

Teachers' and students' voices in developing institutional language policies in higher education: The case of Šiauliai State Higher education institution

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Afin de préserver l'accès des Européens à l'enseignement supérieur et de maintenir la diversité linguistique de l'Europe, les politiques linguistiques dans le cadre des activités des établissements d'enseignement supérieur sont cruciales. Cet article vise à évaluer le contexte de l'élaboration des politiques linguistiques dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur à travers l'analyse des pratiques et des croyances des enseignants et des étudiants en matière de langues étrangères. La partie empirique de l'article présente les résultats d'une enquête quantitative évaluant les pratiques et les croyances en matière de langues étrangères, ou en d'autres termes, les compétences en langues étrangères et les besoins d'apprentissage des enseignants et des étudiants de l'établissement public d'enseignement supérieur de Šiauliai (Lituanie). Les résultats de l'enquête ont été utilisés pour évaluer les compétences en langues étrangères des enseignants et des étudiants et pour prévoir les possibilités de les améliorer. Les résultats de l'enquête peuvent également servir de point de départ à des discussions sur les aspects pratiques et théoriques de l'importance de l'évaluation de l'opinion des parties prenantes dans le contexte de l'élaboration d'une politique linguistique institutionnelle.

Siekiant užtikrinti europiečių galimybę gauti aukštąjį išsilavinimą ir išsaugoti Europos kalbinę įvairovę, kalbų politika aukštojo mokslo įstaigų veikloje yra itin svarbi. Šio straipsnio tikslas – įvertinti kalbos politikos formavimo kontekstą aukštojo mokslo įstaigose, analizuojant dėstytojų ir studentų taikomas praktikas užsienio kalbų srityje. Empirinėje straipsnio dalyje pateikiami kiekybinio tyrimo rezultatai, kuriais vertinama Šiaulių valstybinės kolegijos (Lietuva) dėstytojų ir studentų užsienio kalbų taikymo praktika arba, kitaip tariant, užsienio kalbų įgūdžiai ir mokymosi poreikiai. Tyrimo rezultatai buvo panaudoti dėstytojų ir studentų užsienio kalbų įgūdžiams įvertinti bei numatyti jų tobulinimo galimybes. Tyrimo rezultatai taip pat gali būti naudojami kaip atspirties taškas diskusijoms dėl praktinių ir teorinių aspektų, susijusių su suinteresuotųjų šalių nuomonės vertinimo svarba formuojant institucinę kalbų politiką.

Mots clés:

politique linguistique, enseignement supérieur, besoins en matière d'apprentissage des langues étrangères.

Raktažodžiai:

kalbų politika, aukštasis mokslas, užsienio kalbų mokymosi poreikiai.



Keywords:

language policy, higher education, needs in foreign language learning.

1. Introduction

To preserve Europeans' access to higher education and to maintain the linguistic variety of Europe, it is crucial to develop language policies related to higher education institution (HEI) activities. Also, the latest internationalisation trend that necessitates the establishment of a language policy at the institutional and alliance levels is the formation of partnerships among European universities (EPICUR 2021; Duarte 2022; Triki 2022; Kriaučiūnienė & Šlikaitė 2022). The process of language policy development is influenced by such aspects as the need for internationalisation, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility to meet the objectives of the European Higher Education Area (Council of Europe 2022). When developing a language policy, higher education institutions are faced with questions related to defining the use of national and foreign languages, determining the position of English as a *lingua franca*, ensuring the quality of foreign language programme provision that meets the needs of all stakeholders, and assessing the needs of stakeholders (teachers, researchers, students, etc.) in the field of foreign language learning (Ambrósio et al. 2014; Duarte 2022; Kriaučiūnienė & Šlikaitė 2022 et al.). Recent research in this area (Cenoz 2012; Meyer et al. 2013; Bathia & Ritchie 2013; Marshall & Moore 2018; Duarte 2022; Triki 2022 et al.) has highlighted the need for the inclusion of multilingualism and plurilingualism principles into the language policies, which help to meet the principles of multiculturalism, inclusion, equality, and equity in HEIs. Researchers working in this field also have highlighted other aspects that should be taken into account while creating language policies, such as *English as a medium of instruction* (Hultgren et al. 2022), inclusive language education (Enns-Kananen et al. 2023), bilingualism and bilingual education (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty 2008; Gottardo & Grant 2008; Grosjean 2012; Dewaele 2015; Köktürk et al. 2016; Özşen et al. 2020; Festman & Poarch 2023; García et al. 2023), multilingual education (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2017; Aronin 2018; Kirss et al. 2020; Dafouz & Smit 2022) and translanguaging (Wei 2018).

Thus, while operating in the European Higher Education Area and facing the need to establish an institutional language policy, Šiauliai State Higher Education Institution (hereafter – ŠSHEI) is committed to ensuring the sustained growth of academic Lithuanian discourse and to impart information to Lithuanian citizens in the official language of Lithuania. Additionally, it aims to broaden its international recognition and deepen its involvement in the European Higher Education Area. The latter might be accomplished by disseminating its applied research findings in English and other languages. In all facets of HEI operations, it has been suggested that an appropriate ratio should be kept between the native language and English, which serves as a *lingua franca*. Internal communication within Lithuania is conducted in Lithuanian, whereas external

communication is carried out in English and/or other languages, depending on the intended purpose. Nevertheless, communication in the study of and research in applied sciences at ŠSHEI is becoming more multilingual due to a continuous increase in the number of international students and teachers. The necessity for an institutional language policy at ŠSHEI stems from ongoing internationalisation processes as well as its membership in the NEOLAiA European University Alliance. The Alliance has been developing the NEOLAiA Language Policy Charter, and as a result, member universities have been motivated to create or modify their existing institutional language policies.

According to Triki (2022), developing an institutional language policy raises several key challenges. It first requires the evaluation of the context in which the policy is to be developed or, in other words, knowing how foreign languages are used within the institution, as well as beliefs related to foreign languages. These elements are closely linked to the language learning needs of various stakeholder groups. Their perspective should therefore be thoroughly explored and reconciled before the management process can begin, which involves the targeted action by the institution to change or adjust the existing language-related practices and beliefs. The most prominent stakeholder groups are HEIs' teachers and students, and it is imperative to evaluate their foreign language competencies and their needs for foreign language learning.

This article aims to evaluate the context of language policy development in our institution through the assessment of its teachers' and students' foreign language practices and beliefs.

To achieve this aim, the following **objectives** were identified: 1) to describe the importance of language policy in HEIs from a theoretical perspective; 2) to evaluate the context of language policy development at ŠSHEI through the assessment of teachers and student's foreign language practices: We collected data on the most commonly used foreign languages for teaching, studying and research activities, as well as beliefs (individual's attitudes towards foreign languages and the needs for the improvement of their foreign language competences).

Methodology: The study combines scientific literature analysis and synthesis in the theoretical part of the article and the quantitative survey results are presented in the empirical part. The empirical findings are analysed using descriptive statistical methods.

2. The importance of language policy in HEIs

The need for a language policy in the context of HEIs is driven by several factors. First of all, HEIs play a key role in a country's social development, as they drive change in the economic, cultural, scientific, and technological spheres. In the context of the European Union, HEIs are expected to contribute to the processes

of Euro-integration, with an emphasis on the position of HEIs in contributing to the development of linguistic and cultural diversity in EU countries (Council of Europe 2014, 2020, 2022). HEIs are expected to become multilingual spaces where bilingualism, multilingualism and plurilingualism¹ is promoted, both as values and competences, thus encouraging the use of less common languages in higher education, and not only the most popular ones.

Another important aspect is that in recent years there has been a clear trend in the European Higher Education Area towards the formation of alliances between HEIs (e.g., Arqus, NEOLAiA, etc.). The concept of European university alliances is, by definition, intercultural and multilingual, as it involves HEIs from different countries with different languages, traditions, and customs. As HEIs join international alliances, there is a need for the development of language policies (see Fig. 1), both at the level of alliances and at the level of individual institutions (EPICUR 2021).



Figure 1: The need for a language policy in the context of HEIs (based on Pavón 2020; EPICUR 2021; Kriauciūnienė & Šlikaitė 2022)

The essential benefit of the language policy at the level of the European University Alliance is that it provides a reference framework and can be adapted to different HEIs depending on their characteristics and context (Pavón, 2020). The multilingual and intercultural environment of the European Higher Education Area requires ensuring equality, diversity, and inclusion in all HEIs involved in the collaboration (EPICUR 2021; Laviosa 2022).

These processes are leading to incentives for HEIs to develop institutional language policies that define the essential aspects of language use, covering the core areas of HEIs' activities: research, teaching and learning, and impact on the societies in which they operate, with a focus on the ultimate goal of achieving multilingualism. This ideological discourse is closely connected to the goal of social cohesion, which in the context of HEIs poses several challenges

¹ About the concept of bilingualism, see Grosjean 2012, Dewaele 2015, Köktürk et al. 2016, Özşen et al. 2020, Festman & Poarch 2023, García et al. 2023; about the concept of multilingualism, see Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2017, Aronin 2018, Kirss et al. 2020; and about plurilingualism, see Bergan 2002, Beacco & Byram 2003, Ambrósio et al. 2014, Laviosa 2022.

and requires an assessment of the role of languages across several institutional spheres: teaching and learning, research, collaboration with society and other stakeholders at local, national, and international levels (Ambrósio et al. 2014). As a result, an increasing number of HEIs are now focusing on the development of language policies that promote the teaching and learning of foreign languages. In this context, language policy can be defined as decisions taken at the strategic level by HEIs to equip all stakeholders (teachers, researchers, students, etc.) with the competences and communicative skills in one or more foreign languages (Ambrósio et al. 2014). To fulfil their educational mission, HEIs are encouraged to develop institutional language policies oriented towards teaching and learning foreign languages, which emphasise the principles of language usage and define opportunities for HEI communities (teachers, researchers, students, etc.) to learn foreign languages (Ambrósio et al. 2014; Dafouz & Smit 2016; Altbach & de Wit 2019).

At the institutional level, many European HEIs are facing various challenges in the process of developing language policies. This process is influenced by such aspects as the need for internationalisation, equality, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility to meet the objectives of the European Higher Education Area. In the process of developing a language policy, HEIs are faced with questions related to defining the use of national and foreign languages, positioning English as a “lingua franca”, ensuring the quality of foreign language teaching that meets the needs of all stakeholders, and assessing the needs of stakeholders (teachers, researchers, students, etc.) in the field of foreign language learning (EPICUR 2021).

English has become the most widely spoken language in higher education in recent decades – a lingua franca worldwide (Duarte 2022). The Bologna Declaration, adopted in 1999, which made it possible for students to complete their studies in several countries and unified higher education systems in 29 countries, was a pivotal moment for the internationalisation of HEIs (Phillipson 2015). To increase the internationalisation of teaching, learning and research processes, a large number of HEIs have chosen English and have started to offer degree programs in English, to use English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) in individual subjects, to use English for their international communication and to increase the internationalisation of research activities (Dafouz & Smit 2016; Altbach & de Wit 2019; Dafouz & Smit 2022). However, in recent years, there has been a growing demand in the context of HEIs for an approach based on multilingualism and plurilingualism that includes the use of a wider range of foreign languages, focusing not only on the use of the first language and English in teaching, learning and research processes (Meyer et al. 2013; Caruso 2018; Dafouz & Smit 2016; Altbach & de Wit 2019; Duarte 2022; Dafouz & Smit 2022). According to Marshall & Moore (2018), the terms multilingualism and plurilingualism are not synonymous. Multilingualism is the ability of a person to speak several languages, while plurilingualism encompasses the variety of languages

that exist within a given social group. Both concepts are relevant in the context of HEIs and should be reflected in institutional language policies (Yanaprasart & Lüdi 2017; Duarte 2022). The inclusion of multilingualism and plurilingualism principles in the language policies of HEIs is particularly important as it is closely linked to internationalisation and the provision of high-quality study and research processes (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2017; Aronin 2018; Kirss et al. 2020; Duarte 2022). The principles of multilingualism and plurilingualism in language policy development highlight the need to address the foreign language learning needs of different HEI stakeholders, such as teachers, researchers, and students (Laviosa 2022; Kriaučiūnienė & Šlikaitė 2022).

With regard to language policy in the Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, it is important to note that, since the end of the Soviet occupation, these countries have focused on strengthening the position of their national languages. In terms of the use of foreign languages, English is the most commonly used foreign language in these countries, and it is also one of the most commonly used foreign language in their HEIs, which allows the internationalisation of teaching and research activities, and the international mobility of teachers and students (Kaša & Mhamed 2013; Bulajeva & Hogan-Brun 2014; Dobržinskienė & Stepanovienė 2021; Rozenvalde et al. 2023). However, it should be noted that HEIs in the Baltic States seek to maintain a balance between strengthening and promoting the use of national languages and expanding the use of foreign languages in teaching and research. This expansion is relevant in the context of internationalisation: Offering a wider range of study programs in English and other foreign languages may help attract more international students. It also supports the participations of teachers and researchers in scientific international activities and publications in foreign languages (Kaša & Mhamed 2013; Bulajeva & Hogan-Brun 2014; Kriaučiūnienė & Šlikaitė 2022). On the one hand, the dominance of English can be seen as a threat to national languages, while on the other hand, the national languages of the Baltic States are not widely spoken in foreign countries. Accordingly, English and other foreign languages (e.g., German, French, Spanish, etc.) offer opportunities for HEIs to enhance the internationalisation of studies and research activities (Rozenvalde et al. 2023).

Kriaučiūnienė & Šlikaitė (2022) point out that when developing a language policy, HEIs should consider all languages used in the institution. Talking about the basic principles of language policy making, Spolsky (2004) and Triki (2022) note that a language policy is built on three interrelated but differently characterized elements: *management*, *practices*, and *beliefs* (see Fig. 2).

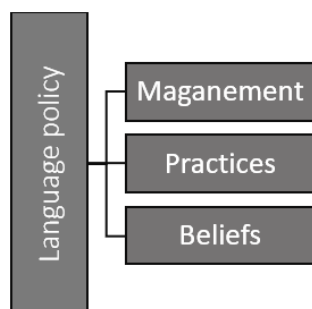


Figure 2: The elements of language policy (based on Spolsky 2004 and Triki 2022)

The authors point out that language *practices* are the visible actions and decisions taken by individuals when communicating; in other words, language practices describe the languages used by members of a HEI community. Language-related *beliefs* include individuals' attitudes and values towards certain languages, which can sometimes lead individuals to refuse to communicate in certain languages because of their beliefs. The *management* element involves targeted action by the institution to change/adjust existing language-related practices and beliefs. This may include the provision of training in different languages, or encouraging the use of foreign languages. The language management element can also be delegated to HEIs at the national level, where the use of the national language is defined in the institution's legislation and documents. The authors argue that, in developing a language policy, a HEI should assess and follow relevant national and international documents, but point out that, first and foremost, the language policy should be tailored to the objectives and priorities of the particular HEI. Triki (2022) stresses that, before starting to develop a language policy (the management element), HEIs should assess the context of language policy, *i.e.* language practices and beliefs of their stakeholders (teachers, students, etc.) by evaluating their foreign language competencies and foreign language learning needs to identify problematic aspects and areas for improvement.

3. The research methodology

To assess the context of language policy development at ŠSHEI, an empirical quantitative survey was carried out. The study evaluated teachers' and students' foreign language practices and beliefs and identified opportunities for improving their foreign language competencies. The survey was a particularly relevant method, as we sought to investigate the opinion of a large group of respondents – teachers and students of the ŠSHEI. It consisted of 2 questionnaires, one for the teachers and another for the students. The questionnaires consisted of 10 multiple-choice, Likert-scale closed-ended questions and open-ended questions, where respondents could write their own answers. The questionnaire for teachers included such questions as the foreign languages in which they are fluent in written and oral communication, foreign languages that they would like

to learn, teachers' preferred form of foreign language learning, challenges for teachers in learning foreign languages, the most frequently used languages to read scientific and subject-specific literature, languages in which they prepare scientific publications and conference presentations, and their opinion on the use of foreign languages in scientific discourse. The questionnaire for students included such questions as foreign languages currently studied by students, students' perceptions of the quality of foreign language study subjects, foreign languages that students would like to study, students' views on opportunities to improve foreign language teaching, and language of the most frequently read scientific literature by students.

Both questionnaires were prepared in the Lithuanian language, because this was the first phase of the research in the context of language policy development in ŠSHEI. The second phase of the research, which will be carried out in this field, is going to be aimed at investigating the language practices and beliefs of foreign teachers and students, as well as the administrative staff of the ŠSHEI.

The descriptive statistics method was used for data analysis of closed-ended questions, and a content analysis method was used for the data from open-ended questions. The research was conducted in May 2024.

To calculate the required sample for the survey, the Paniotto formula was used to calculate the minimum number of respondents needed to take part in the survey for the results to be statistically significant and representative. In this survey, the general population size consists of the teachers and students of the ŠSHEI, which in 2024 totalled 1,624 (1,518 students and 106 teachers). Applying a sampling error of 0.10 (10%) in this formula, which, according to Ruževičius (2015), is possible in social research, it was calculated that 94 respondents should participate in the survey. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling method – the questionnaire was sent to the teachers and students of the ŠSHEI to their institutional mailboxes. A total of 78 correctly completed questionnaires were received. 31 ŠSHEI teacher and 47 students participated in the survey. That comprises 5% of the general population (both teachers and students). Although this number is slightly lower than the required sample size, the results remain representative and statistically significant. They provide insight into the context of language policy development in ŠSHEI through ŠSHEI teachers' and students' views of their foreign language competencies and foreign language learning needs. The teachers, who participated in the survey are content lecturers (they teach such subjects as management, integrated marketing communication, applied research methodology, information technologies, mathematics, information services, social work, mechanics, electronics, etc.). They teach specific subjects for international students (coming for Erasmus+ programme, international study programs) in English, Russian, German, and other languages. 68% of the

teachers work at the Faculty of Business and Technology of ŠSHEI. 32% of the teachers work in the Faculty of Healthcare. This proportion corresponds to the proportion of teachers working in those faculties.

The students who participated in the study are studying in such study programs as Information Management, Program systems, Corporate communication and marketing, Production and logistics management, Business Management, Social work, Accounting, General nursing, Cosmetology, etc. The distribution of students participating in the study is similar to that of the teachers, with 66% studying at the Faculty of Business and Technology, and 34% studying at the Faculty of Healthcare. The majority of the students who participated in the study are full-time students, and 40% have chosen part-time studies. 30% of the students are in their first year, 40% in their second year, 17% in their third year, and 13% in their fourth year.

The research was conducted in accordance with the most important ethical principles for quantitative research in the social sciences: anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the usefulness of the research (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas 2017). In the introductory part of the questionnaire, the respondents who participated in the study were informed about the purpose of the study and the researchers conducting it, and it was noted in the questionnaire that anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents who participated in the study was guaranteed.

4. Results: Teachers' and students' foreign language practices and beliefs at ŠSHEI

4.1 Language practices and beliefs of ŠSHEI teachers.

The first survey questions explored ŠSHEI teachers' practices (the most commonly used foreign languages for teaching and research activities) and beliefs (individuals' attitudes towards foreign languages and the need for the improvement of their foreign language competences). The analysis revealed in which foreign languages ŠSHEI teachers who participated in the study can communicate (see Figure 3).

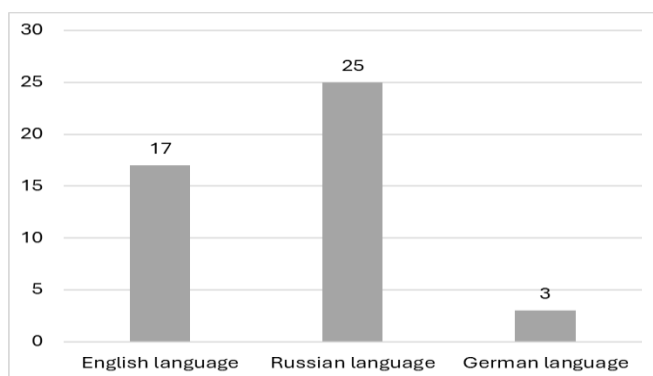


Figure 3: Foreign languages in which ŠSHEI teachers are fluent in written and oral communication.

The data revealed that most ŠSHEI teachers (25) report being able to communicate fluently in Russian, both orally and in writing, and, to teach students coming from abroad in this language. This could be linked to the age profiles of the teachers, as most respondents were aged 45 or older. They studied Russian as the first foreign language, as this was required in former Soviet Union politics. In comparison, 17 teachers indicated that they could communicate fluently and teach in English, while only 3 teachers indicated German.

The survey also sought to find out which foreign languages ŠSHEI teachers would like to learn and through which channels (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

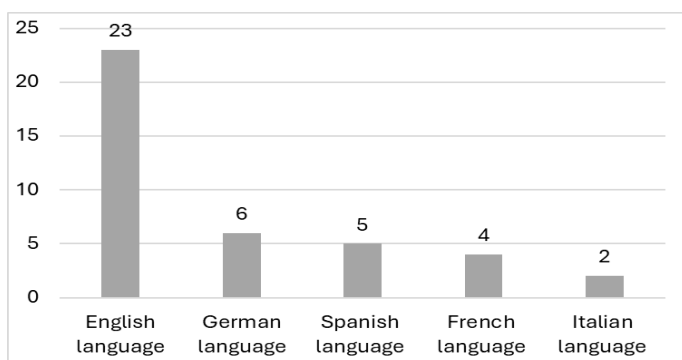


Figure 4: Foreign languages that ŠSHEI teachers would like to learn.

Figure 4 shows that ŠSHEI teachers were primarily interested in improving their English language competences. German, Spanish, and French are also identified as relevant languages. However, considerably fewer teachers expressed a desire to improve their competences in these languages compared to English.

When assessing the forms of foreign language learning that are attractive to the teachers, it is evident that the most popular is classroom learning (see Figure 5).

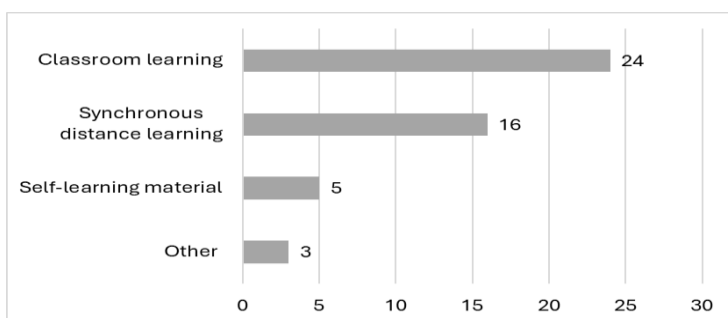


Figure 5: Teachers' preferred form of foreign language learning.

However, in an open-ended question, some teachers pointed out that an ideal option would be blended training, with recorded training or self-learning material provided alongside the classroom instruction:

[...] ideally classroom learning, but the autumn practice has shown that the timing is not always compatible (lectures, meetings, etc.). There should also be an alternative - synchronous access, e.g. in case of sickness, so that you can continue the training, or a recording so that you can listen to a missed lesson [...].²

The survey also included an open-ended question where teachers were asked to identify the biggest challenges they have been facing when it comes to improving their foreign language competences. The answers can shed light on the teachers' beliefs about foreign languages (see Table 1).

| Category | Subcategory | Illustrative statement |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Internal challenges | Lack of time due to a heavy workload | "Lack of time"; "Finding the right time"; "Lack of time, not being able to combine direct work and teaching time, heavy direct workload [...]". |
| | Lack of speaking skills | "Lack of communicative language skills"; "Speaking skills development"; "Vocabulary development [...]"; "Lack of speaking skills [...]"; "Lack of practice, fear of making mistakes when speaking [...]". |
| | Lack of motivation | "Lack of will and time [...]". |
| | Infrequent use of language | "Poor vocabulary and foreign language is not used daily [...]"; "Rare communication in a foreign language [...]"; "Adaptation of speaking skills [...]". |
| External challenges | Lack of a foreign language training | "Lack of qualified teachers, lack of opportunities to improve foreign language competences, lack of opportunities to improve higher level language competences [...]". |

Table 1: Challenges for ŠSHEI teachers in learning foreign languages.

The information provided in Table 1 shows that teachers encounter such internal challenges as a lack of time, insufficient speaking skills, and a lack of motivation to learn foreign languages, as well as external challenges related to the lack of qualified foreign language teachers, which can negatively impact their beliefs and attitudes towards foreign language learning. Also, it is worth mentioning that ŠSHEI and the Lithuanian Ministry of Sports and Education provide financial support for teachers who are willing to participate in English language courses. However, their workload still remains one of the main challenges limiting their participation in foreign language courses.

² Response to the open-ended question about the preferred form of foreign language learning. All quotations from the survey to the open ended questions, that are presented on pages 10-11 and in Tables 1 and 2 were given in Lithuanian. They have been translated by the authors with DeepL translator.

The next questions sought to assess how ŠSHEI teachers used foreign languages in scientific activities, such as reading scientific and subject-specific literature (see Figure 6), and preparing scientific publications and conference presentations (see Figure 7).

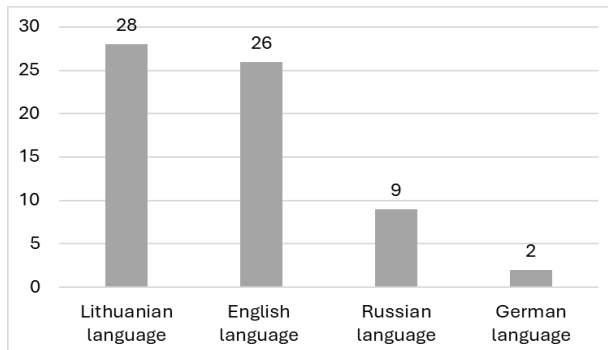


Figure 6: The most frequently used languages by ŠSHEI teachers to read scientific and subject-specific literature.

The information presented in Figure 6 shows that the most common languages used by ŠSHEI teachers to read scientific and subject-specific literature are Lithuanian and English.

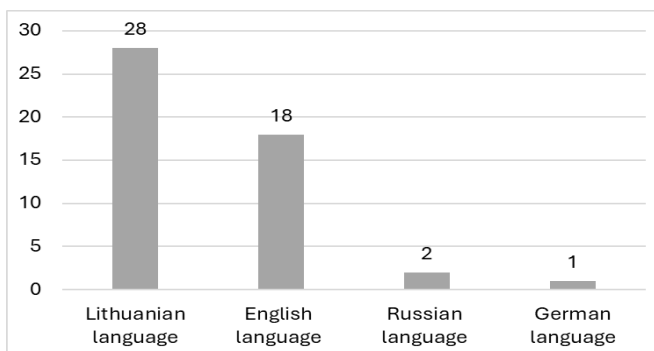


Figure 7: Language in which ŠSHEI teachers prepare scientific publications and conference presentations.

Figure 7 indicates that the vast majority of ŠSHEI teachers shared that the most frequent language in which they prepare scientific publications and conference presentations is Lithuanian. 18 teachers stated that they present papers and presentations at conferences in English. Other languages include Russian and German, although they were selected by fewer respondents.

In the following question, teachers were asked to express their opinion on statements related to the use of a foreign language in scientific discourse, which can be associated with their beliefs about foreign languages (see Figure 8).

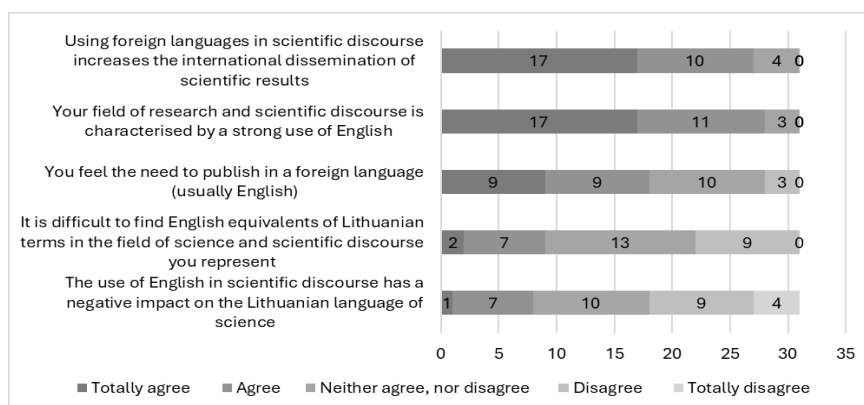


Figure 8: ŠSHEI teachers' opinion on the use of foreign languages in scientific discourse.

The information presented in this figure shows that the majority of the teachers agreed with the statement that the use of foreign languages in scientific discourse increases the international dissemination of scientific results (17 respondents strongly agreed and 10 respondents agreed), and that there is a strong use of English in their field of research (17 respondents fully agreed with this statement, 11 respondents agreed). Also, the teachers agreed, albeit to a lesser degree, that they feel the need to publish publications in foreign languages, mostly in English (7 respondents fully agreed with this statement, 7 respondents agreed). A smaller number of respondents agreed with the statements that it is difficult to find English equivalents of Lithuanian terms in the field of science and scientific discourse they represent (2 respondents fully agreed, 7 respondents agreed) and that the use of English in scientific discourse negatively affects the language of Lithuanian science (1 respondent fully agreed, 7 respondents agreed).

In light of these findings, such managerial activities should be taken into consideration **in the context of institutional language policy development** in ŠSHEI when seeking to change or adjust teachers' existing language-related practices and beliefs: teachers should be offered more opportunities to improve their English language competences, e. g. through English language courses, participation in Erasmus+ training and teaching activities, blended intensive programs, oriented towards the improvement of foreign language competences, etc. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to teach in English, e. g. through working with EMI programs. Furthermore, they should be encouraged and get all the necessary support to engage in international scientific activities, e. g. attending international conferences, preparing publications, and participating in international scientific collaboration networks.

4.2 Language practices and beliefs of ŠSHEI students

The survey also sought to gather information about ŠSHEI students' foreign language practices, including the foreign languages most commonly used for studying and research activities, as well as their attitudes towards foreign languages, perceptions of the quality of foreign language teaching, and needs

related to the improvement of their foreign language competences. The analysis of the information gathered during the survey revealed which foreign languages are studied by ŠSHEI students (see Figure 9).

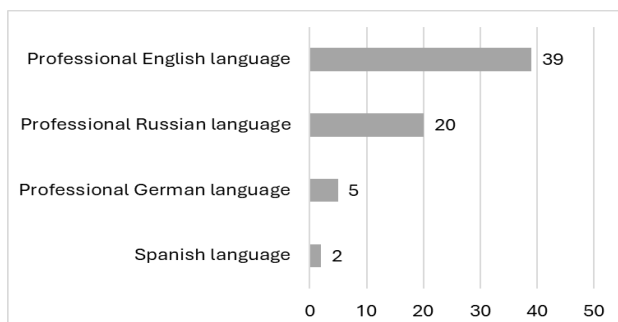


Figure 9: Foreign languages currently studied or studied in previous courses/will be studied in future courses by ŠSHEI students.

Data shows that a majority of ŠSHEI students are studying or have previously studied professional English. A bit more than half are studying or have previously taken professional Russian classes. Finally, very few mention German, and even fewer Spanish as a free choice subject.

The students were asked to evaluate the quality of foreign language courses (content, teaching methods, etc.), which may reflect their beliefs about certain foreign languages (see Figure 10).

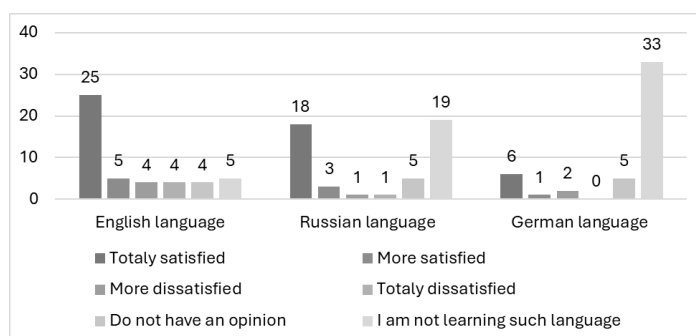


Figure 10: Students' perceptions of the quality of foreign language study subjects taught at ŠSHEI.

The data presented in Figure 10 reveals that the majority of students are completely or quite satisfied with the quality of the English classes, only a small minority of students are quite or totally dissatisfied or do not have an opinion. The survey showed that a bit majority of students who are taking Russian courses and German courses are totally satisfied with them. A high percentage of the respondents mentioned they did not study Russian or German. This aligns with the results of the previous question (see Figure 9), which shows that the proportion of students studying Russian and German is significantly lower compared to students studying English. This data suggest that students are satisfied with the quality of the foreign language courses offered at ŠSHEI.

In a follow-up open-ended question, students were asked to identify aspects of the current offer of foreign language courses at ŠSHEI that needed improvement (content, teaching methods, etc.), which may reflect their beliefs about certain foreign languages (see Table 2).

| Category | Subcategory | Illustrative statement |
|--|--|---|
| Increasing the variety of tasks and teaching methods | Task differentiation | "Give different tasks to different groups [...]"; "The teaching method should be improved [...]". |
| | Increasing the diversity of teaching methods | "Lack of real-life examples in lectures (videos would be perfect), which would help students to absorb the information and understand where and how it can be applied in reality [...]"; "Maybe more videos, more interesting exercises [...]". |
| Expanding the scope of the subject | Increasing the scope of the subject with a focus on practice | "[...] more than 3 credits for a subject [...]"; "More specialised foreign language hours per semester"; "More practice [...]". |

Table 2: Analysis of the opinion of the students on how the quality of foreign language classes could be improved at ŠSHEI.

Students indicated that they would like to see more differentiated assignments in foreign language lectures, more varied teaching methods, a greater scope of subjects with a focus on practice, etc. These aspects could impact students' beliefs about foreign language learning.

The survey also sought to assess the foreign language learning needs of ŠSHEI students (see Figure 11).

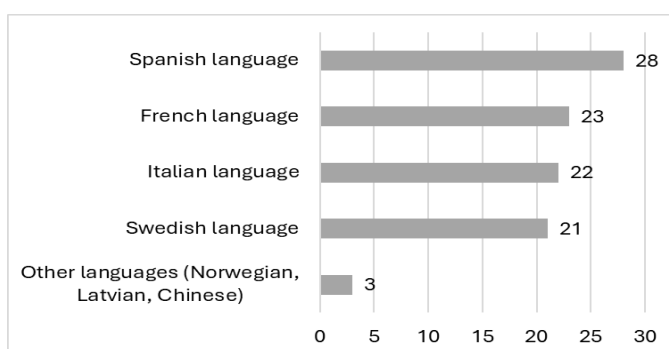


Figure 11: Foreign languages that students of ŠSHEI would like to study.

The information presented in Figure 11 shows which foreign languages are preferred by ŠSHEI students: Spanish, French, Italian, and Swedish.

In the next open-ended question, students identified opportunities for improving foreign language teaching at ŠSHEI in the future (see Table 3).

| Category | Illustrative statement |
|---|---|
| Increasing the choice of foreign languages | "It would be nice if there were a choice of languages other than English, Russian, and German [...]"; "More options, not only when it comes to the elective courses, but in general."; "A wider choice of languages [...]". |
| Increasing the diversity of teaching methods for foreign languages | "Also allow smaller groups to study languages [...]"; "More interesting and varied learning material [...]"; " Maybe more videos, more interesting exercises [...]". |
| Inviting foreign teachers to teach in the languages of the country they represent | "More teachers from the country of the language"; "Invite representatives of that language to give at least one lecture [...]". |

Table 3: Students' views on opportunities to improve foreign language teaching in ŠSHEI.

The information presented in Table 3 shows that, when discussing possibilities for improving foreign language teaching at ŠSHEI, students emphasised the need for expanding the range of foreign languages offered and diversifying teaching methods.

The following question sought to assess the views of ŠSHEI students on the use of foreign languages in scientific activities (see Figure 12).

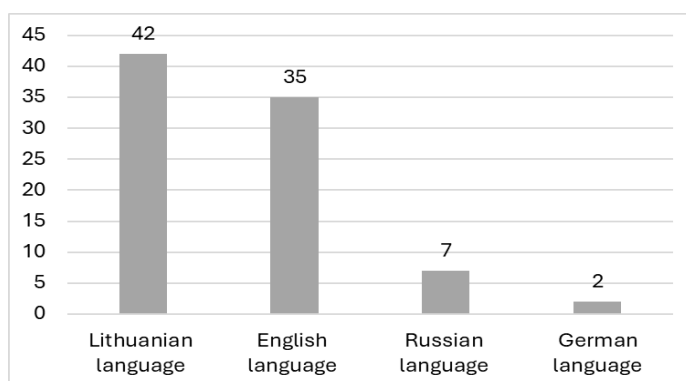


Figure 12: Language of the most frequently read scientific literature by students of ŠSHEI.

The information in this figure shows that students are the most likely to read scientific literature in Lithuanian, with a bit less responses for English.

According to these findings, the development of an **institutional language policy** at ŠSHEI should include managerial measures designed to shape or adapt students' existing language-related practices and beliefs: students should be offered more opportunities to study not only English and Russian, but also such languages as Spanish, French or Italian. The variety of teaching methods in foreign language lectures should be expanded. In addition, in response to students' expressed needs to improve their foreign language competences, several measures could be implemented, such as encouraging participation in

international scientific events, Erasmus+ mobility programmes, and blended intensive programmes.

5. Discussion

As a first step in developing a language policy at ŠSHEI, our empirical research reveals that the context at ŠSHEI is quite homogeneous for all surveyed stakeholders. The most commonly used foreign languages used by both teachers and students are English and Russian. Although greater attention has recently been devoted to improving teachers' English language competences (including through organised courses), teachers still expressed a need to further develop these competencies. Besides, students stressed the need for a larger range of foreign languages in classes at ŠSHEI (Swedish, French, Italian, and Spanish). Regarding language-related beliefs, it was identified that ŠSHEI teachers face both internal and external obstacles that can have a detrimental effect on their attitudes and beliefs about learning foreign languages, while students face fewer internal and external obstacles and are more open to foreign language learning and usage. While creating its institutional language policy, management at ŠSHEI should take these results into consideration and provide opportunities for teachers and students to improve their foreign language competences.

These findings with those reported by other researchers in the field (Kaša & Mhamed 2013; Bulajeva & Hogan-Brun 2014; Kriauciūnienė & Šlikaitė 2022 Rozenvalde et al. 2023), who argued that HEIs in the Baltic States seek to balance between promoting and strengthening national languages and increasing the use of foreign languages, especially English, in teaching and research. It is also important to take into account all of the languages that are used within the institution (by international students and teachers, immigrants, etc.) when creating a language policy.

However, it is important to note that this study is a starting point, giving both the theoretical and practical insights that are relevant in the context of institutional language policy development in ŠSHEI. Further research is needed at our institution to investigate the language practices and beliefs of international teachers and students, as well as the administrative staff.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the scientific literature revealed that HEIs are key drivers of scientific, technological, economical, and cultural development, thereby contributing significantly to a nation's social growth. Within the context of the European Union, HEIs are also expected to support Euro-integration processes by fostering linguistic and cultural diversity. Consequently, the promotion of bilingualism, multilingualism, and plurilingualism constitutes an important dimension of their mission. Regarding the development of language policies,

Triki (2022) emphasises that before beginning to develop a language policy (taking managerial actions), HEIs should evaluate the context within the institution – i.e., the language practices and beliefs of all stakeholders (teachers, students, etc.), looking at uses, needs, and identifying problematic aspects and areas for improvement.

The data gathered during the empirical study allowed to evaluate the context of language policy development at ŠSHEI by assessing teachers' and students' foreign language practices and beliefs. The study revealed that the most popular foreign languages used by ŠSHEI teachers in the study process are Russian and English. The data showed that the majority of teachers want to become more proficient in English. According to the survey, Lithuanian and English are the languages that are most often employed by ŠSHEI teachers in scientific activities, including reading scientific and subject-specific literature and preparing scientific papers and conference presentations. Regarding language-related beliefs, it should be mentioned that ŠSHEI teachers face both internal (such as a lack of time, poor speaking abilities, and a lack of motivation) and external (such as shortage of qualified foreign language teachers) obstacles that can have a detrimental effect on their attitudes and beliefs about learning foreign languages.

Based on these findings, we believe that management developing the institutional language policy at ŠSHEI should implement measures to respond to teachers' and students' expressed used, needs, and beliefs. They should provide teachers with more opportunities to enhance their English language proficiency, such as through English language classes, Erasmus+ training and teaching activities, blended intensive programs focused on foreign language proficiency development, etc. Furthermore, teachers ought to be urged to teach in English more often. They should also be supported and encouraged to participate in international scientific endeavours. Students should be given more opportunities to study languages other than English and Russian, such as Spanish or French. In parallel, foreign language teaching should be transformed through more diverse teaching methods. Furthermore, students also ought to be motivated to take part in international scientific endeavours, BIPs, scientific conferences.

Note

No AI tools were used for survey design, data processing, or in the article writing process in Lithuanian. The article was then translated into English with DeepL translator and thoroughly proofread and modified by the authors and external reviewers.

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