foreign language learning, while the fourth chapter analyses the results of a second questionnaire examining the experiences of EU citizens learning English as a foreign language.

Overall, the theoretical value of this research lies in its comprehensive review of relevant literature and its analysis of the survey results, which can contribute to a better understanding of language acquisition and second language learning. The practical value of this research lies in its exploration of solutions and strategies that professionals can employ to help learners overcome difficulties and obstacles in learning English as a foreign language, leading to more effective teaching practices and improved learning outcomes. Additionally, this research can provide learners with a sense of community and a better understanding of the challenges they face, thereby enhancing their motivation to learn a foreign language. Furthermore, this paper aims to be a valuable resource for future students of linguistics and second language acquisition.

PART I. POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES AND OBSTACLES IN THE PROCESS OF FLA

In the following few paragraphs, a detailed description of the commonly experienced difficulties while learning a second or foreign language will be provided – based on previous research and literature. A short examination of the relationship between personality and success in language acquisition and the English language's place in terms of difficulty follows.

1.1. Most common difficulties experienced by language learners

Learning a foreign language can be challenging, and learners may face a variety of difficulties. Some of the most frequent difficulties include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary acquisition, and cultural differences.

Pronunciation can be particularly challenging for learners, as it involves mastering the sounds and intonation patterns of a new language (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Grammar can also be difficult, as it often involves learning new structures and rules that are different from those in the learner's native language (Ellis, 2006).

Vocabulary acquisition is another common difficulty, as learners need to learn and remember a large number of new words and their meanings (Nation, 2001). Cultural differences can also present challenges, as learners need to understand the cultural context in which the language is spoken in order to communicate effectively (Kramsch, 1993).

In the following four sub-sections below, these learning obstacles are specified and categorized by language skills, narrowed down to English as a second language alone.

1.1.1. Writing

Learners may face an infinite number of obstacles when learning how to use their writing skills effectively and confidently, not to mention, correctly.

Difficulties in writing may root in various aspects of EFL - for example, grammar, word use, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, the use of fixed expressions.

Based on the findings of numerous researchers, the most commonly realized and experienced grammar difficulties are the following:

- o distinguishing times and tenses, choosing the correct one based on the context *(especially in the case of the more "complex" tenses, such as present perfect continuous, or future perfect continuous)*

- o the use of articles, prepositions *(putting "a" instead of "the", or "at" instead of "in", etc.)*

- o pronoun disagreement *("her" instead of "him", "their" instead of "them", etc.)*

- o switching up similarly written words *("except" and "accept")*

- o apostrophe usage *("it's" and "its", "boys'" and "boy's")*

Punctuation mistakes mostly appear in the form of misplaced commas, not indicating where a clause ends, and where another one starts, incorrect use of hyphens and colons.

According to Fanning (2018), the most often observed spelling mistakes made by non-native English speakers are as follows:

- o spelling silent consonants *(character, environment, bomb)*

- o confusing similarly written words *(principle – principal, weather - whether)*

- o mistaking the order of seemingly unusual letter sequences *(design, foreign, theatre)*

- o confusing a word's writing with a similar word from one's native language *(international - internazionale)*

The use of **idioms, fixed expressions** (slang, figurative speech) is reportedly one of the hardest skills to acquire, since there are so many phrases, sometimes several meaning to one, depending on where a person uses it, and the list is constantly growing. Some of the most interesting fixed expressions that cause trouble for non-native speakers are the following:

- o piece of cake *(very easy, not problematic)*

- o sounds like a broken record *(someone keeps repeating something)*

- o spill the beans / spill the tea *(tell the truth, just say it)*

- don't cry over spilled condiments *(don't be upset about something you can't change)*

- it's downhill from there, went downhill *(the situation just got worse and worse)*

- don't put all your eggs in one basket *(don't rely on only one opportunity)*

Mistakes made in writing can be explained with several possible reasons, depending on the learner's background, they most often come mixed. These may be the lack of practice / short period of learning time (being a beginner in ESL), not having enough time to comfortably think about the different options to describe something (e.g. writing a test with a timeframe), feeling discouraged, unmotivated.

1.1.2. Reading

Reading is said to be one of the most effective methods to improve one's vocabulary, and fluency as well. (Lane, 1999) Difficulties in reading, and understanding the read information most commonly root in the following:

- *vocabulary* gaps (not having a sufficient collection of known words, thus, not understanding the text – for academic purposes, the average minimum vocabulary size should be between 5000 and 10000 words)

- *grammatical deficits* (not recognizing tenses. confusing syntax)

- *the lack of sufficient background knowledge related to the text* (one's interpretation of a given text is dependent on their previous knowledge as well)

- *the text not matching the learner's proficiency, and/or intelligence level* (a macroeconomic study will most probably not be understood by a fifth-grader, or a beginner learner who's at the stage of learning everyday expressions).

1.1.3. Listening

Listening problems, more specifically, not understanding the heard information, do not depend on the learner's developmental level alone, there are many factors that have an impact on the success of acquiring listening skills. The *material to which the learners listen to* greatly affect the level and quality of understanding. Furthermore, problems may arise from the wide

range of *accents and pronunciation variations* that exist in the language, *vocabulary deficiencies, cultural differences* (not having previous background on the topic they're listening to). (Bano, 2016) The *speed of the conversation* can never be controlled by the learners, and talking too fast may cause difficulties in understanding as well. (Haddad, 2016)

1.1.4. Speaking

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills to acquire for EFL learners. (Ur, 1999)

Mistakes made in speech more often than not, are in connection with problems of other skills – grammar and vocabulary, which were discussed previously above. Lack of knowledge in grammar, and gaps in vocabulary present themselves in speech as well.

Based on Tran and Dang's research carried out about speaking difficulties in 2019, these difficulties encountered in speaking, can be categorized into four categories:

- affective difficulties
    - present themselves as fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, lack of enthusiasm
- social difficulties
    - not being surrounded by an English-speaking community, not finding the correct, most suitable way to speak one's mind in the specific situation
    - lack of opportunities to practice the language
- instructional difficulties
    - unhelpful relationship between the learner and their instructor / teacher, lack of synergy
- linguistic difficulties
    - lack of English consciousness, grammatical knowledge, gaps in language collection

(Tran & Dang, 2019)

1.2. Personality and success, the role of anxiety

In the past few decades, the question of whether there's a correlation between one's personality and their success in language learning has received some popularity, many researchers took the time to dig deep into the roots of this topic. Linguists and psychologists have yet to arrive at an agreement in regards with this problem, because just as there have been some studies that were able to show a significant correlation between personality traits (and MBTI-types) and intelligence, thus academic success, there were also several cases where no correlation was found between these two. ((Gagne & St Pere, 2001, Singh, & Varma, 1995)

However, there are certain character traits, which are useful to have, if one wants to successfully learn a new language. According to OxfordHouse (2018), some of these are as it follows:

- independency, being able to find one's own way
- good organizational skills, being able to keep track of one's self-development
- not being afraid to fail and making mistakes
- good communication skills, being able to find their way around not having a specific word to use
- perseverance, ambition, easy-going attitude

The United Kingdom's Mental Health Foundation describes **anxiety** as *"a feeling of unease, worry or fear"*. The phrase "anxiety" has become quite commonly used in day-to-day life, especially in the 2020s. The reason behind this is that even though feeling anxious at times has always been completely normal, human even, it's in the past few years that society's becoming more open to talk about mental health issues, and even these normal human feelings like anxiety and fear, without presenting them as weaknesses and as shameful traits.

The common symptoms of anxiety are: feeling on edge, slight panic, feeling irritable, having difficulties focusing, concentrating, nausea, faster heartbeat. Anxiety affects people's behaviour, their mind and thoughts, thus, how they see the world around them, their outlook on life (Garner & Möhler, 2009) – how easily they can acquire language skills as well.

There's a term that refers specifically for the uneasy feeling that appears during some phases of language acquisition – **language anxiety.** Language anxiety influences, negatively affects involvement and progress. Dörnyei states that language anxiety is a psychological factor that has a role in determining the level of success in the language acquisition process. (Dörnyei, 2005)

One of the major difficulties that learners face when developing speaking skills in English is anxiety and fear. (Mousavi & Khosravizadeh, 2018) Learners may feel nervous or self-conscious about speaking in front of others, especially if they are not confident in their English language abilities.

Horwitz et al. declares the following components of language anxiety:

- the fear of communicating with people ("communication apprehension") – might show itself as shyness, reserved personality
- the fear of negative evaluation, feedback, not fulfilling expectations
- the fear of academic valuation

(Horwitz et al., 1986)

Research has shown that language anxiety can have negative effects on language learning outcomes, including reduced motivation, decreased willingness to communicate, and lower self-efficacy (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992).

We can also distinguish different types of anxiety based on how or when they appear, and what their duration is in the learning process. Some of these are: *proficiency-related anxiety* (not completing a test or assessment as well as one would've expected, realizing mid-conversation how many things we don't understand, etc.), *contextual anxiety* (negative emotions related to the momentary learning situation), furthermore, *social* (the fear of social situations, pressure from social groups, family, friends) and *psychological* (general, clinical) anxiety greatly influence learners as well (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021)

1.3. The English language's place in terms of difficulty

It is important to note that the difficulty of learning English, or any language for that matter, can vary greatly depending on one's native language. For example, a native speaker of a Romance language like Spanish or French may find it easier to learn English due to

similarities in vocabulary and grammar, while a native speaker of a tonal language like Mandarin or Thai may struggle with the English phonetic system.

When it comes to comparing the difficulty of learning different languages, there are many factors to consider. The Foreign Service Institute categorizes languages into four categories based on how long it takes a native English speaker to achieve general professional proficiency. Category I languages like Spanish and French take an estimated 575-600 hours of study, while Category IV languages like Arabic and Mandarin take an estimated 2,200 hours or more. (Foreign Service Institute, n.d.)

The FSI of the US Department of State categorizes English as a Category III language, meaning it takes an estimated 600-750 hours of study to achieve general professional proficiency. Additionally, the British Council ranks English as the third most difficult language for non-native speakers, behind only Arabic and Mandarin.   (British Council, 2018)

The most difficult languages to acquire for Hungarian speakers:

- Greek
- Icelandic
- Estonian
- Thai
- Arabic

English is widely acknowledged as one of the most challenging languages to learn. To further understand this notion, a research study was conducted by the online journal/blog, English Proficiency.

One of the primary reasons cited for English being a difficult language to master is the abundance of rules and exceptions that make it complex. In addition, there can be confusion among different dialects of English, where someone may be fluent in British English but struggle to comprehend basic phrases in American English. This phenomenon is not uncommon, even for native English speakers, and it's particularly prevalent among non-native learners. (Trudgill & Haynie, 2002)

According to English Proficiency's study, there are several factors that contribute to the perception that English is a particularly challenging language to acquire. Some of them are as follows:

- not living in an English-speaker community, less exposure to the language

- not finding the learning methods individually suitable for the learner

- English has a mixed origin (has evolved and been influenced a lot)

- different dialects existing

- spelling rules – hand-in-hand with dialects

- complicated tenses

- logical order of words changing depending on the context

1.4. Learning disabilities and FLA

Students with learning disabilities often experience foreign language learning difficulties, given that deficiencies make their learning tough in their native language as well. In the last few decades, the term "foreign language learning disability" have been investigated quite thoroughly – it indicates that there are some people who just are not able to be successful in language learning. In 2006, psychologist Richard L. Sparks carried out research about this explicit "disability" and stated that all learners can reach success in language learning, provided the right resources and methods. (Banks, T., 2008)

There is evidence to suggest that individuals with learning disabilities may face unique challenges when learning a second language. Research has shown that learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and specific language impairment (SLI) can impact various aspects of second language acquisition (SLA), including grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing.

For example, individuals with dyslexia may struggle with phonological processing, which can make it difficult to distinguish between sounds and identify the sounds of new words in the second language (Schwartz, Kroll, & Diaz, 2007). Similarly, individuals with ADHD may have difficulty sustaining attention, which can affect their ability to focus on language input and practice language production (Knoop-van Campen, Segers, & Verhoeven, 2012).

Above-mentioned research on learning disabilities and teaching methods resulted in finding the most common reasons behind students facing difficulties in the process of learning a foreign language:

- difficulties stemming in their native language
- students unable to find their preferred learning style, determine what kind of strategies and techniques to use to successfully acquire skills
- low self-esteem, negative attitude, low motivation level
- anxiety

Banks (2008), in her research about learning disabilities, states that these difficulties could be eliminated by choosing the right teaching methodologies, curriculum and assessment, as these all contribute to students' success. Lesson plans and curriculum should be based on what the individual learners are needed.

PART II. CHALLENGES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

2.1. Methodology

I gathered primary data by compiling a questionnaire on my research topic specifically for Hungarian speaking people living in Hungary and Transcarpathia, but eventually the survey reached people from other parts of the Carpathian Basin. The name that I published my questionnaire with was *"Idegennyelv-tanulás - motiváló faktorok, akadályok és sikerek"*, which translates to *"Foreign language learning – motivating factors, obstacles and success"*.

This part of my research falls into the qualitative, exploratory category. 173 people started the questionnaire – however, after processing and cleaning the data, some of the answers turned out to be logically inconsistent (this can happen because of the fact that there are some questions which are mutually exclusive).

At first, I made sure every participant knew about the aims of the questionnaire, for what purpose their data is collected, and how that will be processed, by putting a description at the very beginning of it. It should be mentioned that the questions did not only refer to the English language alone, but to foreign language acquisition in general (which is one of the reasons why I designed it in Hungarian). However, several people marked English as the only foreign language they learnt, which is useful in terms of analysing and generalizing the data for the English language alone.

At the very beginning of the survey, participants were asked to state their generation, and mark whether they ever learnt a foreign language. Those who put "no" were faced with only one question, which was "What was the reason You never learnt any languages besides your mother tongue?" with some predefined options laid out – these were selected based on my previous experience alone, and the results confirmed that these were the most common reasons to not leaning a foreign language. The rest of the questions were only relevant to those who answered "yes".

With the following questions I aimed to discover a pattern in the specifics of foreign language acquisition amongst the regions of the Carpathian Basin. Participants were required to say which languages they learnt and for what reason if they had one, what motivated them the most, what kind of learning methods they tried for self-development, what part of the

learning process they found the most difficult, whether they have reached a professional level in any of those languages, and what their plans were for the future.

The questionnaire was 100% anonymous, did not require any personal data that could be used to identify a participant, these were not needed for the results to be relevant to the topic. The sample of course could not be certainly representative, since the last known number of Hungarian speaking people in the Carpathian Basin is 11,7 million, unfortunately I was in no position to use resources and channels big enough for the sample to be representative.
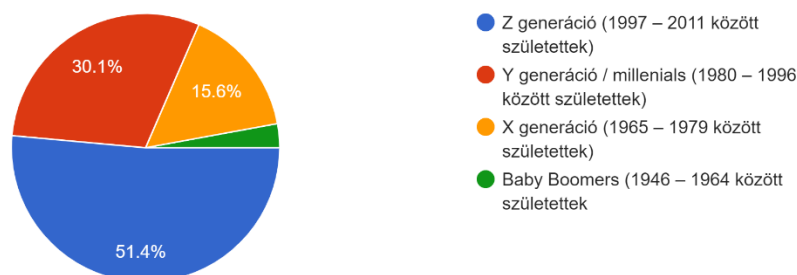
2.2. Results and Discussion

*Question 1. **Which generation do you belong to? – multiple choice***

Possible answers: generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2011), generation Y / millennials (those born between 1980 and 1996), generation X (born between 1965 and 1979) and Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964).

51,4 % of the participants are part of Gen Z (those born between 1997 - 2011). The second largest ratio is of Gen Y (those born between 1980 - 1996) – from this, we can conclude that the answers will mostly refer to the current school system's regulations regarding language learning.

Melyik generációt képviseli?
173 responses

- Z generáció (1997 – 2011 között születettek)
- Y generáció / millenials (1980 – 1996 között születettek)
- X generáció (1965 – 1979 között születettek)
- Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964 között születettek

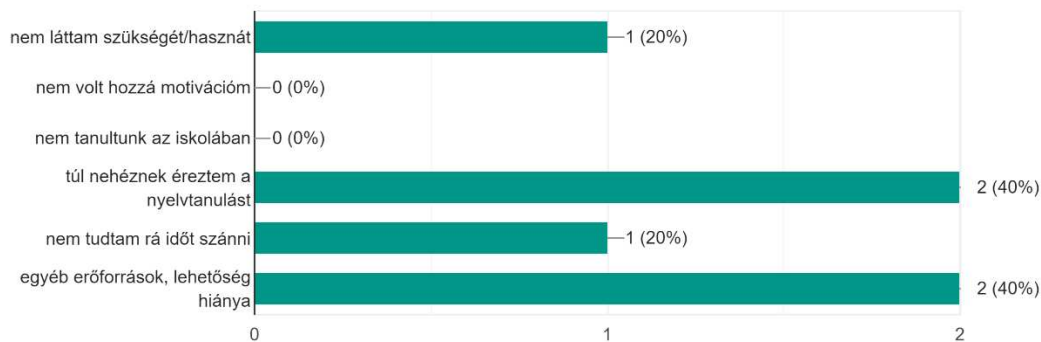*Question 2. **Did you learn any foreign languages? – yes/no***

100% of the participants stated that they learnt another language besides their mother tongue, but 3% of them still answered the question about why they did not learn any foreign languages, which, to my interpretation, could point to the possibility that they did learn a foreign language, and wanted to start another, but chose not to – these are the logically inconsistent answers that make it more difficult to analyse the questionnaire.

Question 3. For those who answered "no" to the previous question: **Why did you not start learning a foreign language? – multiple choice**

Possible answers: "I did not see the need to", "I had no motivation", "We did not learn a foreign language in school", "Learning a foreign language is too difficult for me", "I had no time", "The lack of other resources or opportunities".

The most popular reasons behind the participants not learning any/any more foreign languages were because they felt like it would be too difficult, and the lack of resources and opportunity. The other two most common options were "I did not see the need or use of learning" and "I could not make time for it".

Ha az előző kérdésre a válasza "nem" volt, miért nem tanult idegen nyelvet?
5 responses

nem láttam szükségét/hasznát	1 (20%)
nem volt hozzá motivációm	0 (0%)
nem tanultunk az iskolában	0 (0%)
túl nehéznek éreztem a nyelvtanulást	2 (40%)
nem tudtam rá időt szánni	1 (20%)
egyéb erőforrások, lehetőség hiánya	2 (40%)

Questions only relevant to those who learnt at least one language besides their native:

Question 4. **What languages did you learn besides your mother tongue? – multiple choice**

Possible answers: English, Ukrainian, Russian, German, French, Spanish, Italian, other

80.3 % of participants answered with English, which is not too surprising, neither are the second and third most chosen ones (66.5% and 37.6%), Ukrainian and German, since the

education system of the countries surrounding (and including) Hungary requires pupils to study either English or German as a foreign language, and schools in Ukraine make it mandatory to study Ukrainian.

Milyen nyelve(ke)t tanult az anyanyelvén kívül?
173 responses
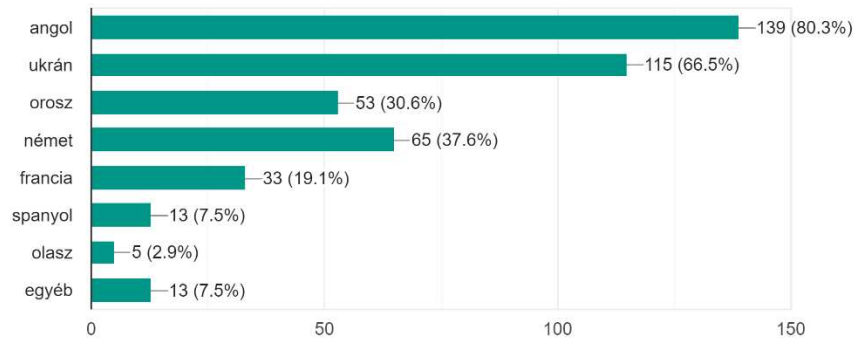
*Question 5. **Are any of the languages mentioned above outside of the scope of the mandatory school material? – yes/no***

This question aimed to find out whether or not people learn from their own will, and not only because they are obligated to (e.g. the education system expects them to) – 38% of participants answered that they learnt one or several foreign languages that the mandatory school material did not include.

Szerepel-e olyan nyelv ezek között, amit nem a kötelező iskolai tananyag részeként tanult, hanem önszántából?
171 responses
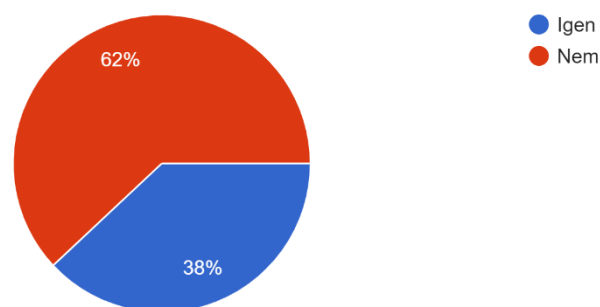
*Questions 6 - 7. **At what age did you start learning a language that wasn't part of the mandatory school material? What factors did you base your decision on? – short answer and multiple choice***

These two questions aimed to find out when and why people started to learn a language out of their own will (or, possibly, for a reason other than the school system's requirement). The ages differ significantly, but the answers that got chosen the most are the following: 16 years old (10%), 12 and 20 years old (8.6%), 14, 17 and 18 years old (7.1%). Most of these numbers indicate secondary school age, which could draw the conclusion that people either get more curious in that time of their life or start seeing the advantages of knowing more languages clearer.

Hány évesen kezdett el először olyan idegen nyelvet tanulni, ami nem szerepelt az iskolai kötelező tananyagban?
70 responses
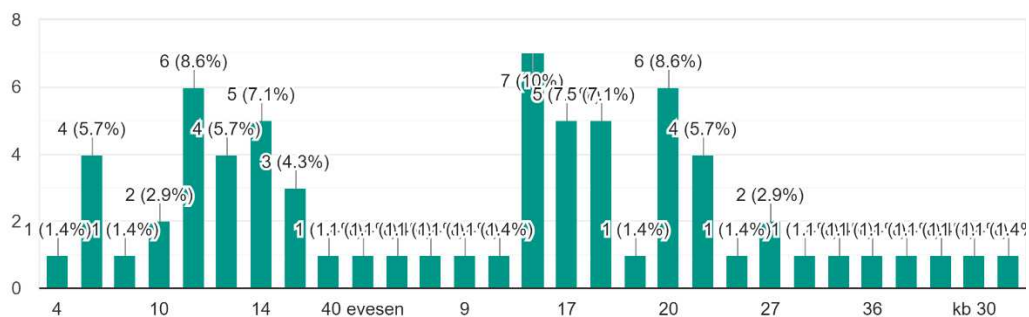
Regarding the aspects of their decision, 58.3% of respondents chose "will it be of use in the future?". Results show that many people learnt a foreign language because they needed to for some reason, which was not the education system. The origin of the language, its language family was also a popular factor amongst respondents (which is quite understandable, most people find it easy to learn languages from the same family, since they always have similarities regarding their alphabet, pronunciation, and grammar as well).

Milyen szempontok alapján választotta ki ez(eke)t a nyelv(ek)et?
84 responses
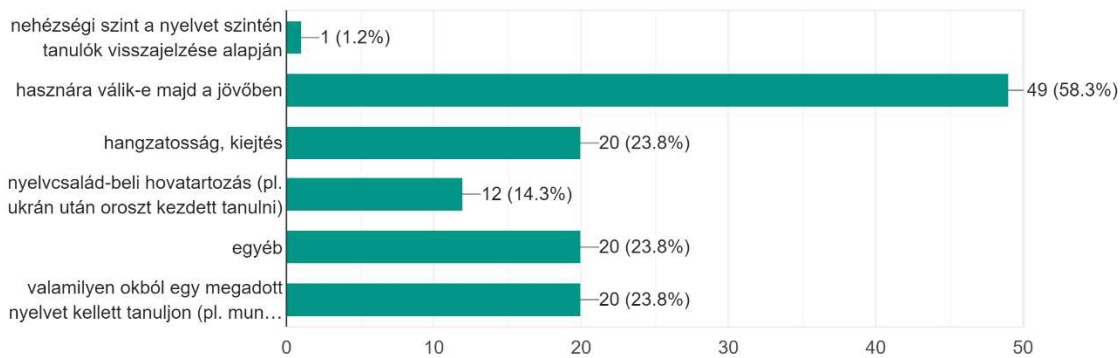
Possible answers: "level of difficulty based on learners' feedback", "whether or not it will be of use for me in the future", "pronunciation, phonetics", "connections in language family", "for a specific reason – to fill a vacancy, for example", "other".

Question 8. **What motivated you to start learning a language? – multiple choice**

The question speaks for itself – I wanted to display what kind of motivations language learners feel before they start the process – or even during -, why do they keep up with their development? The most common answer was "I needed to learn that language in connection with my studies" (59% of respondents), all the other options got chosen with very similar ratios – "out of my own ambitions", "it was a requirement at my workplace", "communication with relatives, acquaintances", "stayed abroad for a while/moved abroad".

Mi motiválta arra, hogy elkezdjen egy vagy több idegen nyelvet tanulni?
146 responses
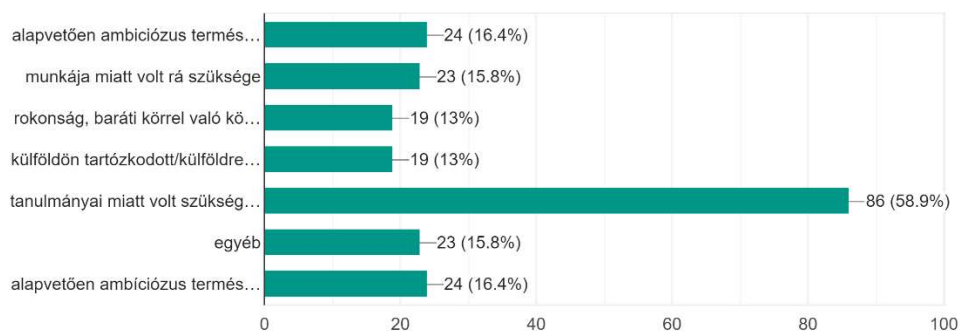
The answers are not at all surprising, considering the fact that most of the Hungarian higher educational institutions require, or greatly appreciate (meaning: plus points to the

application) language exams and foreign language school-leaving exams of higher level. Moreover, in the past decade, all of these universities and colleges made it mandatory for students to take at least one successful language exam by the end of their studies (before they get their BA/BSc level diploma).

Although knowing any foreign languages has always been advantageous when it came to job hunting, it is slowly but steadily becoming a basic requirement coming from employers – no wonder this was also among the three most common answers in the questionnaire. As I've highlighted several times before, acquiring language skills that aren't our native, is not a small achievement by any means. There are personality traits which you are simply required to have even to start the learning process, and many more get developed during. These are, for example: cultural awareness, open-mindedness, curiosity, perseverance, good (and continuously improving) communication skills, organization skills (OxfordHouse, 2018). These qualities stand out to employers and HR representatives, leading to preferring candidates with these skills and traits, furthermore, those employees who got hired without knowing any foreign languages, are often obligated to take courses, and/or learn a foreign language by themselves. Besides all these positive character traits coming with learning a foreign language, globalization and internationalization is also one of the reasons workplaces require employees to acquire at least one foreign language.

Question 9. ***Which skills did you feel the most difficult to acquire? – multiple choice***

Possible answers: "Grammar and vocabulary", "Speaking", "Reading, understanding the written text", "Listening, understanding the heard language", "None of them".

Not at all surprisingly, speaking skills got most of the votes with 38%. Coming up with 34% - grammar and vocabulary. Only a small number of respondents chose the option reading (less than 4%).

Speaking skills are most easily developed and improved by actually practicing live speech, interacting in the given language. As I mentioned previously in the first chapter of my work, the fear of failure and making mistakes, anxiety, and the lack of opportunity to talk to native speakers all make it more difficult to improve one's pronunciation and speaking skills. These are most probably present in the participants' case as well.

Melyik készség fejlesztését érezte a legnehezebbnek általában?
165 responses

- szókincs és nyelvtan
- beszédkészség
- olvasás utáni értés
- hallás utáni értés
- egyik sem okozott gondot
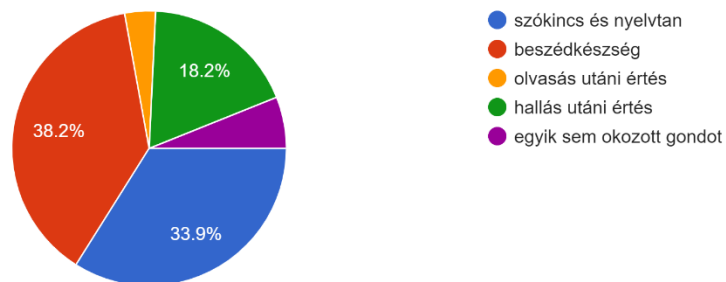
Question 10. **Which of these learning methods listed below have you tried for self-development? – multiple choice**

Possible answers: "watching movies or shows in a foreign language with subtitles", "watching movies or shows in a foreign language without subtitles", "reading literature in the given language", "conversing with native speakers", "correspondence, emailing in the given language", "language courses", "Duolingo and similar language learning apps", "listening to podcasts", "none of the above".

As I wrote about the different methods that may help the foreign language learning process, I also asked the participants of the survey about these. A quite big ratio of respondents believe watching TV shows and movies in the language to be helpful (>60%), while listening to podcasts did not seem to be recognized as a commonly used learning method (12%).

The language learning app Duolingo is also quite popular based on the responses – no wonder, there are 100 million users worldwide, which include 2 million Hungarians. (Duolingo's official website, 2022)

Az alább említett módszerek közül melyiket próbálta a nyelvtanulás elősegítése céljával?
164 responses
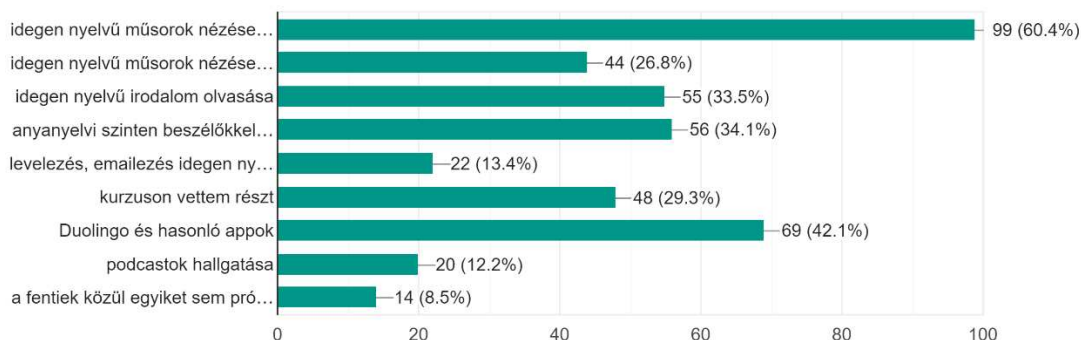
Reading foreign literature, conversing with native speakers and language courses also got chosen by at least 30% of the respondents.

The following questions focused on personal goals regarding language learning - both set and reached, and future ones.

Question 11. **Have you reached full professional proficiency in any of the foreign languages you learnt? – yes/no**

68.6% of the respondents put "no", as in they are yet to reach the professional level, while the rest (31.4%) put "yes".

Az Ön által tanult idegen nyelvek közül sikerült-e elérnie valamelyikből a felsőfokon beszélő szintet?
169 responses
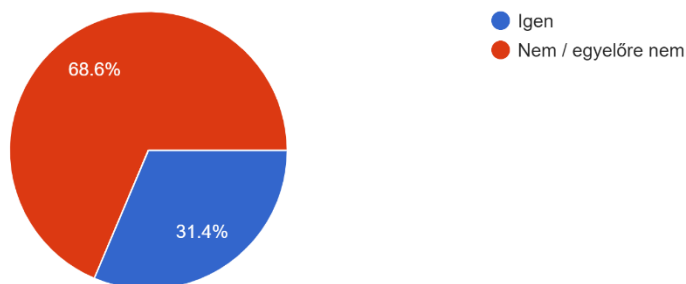
Question 12. **What are your plans for the future regarding language learning? – multiple choice**

Possible answers: "I would like to learn more languages", "I would like to develop the things I have learned so far", "I would like to take a language exam", "I would not like to progress with language learning significantly".

Would the respondent like to learn more languages, improve their skills in the current ones, take a language exam, or don not bother with language learning anymore?

70% of the participants said they would like to improve their language skills in the languages they had already acquired. 30% would like to learn new languages, while for 18%, language learning is not a priority in the future.

The 70% can easily be explained with the possibility that these people had a temporary reason to learn a language, not a permanent one – such as work or school. Once they had reached their goals in these areas, they see no point of starting the process all over with another language. Of course, it can also be due to personal reasons, lack of motivation, lack of time.

Very similar explanation may be fitting to the 18% of people who chose not to make language learning a priority in the future.

Tervei a jövőre nézve:
170 responses
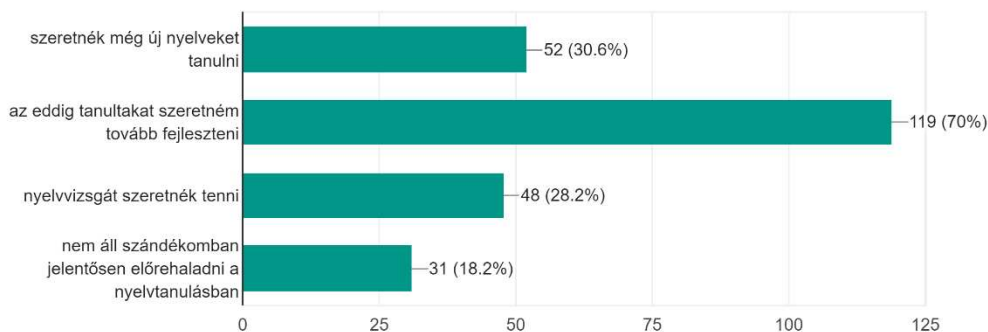
2.3. Summary

According to the analysed questionnaire presented above, individuals who speak Hungarian in the Carpathian Basin tend to learn foreign languages more frequently due to external demands from their school or workplace, rather than personal interest. The majority of participants reported having learned at least one foreign language, with Ukrainian, English, and Russian being the most commonly studied.

The primary motivating factors identified were future career opportunities, personal ambition, social connections with friends and family, and relocation to a new country.

In terms of language learning difficulties, the participants noted that speaking skills and grammar posed the greatest challenges, and these were the most difficult areas to practice and improve upon.

PART III. LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

3.1. Methodology

The following practical part of my paper is aiming to examine quite similar aspects of language learning as the previous survey did, but its target audience is ESL and EFL learners living in the European Union (not excluding Ukraine).

The questionnaire was open for 6 weeks, resulting in 85 responses. The questions include multiple choice, yes/no, short textual and scaling types.

The participants all got a short introduction about the aims of the survey and how their submissions will contribute to my work. The survey does not include any questions that require providing of personal data that could be possibly used to identify the respondents.

3.2. Results and Discussion

The findings of the questionnaire have been compiled and analysed. The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the methods and practices used by ESL learners, as well as to identify the challenges they face in their language learning journey. The results provide valuable insights into the language learning habits of individuals residing in Europe and can inform the development of effective ESL teaching strategies.

70% of the respondents are from Hungary, 20% of them are from Ukraine, 4% of them are from Italy, and the remaining 6% are from various other countries of Europe, such as Belgium, Germany, Poland, Romania, and Sweden.

77.6% of the audience represent the generation Z, 22% - generation Y (millennials), and less than half percent – generation X.

Less than 1% of the respondents started learning English as a foreign language before they turned 6, 5% said they started between the ages of 16 and 19, while the rest, more than 95% of the audience had their first acquaintance with ESL between the ages of 7 and 15 (primary and secondary school years).

Instead of going over the exact questions one by one, please find some of the interesting correlations shown in the results.

- ❖ **Motivation** – why did the respondent start learning English if it wasn't mandatory for them in school?

Only 6 participants (<1%) stated that they were not obligated to learn English as a second language in school. 3 of them started learning it for some other school-related purposes, to pursue a higher-level degree, for example. The other 3 chose "self-development" as the motivation behind their learning.

- ❖ **Hungarian generation Z who started learning English before they were 6 years old**

This is quite a small segment of the audience but provides some interesting insights. All those who fall into this category (respondents from Hungary, between the ages of 12-25 who started learning English before they turned 6) stated that they have reached an advanced level in the language (C1 at least). They all learned other foreign languages, which they consider more difficult than English (German, Ukrainian and Russian). As Aruna Pinilih explains in her research about generation Z's unique ways of language learning in 2020, they have the advantage of learning English in an unconventional way (not only through lessons in school or tutoring which are considered conventional) – such as being well connected with the means of the Internet and digital connections and the more and more frequent use of English on different social media platforms. (Pinilih, 2020), which most probably helps with their development, thus, correlates to them perceiving English as an easy language to learn.

All of them stated that they would recommend learning English to others, as it makes their everyday life easier. Amongst the methods they used for self-development, they all mentioned watching movies in English with or without subtitles, reading English literature and listening to English movies or podcasts. Surprisingly, they differ in the kind of skills they found difficult to acquire (some picked writing, some understanding speaking, while others — grammar).
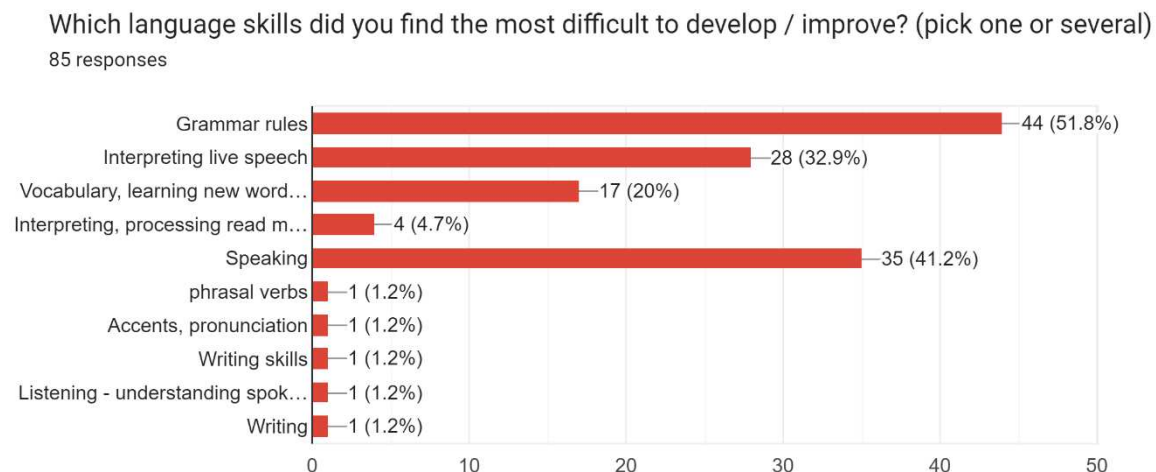
- ❖ **Respondents who started learning English in their young adult years (between the ages of 16 and 19), regardless of their home country**

Those participants who fall into this category all mentioned grammar as the most difficult area of language to develop. 50% of them reached B2 (upper-intermediate) level, 25-

25% of them are at B1 (intermediate) and C1 (advanced). Interestingly, 75% of respondents in this segment learned American English, which may be in connection with their learning and practicing methods, such as watching movies with American actors, and listening to US-based artists. All the participants marked Duolingo, Babbel or similar language learning app as their way of developing their language skills, which is not unusual for adults learning a foreign language, considering that the conventional methods, such as language classes, tutoring, workshops, online courses are not free of charge, while several of these softwares and platforms are.

Moreover, all of the respondents in this segment would recommend learning English to those who have not started yet, since they feel it makes their everyday life easier. In terms of difficulty, all those respondents who learned another foreign language, consider English quite easy compared to those (1-2 on a scale of 5). The most difficult skill to acquire for them, turned out to be grammar, the rules of grammar, as all of them marked it. Furthermore, speaking was marked by 50% of them, and vocabulary by 25.

❖ **The most common difficulties in learning**

Which language skills did you find the most difficult to develop / improve? (pick one or several)
85 responses

Skill	Count
Grammar rules	44 (51.8%)
Interpreting live speech	28 (32.9%)
Vocabulary, learning new word…	17 (20%)
Interpreting, processing read m…	4 (4.7%)
Speaking	35 (41.2%)
phrasal verbs	1 (1.2%)
Accents, pronunciation	1 (1.2%)
Writing skills	1 (1.2%)
Listening - understanding spok…	1 (1.2%)
Writing	1 (1.2%)

As predicted based on data from previous research and different theoretical materials, developing speaking skills is one of the top 3 most difficult and/or problematic skills, ranked second after grammar, which came in first. Understanding and interpreting live speech, which includes talking to native speakers, is also commonly mentioned as a difficult area to improve in.

❖ **The connection between language and culture**

62% of the participants stated that they feel like by learning English, they deepen their knowledge about the culture of English-speaking countries as well. Surprisingly, 10% of them marked the opposite, which may be a result to not having English lessons in school (since these usually include literature and culture-related topics as well), or the syllabus of the English subjects not containing much information about the countries where English is a commonly spoken and/or official language. Learning English with unconventional methods that are not related to an educational institute, may also result in little to no awareness of culture, since many of these focus on developing language skills alone.

Do you feel that by learning English, you get a chance to deepen your knowledge about the culture of English speaking countries as well?
85 responses

- ● No
- ● Yes
- ● I'm not sure
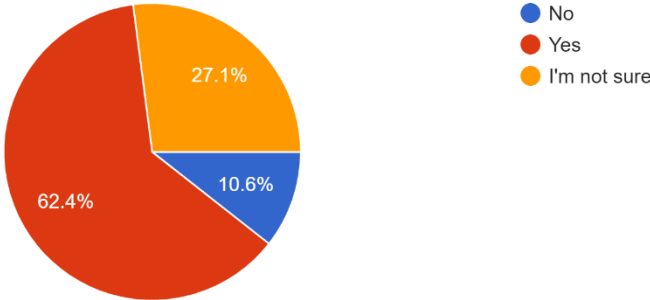
❖ **The connection between the level of proficiency, means of practice and mandatory English lessons**

What is your current level (generally, all skills combined)?
85 responses

- ● B1 = intermediate level
- ● B2 = upper-intermediate level
- ● C1 = advanced level
- ● C2 = proficiency level, almost native
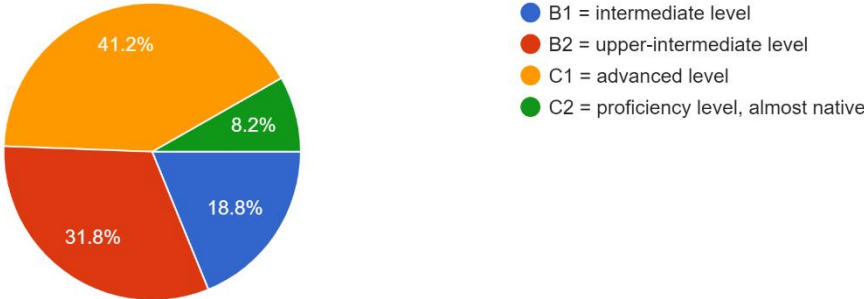
Most of the respondents marked their level as intermediate and advanced (32% and 41%). Examining the relationship between the higher levels of proficiency (B2, C1, C2) and

how frequent a learner is able to practice his or her skills, it becomes obvious that these two correlate. 82% of the respondents, who are at least a B2 level in English, use the language either daily or at least a few occasions a week. 43% of them speak it every day.

92% of the respondents who marked at least B2 as their level of proficiency, had mandatory English lessons in school.

❖ **Comparing the results of the Europe-wide survey (later: second) with the Carpathian Basin-wide (later: first) one**

o Difficulties in learning:

In the case of the first questionnaire, speaking skills came in first in terms of how difficult acquiring each of the skills is, and grammar came in second. In case of the second, Europe-wide questionnaire, the order of these two was the other way around, with a bigger difference in numbers.

Melyik készség fejlesztését érezte a legnehezebbnek általában?
165 responses

- szókincs és nyelvtan
- beszédkészség
- olvasás utáni értés
- hallás utáni értés
- egyik sem okozott gondot

38.2%
18.2%
33.9%
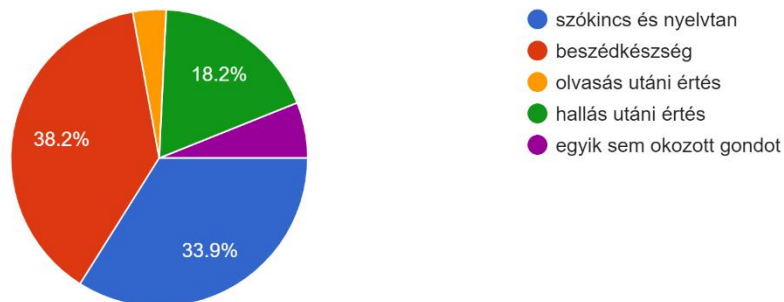
first questionnaire, spring of 2022

Which language skills did you find the most difficult to develop / improve? (pick one or several)
85 responses

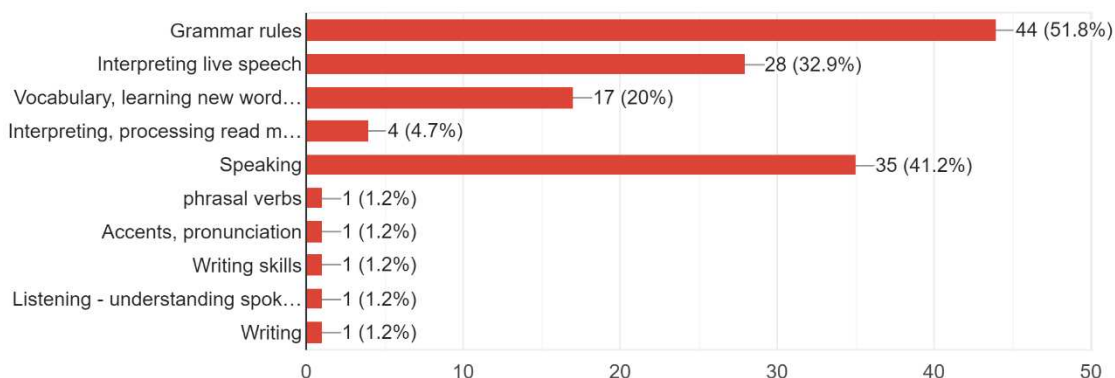| Skill	Value
Grammar rules	44 (51.8%)
Interpreting live speech	28 (32.9%)
Vocabulary, learning new word…	17 (20%)
Interpreting, processing read m…	4 (4.7%)
Speaking	35 (41.2%)
phrasal verbs	1 (1.2%)
Accents, pronunciation	1 (1.2%)
Writing skills	1 (1.2%)
Listening - understanding spok…	1 (1.2%)
Writing	1 (1.2%)

second questionnaire, spring of 2023

Az alább említett módszerek közül melyiket próbálta a nyelvtanulás elősegítése céljával?
164 responses

Módszer	Érték
idegen nyelvű műsorok nézése…	99 (60.4%)
idegen nyelvű műsorok nézése…	44 (26.8%)
idegen nyelvű irodalom olvasása	55 (33.5%)
anyanyelvi szinten beszélőkkel…	56 (34.1%)
levelezés, emailezés idegen ny…	22 (13.4%)
kurzuson vettem részt	48 (29.3%)
Duolingo és hasonló appok	69 (42.1%)
podcastok hallgatása	20 (12.2%)
a fentiek közül egyiket sem pró…	14 (8.5%)
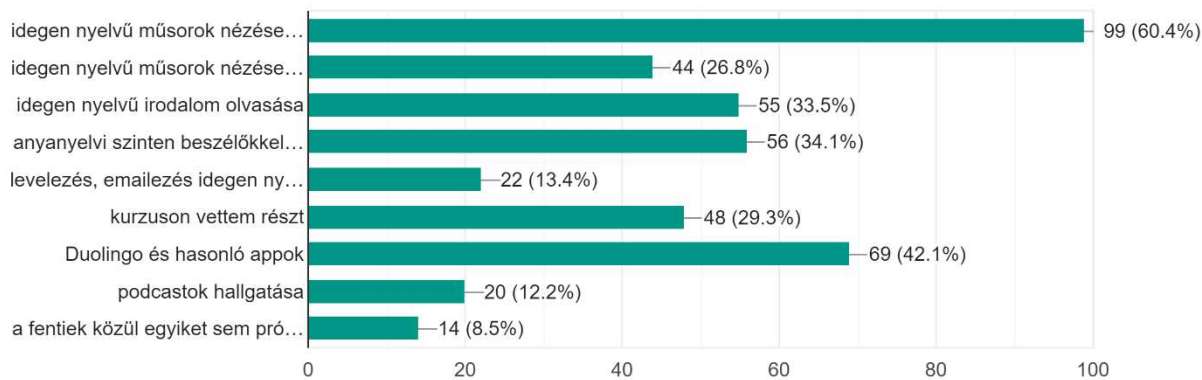
o   Methods of learning and practicing:

first questionnaire, spring of 2022

Watching movies with or without subtitles ended up at the top in both cases – which is not surprising, since this is a free / affordable, easily accessible way of developing one's language skills for themselves.
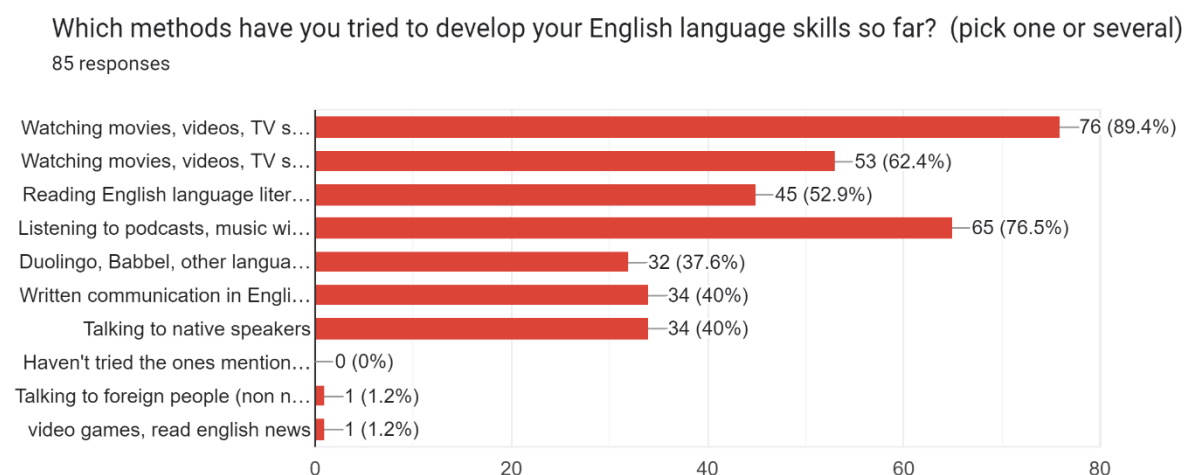
Language learning apps seem to be more popular amongst Hungarian-speaking learners than amongst the international audience. 76% of respondents in case of the Europe-wide questionnaire mentioned listening to podcasts as a method of practicing, while, amongst those living in the Carpathian Basin, it ended up with the least popular ways of learning and self-development, with 12%.

Which methods have you tried to develop your English language skills so far? (pick one or several)
85 responses

Method	Value
Watching movies, videos, TV s…	76 (89.4%)
Watching movies, videos, TV s…	53 (62.4%)
Reading English language liter…	45 (52.9%)
Listening to podcasts, music wi…	65 (76.5%)
Duolingo, Babbel, other langua…	32 (37.6%)
Written communication in Engli…	34 (40%)
Talking to native speakers	34 (40%)
Haven't tried the ones mention…	0 (0%)
Talking to foreign people (non n…	1 (1.2%)
video games, read english news	1 (1.2%)

3.3. Summary

According to the analysed questionnaire presented above, as part of my research in 2023, individuals coming from the European Union and Ukraine, whose native language is not English, tend to have quite the list of motivations to start learning the language, even though they would not be strictly required (from their educational institution or workplace).

The primary motivating factors identified were self-development, personal ambition, school-related matters such as a foreign language being an advantage when applying to college, and easier communication with acquaintances, friends, family.

In terms of language learning difficulties, the participants noted that grammar and speaking skills posed the greatest challenges, and these were the most difficult areas to practice and improve upon, while writing and listening (understanding) of the heard language proved to be the most easily developed skills – compared to the first questionnaire, where speaking skills proved to be the most challenging to develop, in case of a foreign language in general.

Interestingly, the methods which foreign language learners try for self-development, also differ in popularity amongst the two audiences. Although TV programmes in a foreign language and reading literature in the given language ranked at the top of the list in both scenarios, the use of language learning applications are more popular in the Carpathian Basin, and listening to podcasts is a more common method of learning amongst the European audience.

Differences were shown in the respondents also: the results of the first questionnaire reflect the experiences of various generations, while the second questionnaire gives us more insight into the habits and difficulties of ESL and EFL learners who represent generation Z, Y and X.

PART IV. ADDRESSING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION CHALLENGES

As examined and presented previously, there are several difficulties that learners may face when developing foreign language skills, including the process of learning English as a second language as well.

Below listed are numerous advice and teaching methods to address these obstacles met by the learners – possibly as a guide for ESL teachers:

- **Listening:**

Learners may find it challenging to understand spoken English due to factors such as differences in accents and speech rates, background noise, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Teachers can help learners improve their listening skills by providing them with opportunities to listen to a variety of authentic English language materials, such as news broadcasts, podcasts, and movies. Teachers can also use techniques such as **pre-listening activities** *(vocabulary pre-teaching, graphic organizers, pre-listening questions)* and comprehension questions to help learners focus on the key information.

- **Reading:**

Learners may struggle with reading comprehension due to unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Teachers can help learners improve their reading skills by selecting texts that are appropriate for their level and providing them with opportunities to practice reading strategies such as **skimming, scanning, and predicting**. Teachers can also encourage learners to read for pleasure and provide them with opportunities to discuss what they have read.

- o Skimming: a technique used to quickly get an overview or general sense of a text. When skimming, readers glance over the text, focusing on headings, subheadings, bold or italicized text, and the first and last sentences of paragraphs. (Suhid, Zaman, & Rahman, 2017)

- o Scanning: a technique used to locate specific information within a text quickly. When scanning, readers move their eyes quickly over the text, searching for particular keywords, phrases, or specific details. (McLean, 2007)

o   Predicting: using prior knowledge and contextual cues to make informed guesses or assumptions about what might happen next in a text. (Morrow, 1985)

- **Writing:**

Teachers can help learners improve their writing skills by providing them with opportunities to practice writing in a variety of genres, such as **emails, essays, and reports.** Teachers can also provide learners with **feedback** on their writing and encourage them to revise their work.

- **Pronunciation, speaking:**

Teachers can help learners improve their pronunciation skills by providing them with opportunities to practice individual sounds and stress patterns, as well as to imitate and repeat authentic English language materials. Teachers can also use techniques such **as phonemic awareness activities** and **minimal pairs** to help learners identify and correct their pronunciation errors.

o   Examples of **phonemic awareness activities:**

   ✓ Identifying and producing rhyming words (e.g., "cat," "bat," "mat").

   ✓ Clapping or tapping out the number of sounds in a word (e.g., "cat" has three sounds: /k/ /a/ /t/).

   ✓ Blending individual sounds to form words (e.g., saying /c/ /a/ /t/ and recognizing it as "cat").

   ✓ Segmenting words into individual sounds (e.g., saying "sun" and recognizing it as /s/ /u/ /n/).

o   The technique of **minimal pair:**

   ✓ used to help individuals identify and discriminate between specific sounds in a language

   ✓ "Cat" and "hat" are a minimal pair because they differ by the initial sound: /k/ versus /h/.

   ✓ "Ship" and "sheep" are a minimal pair because they differ by the vowel sound: /ɪ/ versus /i:/.

Ultimately, it can be inferred that by implementing these strategies and providing ample opportunities for practice, feedback, and revision, teachers can effectively support learners in their language development journey.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the course of this research, the challenges and benefits of learning foreign languages were explored. While language acquisition provides individuals with access to new cultures, experiences, and opportunities for personal growth, the process is not without its difficulties. Through this analysis, a variety of obstacles that learners may encounter were identified, including anxiety-related, personality-related, and performance-related issues.

The study's aim was to collect comprehensive data on these challenges and their roots, as well as to gain insight into the language learning habits of Hungarian-speaking individuals in the Carpathian Basin and the process of acquiring English as a second language for citizens of European countries (including Ukraine).

In the first chapter of the thesis, I presented secondary data from various sources that focused on common difficulties in the learning process, the relationship between motivation, anxiety and FLA, and the most frequently recognized mistakes in writing, listening, reading, and speaking.

The second and third sections of the thesis were based on recent primary research conducted through surveys. These sections provided insight into modern-day language learners' habits, most common obstacles they face, their motivation to continue learning, and their methods for self-improvement. The fourth chapter explored different methods of teaching English as a foreign language that aim to address the obstacles and difficulties identified in the previous sections. These strategies are designed to help learners overcome their language learning difficulties while fostering a positive learning environment.

In conclusion, the results of the thesis suggest that by identifying and understanding the roots of language learning difficulties, teachers can tailor their instruction to better address individual learners' needs. Furthermore, learners can gain a better understanding of their struggles and how to overcome them. This kind of research is valuable to both teachers and learners, as it can promote more effective teaching strategies and provide learners with the tools they need to succeed in their language acquisition journey.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Дослідження присвячене вивченню викликів засвоєння іноземних мов, зокрема здійснено компаративний аналіз труднощів вивчення англійської мови як іноземної серед представників Карпатського басейну та Європи. У ході аналізу виявлено перешкоди, з якими стикаються учні, включаючи проблеми, пов'язані з тривогою, особистісними особливостями та продуктивністю.

У перших двох розділах роботи представлено теоретичні засади проблеми етапів вивчення мови, загальних труднощів у процесі навчання, взаємозв'язку між мотивацією, тривожністю та ЗНМ, а також найпоширеніші труднощі, які виникають у письмі, аудіюванні, читанні та говорінні.

Третій і четвертий розділи роботи ґрунтуються на емпіричному дослідженні, виконаному методом анкетування. Було виявлено звички сучасних студентів, які вивчають англійську як іноземну мову, найпоширеніші перешкоди, з якими вони стикаються, їх мотивацію продовжувати навчання та методи самовдосконалення. У п'ятому розділі роботи досліджуються різні підходи до викладання англійської мови як іноземної, які спрямовані на подолання перешкод і труднощів, згаданих у попередніх розділах. Окреслені дидактичні підходи призначені для допомоги учням у подоланні труднощів у вивченні мови та сприяють створенню позитивного навчального середовища.

Отже, результати даного дослідження підтверджують, що під час організації навчального процесу необхідно враховувати індивідуальні потреби учнів, виходячи з аналізу труднощів та їх причин у вивченні мови. Ці дослідження мають велике значення як для вчителів, так і для учнів, оскільки вони сприяють впровадженню більш ефективних стратегій викладання та надають учням необхідні інструменти для досягнення успіху у вивченні мови.

UNICHECK

3.64% Схожість

Найбільша схожість: 0.66% з джерелом з Бібліотеки (ID файлу: 1011032570)

3.25% Джерела з Інтернету	169	Сторінка 46
0.85% Джерела з Бібліотеки	5	Сторінка 48

5.62% Цитат

Цитати	14	Сторінка 49
Посилання	1	Сторінка 49

8.14% Вилучень

Деякі джерела вилучено автоматично (фільтри вилучення: кількість знайдених слів є меншою за 8 слів та 0%)

7.64% Вилучення з Інтернету	136	Сторінка 50
8.02% Вилученого тексту з Бібліотеки	72	Сторінка 51