

La situation de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage des langues vivantes en Europe:

LA LITHUANIE

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Apprentissage précoce des langues vivantes

L'apprentissage précoce des langues vivantes en Lituanie commence à l'âge de 6 ou 7 ans ; il est très limité et disponible uniquement dans les écoles privées ou dans des groupes en fonction des souhaits des parents et à leurs propres frais. Seulement près de 10% des écoles publiques propose comme choix de langues l'anglais, l'allemand ou le français, dès l'âge de 8 ans. Une tendance générale, observée quand les élèves choisissent une langue étrangère, atteste de la prépondérance de la langue anglaise sur les deux autres.

Tableau numéro 1: Nombre d'élèves étudiant l'anglais, l'allemand ou le français (par groupe d'âge)

Language	Number of students age group 8-10	Number of students age group 11-15	Number of students age group 16-18
English	14,968	13,878	1,931
German	3,132	2,713	144
French	1,521	1,143	39

Le nombre d'écoles offrant un apprentissage précoce des langues vivantes est passé de 26 sous le régime communiste à 260 durant les années de l'indépendance. Il y a une demande importante pour plus, mais la diminution du nombre de professeurs d'anglais et d'allemand ne permet pas l'expansion de ce type d'apprentissage. Il ne peut pas exister dans les écoles primaires rurales parce que les instituteurs ne sont pas formés pour l'enseignement des langues vivantes.

Il n'y a pas de programme national pour l'enseignement précoce des langues vivantes. Chaque école développe son propre cursus qui est approuvé par l'inspection académique compétente. Dans une certaine mesure, cela dépend des objectifs de l'école en question et du temps consacré à l'enseignement des langues vivantes, qui est limité à 3 leçons par semaine. La majorité des professeurs de langue croient que l'introduction systématique de la lecture et de l'écriture dans une langue étrangère devraient commencer uniquement après le fait que les enfants aient appris à lire et à écrire dans leur langue maternelle. Cela ouvre la voie à de futures recherches. L'élément-clé de n'importe quel processus d'apprentissage des langues est le développement d'une conscience culturelle. Des aspects culturels inclus dans le cursus scolaire sont en étroite relation avec la propre culture des enfants.

Language study in state-maintained schools

Compulsory education in Lithuania is for learners from the age of 7 until the age of 16, covering

- four years at primary school and
- five years at basic school.

The introduction of a six-year basic school is planned for the future. It should provide a certain level of knowledge, practical skills and culture. This level is defined by educational standards so as to enable learners to cope in various spheres of life in a changing world and to continue studies at a secondary or vocational school.

Secondary education (16-18 years) is not compulsory, but the majority of students, after finishing a five year basic school, continue for three years at secondary school. During their school career, students take examinations twice: after finishing basic school and after finishing secondary school.

The first compulsory foreign language is started at the age of 10, in the last year of primary school. The second foreign language is started two years later, at the age of 12. The languages chosen are studied throughout the student's school career, and a centralised examination is taken at the age of 18. At the same time, this serves as an entrance examination to the universities and colleges.

The third foreign language is optional and can be chosen by students in gymnasias or in schools with a humanities profile. The number of lessons per week for compulsory languages are 2 or 3 lessons. In some schools there can be 4 lessons. A lesson lasts 45 minutes in basic and secondary school and 35 minutes during the first year of primary school.

After finishing compulsory basic education, students can stay at secondary school or go on to vocational education. There they continue the first and the second foreign language. The level of proficiency reached at the end of vocational school is the same as that of secondary school leavers.

There are 25 gymnasias and 56 gymnasium classes. They usually offer a four-year period of study, starting at the age of 15, after the fourth year of basic school, and are supposed to provide a higher level of education than secondary schools. They offer students the opportunity to choose between various branches of study, including humanities, science, etc. Schools are granted the right to establish gymnasium or gymnasium classes if they meet certain requirements set up by the Ministry of Education and Science. The process of opening new gymnasias started five years ago and is still going on. It is a part of the educational reform initiated in 1989. Statistical data on it is not yet being collected, gymnasium except for the numbers of students.

Languages taught and regional variation

There are four main languages taught in Lithuania: English, Russian, German and French.

The languages offered as first foreign language (FL1) offered are English, German or French.

Table 2. Distribution of English, German and French as FL1

Languages	Secondary		Vocational		Gymnasia	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
English	1,326	232,438	98	15,495		2,490
German	968	90,396	97	8,378		304
French	288	22,234	59	2,188		88

The languages offered as second foreign language (FL2) are Russian, English, German, French or any other foreign language. Since 1990, Russian has been one of the foreign languages for students to choose from. Earlier it used to be the first compulsory language, started at the age of 8.

Table 3. Distribution of English, German, French and Russian FL2

Languages	Secondary		Vocational		Gymnasia	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
Russian	1,085	129,639	78	15,644		2,020
English	321	25,004	21	1,027		1,175
German	292	2,3831	27	1,141		441
French	136	6,754	8	139		338

The numbers of students learning other languages are insignificant. It is usually difficult to find a native speaker able to teach Swedish, Finnish, Latvian, Italian, etc., and to ensure continuity after the person leaves, because only teachers for English, German, Russian and French are trained in Lithuania.

The third foreign language offered can be any modern language, or Latin.

The languages offered at schools depend on the availability of the teachers. During the Soviet period, the languages taught were regulated by the Ministry. Up until now, there have been regions where the majority of students studied English, German or French .

Bilingual education / Teaching content in a foreign language

Ten percent of schools offer language learning beginning at the age of 8 and continuing until the age of 18. During the last two or three years of secondary education, schools offer teaching on the literature, history and geography of the target countries taught in the respective foreign language. The number of subjects is very limited due to the lack of qualified teachers able to teach other subjects in the foreign languages.

Students choosing schools with Russian or Polish as medium of instruction have to take the Lithuanian language beginning at the age of 9. The history and geography of Lithuania are also taught in Lithuanian. Other subjects taught in Lithuanian will be introduced gradually.

Language training in adult education

Adult learners can choose one of the sixteen secondary education schools or one of the four adult education centres. Languages are the most popular subjects on offer there. Learners can choose between English, German, French or Lithuanian. The curriculum can be a secondary school curriculum or modular, developed by the teacher. Teaching/learning materials and tuition are free, paid for by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Tuition for Public Service Language Centre and International House courses has to be paid by participants themselves. There is a wide variety of English or American language programmes on offer, but there are no statistical data available on these, and the quality of education and the level reached by the learners are not known.

Role of distance teaching

Distance teaching at present does not play an important role in language learning because there are not enough distance teaching materials available. Two new distance learning centres are being established: one at Vilnius University, the other at Kaunas Technological University, with three other distance learner support centres in Vilnius and Kaunas affiliated with them. The centres are supported by the multi-country PHARE Distance Education Project. They will be equipped with computers, CD-ROMs and modern English language multimedia learning packages.

There are also 18 colleges providing distance education for different professions. Foreign languages are usually included in the distance education curriculum of the college.

Self-access centres

There is only one self-access centre in Vilnius, provided by the Public Service Language Centre. There is a great demand for this kind of establishment all over the country. Most of the population in Lithuania have a good command of Russian, but they need to improve their English, German or French. Most are at Breakthrough or Waystage level. For learners who want to start a new language, there are few possibilities for autonomous learning because there is no choice of learning materials produced by Lithuanian authors, whether for English, German, French or Lithuanian. All the materials presented in the centre are foreign.

Language teaching materials

Most of the textbooks used in secondary, vocational and tertiary education are foreign. Various materials packages from Britain (*Compass, Strategies, Cambridge English Course*), France (*En avant la musique*), Germany (*Das Deutschmobil, Deutsch Konkret, Themen Neu*) etc. are used alongside old Lithuanian textbooks produced in the 1980s and reflecting that particular structural approach.

Teachers are free to choose between textbooks, but there is one particular textbook approved by a panel of experts for each grade and usually only approved books are paid for by the Ministry of Education and Science.

A new project on writing textbooks for learning/teaching the Lithuanian language in secondary education has been initiated and is proceeding successfully. The Threshold Level specification for Lithuanian, *Slenkstis*, has recently been published.

There are some textbook writers for the English and German languages, but the demand for national textbooks is greater than the existing offer.

Methodology

The communicative approach is used by a majority of teachers. It is recommended in the Curriculum Guidelines and geared to the national school-leaving examination which tries to produce a positive washback on teaching. Sometimes teachers do not use only one approach, but a mixture of communicative, grammar-translation, audio-lingual and other approaches.

	FL1	ADD.	LITH	FL2	FL3	
Sector	Lessons per week			Lessons per week	Lessons per week	Age
S E C	2 - 4	3	4 - 5	2 - 3	NOT	18
D A R	2 - 4	3	4 - 5	2 - 3	LESS	17
B	2 - 4	3	4 - 5	2 - 3	THAN	16
A	3	3	3 - 4	2 - 3	2 LESSONS	15
S	3	3	4	2 - 3		14
I	3	3	4	2 - 3		13
C	3	3	4	2 - 3		12

P R						
I M A		2	4			9
R Y		2	0 - 3			8
						7

FL1: English, German, French

L2: English, Russian, German, French

FL3: English, German, French, Latin, etc.

ADD.= additional to L1

LITH.= Lithuanian

The columns marked ADD. and LITH. show the number of additional classes available for the students at schools offering early language learning or bilingual instruction, and the number of classes for Lithuanian language at schools where the language of instruction is other than Lithuanian.