Adult Education In Lithuania – Fostering Openness In Society

GENUTE GEDVILIENE, Department of Education, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
ELENA MICKUNAITE, Department of Education, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
NIJOLE BURKSAITIENE, Department of Education, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas; Department of Foreign Languages, Law University of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania

The history and tradition of Lithuanian adult education goes back to the second part of the 19th century when a famous Lithuanian bishop Motiejus Valancius widely spread ideas of education. In the period of Soviet occupation alongside adult education that was basically developed by the state to improve vocational skills and qualification there also existed a formal organisation called Knowledge Society (“Zinijos draugija”) with its many branches, where educational lectures were given on popular science, innovations, etc. The society was very popular among the educated part of the people and it became especially important in the late 1980s when bright liberation ideas could be here and there heard during the lectures. Another very important trend of adult education in the Soviet period could be called adult education of resistance. Ideas of maintaining Lithuanian national identity, culture and language were carried out through various cultural activities, amateur folk dance, song and craft groups and circles. The spirit of national identity was retained through the form of non-formal adult education and was put into its full potential during the process of regaining independence.

For decades the society was very close within and totally isolated from the rest of the world; its economy existed under the conditions of deep stagnation, totalitarianism was prevailing in social and political life. After the Restoration of Independence (1990, March) Lithuania started an active process of its democratic development and integration into the Western market economy. The years of Independence have also marked the beginning of modern adult education in Lithuania. The development of democratic state and government, legislation on adult education and the processes of adult education in Lithuania have played an important role in fostering openness in the society.

The aim of this paper is to outline the importance of adult education to the process of developing openness in Lithuanian society. Development of new basic skills, such as electronic literacy, social skills and foreign language skills for adults alongside with democratic adult teaching methods are seen as powerful tools that foster openness in the post-Soviet society of modern Lithuania.

The methods employed in this paper include quantitative data and document analysis as well as observation of group dynamics. Promotion of different skills such as IT literacy, technological culture, social and foreign language skills in adult education are analysed as a means of successful integration of adults of Lithuania into the modern world of knowledge and information, the world of shared values, different cultures and respect, the world alien to xenophobia and exclusion and characterized by democratic values and openness.

The impact of adult education on the development of democracy in Lithuania

In modern democracies that are characterized as knowledge economies and knowledge/learning societies adult education has become of vital importance. This is due to the three main reasons. Firstly, western democracies are at present functioning in the era of a learning society in which adults participate in organised life long learning; secondly, post-school system involves great numbers of adults and young people; thirdly, non-formal education and self-directed education occurs everyday and is recognized. Besides, learning has become highly individualized and reflective (J. Field, 2002).

Lithuania is a new democracy and is undergoing a period of particularly rapid development in different areas of its life – law, economy, science, new information technologies and, of course, education. This has had multiple impacts. On the one hand, the introduction of the principle of the rule of law and political changes laid down the foundation for the democratic order of state and government
and gave an impetus to the development of openness in the society in general, and to the new educational order in particular. On the other hand, the processes occurring in the area of education in their turn strengthen the development of democracy adding force to the process of creating an open society in Lithuania.

Education has been a priority area in Lithuania since the rise of the liberation movement called Sajudis that began fifteen years ago (1988). In 1991 the Law on Education was adopted and it became the turning point in the development of the education system and the legal basis of its reform rejecting the totalitarian education system based on communist ideology and calling for humanism, democracy, renovation and preservation of national character. In the Soviet period education in Lithuania was officially highly valued. In accordance with the Constitution all education was free of charge, which made it possible for young adults from low income families to study not only at vocational training institutions, but also at universities; secondary education was compulsory, quite a big number of adults having little education were sent to schools, etc. As a result of such an education policy the level of formal education among the adult population of Lithuania has been relatively high.

However, the Soviet education system had significant drawbacks. It was a system designed to serve the needs of a central command economy and inappropriate for the needs of a country aspiring to operate as a market economy (Reviews, 2000, p.7). The greatest disadvantages of the previous system were as follows: the goals of education – to educate obedient employees having neither initiative nor skills of critical thinking, decision making or entrepreneurship because such skills were considered to be unnecessary to Soviet citizens. What is more, education was based on the communist ideology; its methodology emphasized teaching not learning. Moreover, the teaching contents was very academic and the development of competences was not fostered. Finally, adult education did not include a large part of the adult population; conditions for non-formal and informal learning were inadequate. Due to the reasons mentioned above the idea of lifelong learning has become particularly important after the Restoration of Independence in Lithuania. Besides, there were some more factors in the 1990s that added force to its development.

Firstly, the processes on the labour market such as the economic restructuring, the growth of private sector and the development of market relations had a direct impact on employment and, consequently, on the needs and possibilities of the inhabitants to seek education. In 1990-2001, the number of the employed went down by 18% (by over 300,000), which was due to the decrease in the number of the population, the ageing of the society and the growth of unemployment. The number of the employed population in state-owned enterprises, public institutions and organisations decreased from 90% to 30%, whereas the number of the employed in private companies increased from 10% to 70%.

There were also considerable changes in the economic structure. In 1990-2001, the proportion of the employed in industry went down from 30% to 20 %, the number of the people engaged in agriculture remained stable at about 18%, but the proportion of the population engaged in the service sector grew from 40 to 55 %.

In 2001, the greatest demand for labour was in the service sector (70,000) and industrial enterprises (40,000) and since then there has been a notable increase in demand for highly qualified employees holding higher education qualifications (Education in Lithuania 2001, 2003, p.20).

Secondly, the demand of new competences created competitive labour market and made it clear that one cannot live in a fast world of change without learning and without changing oneself. An understanding that there are no ‘safe’ jobs or in other words ‘jobs for life’ was very painful for many adults, because due to the lack of knowledge and skills people faced a new phenomenon – unemployment. In 2001, in accordance with the figures released by the Department of Statistics, unemployment rate was 12.5% (15.4 % in 2000), territorial differences in unemployment rates were growing, the highest ones being in rural areas (as high as 40 %). Prolonged economic crisis, lack of jobs and the demand for employees with higher qualifications increased the prestige of education and
the motivation to seek it (Education in Lithuania 2001, 2003, p.20). In many cases to find a new job or not to lose the present one meant to start learning.

Thirdly, Lithuania made a historic decision to join the European Union, which started posing new challenges. EU membership meant reforming and harmonizing the law, entering a single market, increased labour force mobility, great foreign investment and much faster restructuring of our economy. Thus, it became apparent that under such conditions only permanent education could provide an individual with employability and other competitive advantages. Thus, the idea of permanent education was reflected in several political instruments: the main education reform document the *Concept of Lithuanian Education* (1992); the Law on Non-formal Adult Education (1998); the White Paper on Vocational Education (1999); The White Paper on Higher Education (1999).

However, it is important to point out that the documents mentioned above considered lifelong learning to be a constituent of a problem rather than a principal underlying the conviction that it will make the education system a system being able to meet the requirements of the 21st century.

The education reform has changed the quality of all types of education, including continuous adult education. The latter has been strongly emphasized in the most recent documents on education related to the integration of Lithuania into the European Union, i.e. *Life Long Learning Strategy* and *Education Guidelines: Lithuanian Education Development Strategies 2003-2012* prepared on the basis of the EC Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000. The documents stress one of the fundamental principals of the present day democratic education policy in Lithuania - to provide all citizens of Lithuania with equal rights to education.

Nowadays adult education has become a major part of continuous education system involving people older than 18 who are engaged in voluntary learning practices due to various economic, social or personal reasons. Formal education to adults is provided by different state and non-governmental institutions such as adult training centres/adult comprehensive schools or special classes in secondary schools; vocational training schools; colleges and universities. Adults are offered all forms of learning: day-time, evening, extra-mural or distance learning.

Secondary education to adults is free of charge and provided by 23 adult training centres or special classes in 48 secondary schools located in different towns in Lithuania. These institutions provide both, formal and non-formal education. Teaching there is based on modules, adults may choose the form of learning and a type of profile – humanitarian or science. They are enabled to learn only some subjects, all the subjects or take extern examinations.

The main state institution responsible for the development of adults’ continuous vocational training policy at national level is Lithuanian Labour Market Training Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. This institution implements the policy of labour market training and organises the services of professional information and counselling. Its six branches (territorial labour market training and counselling services) and 15 Labour market training centres are located in the biggest cities of Lithuania; they have partners in many western countries (Austria, Denmark, the UK, Sweden, etc) who share their experience in the area.

According to the Department of Statistics that collects information on adult education from all institutions having licences to provide adult teaching services (issued by the Ministry of Education and Science), in 2000-2001 the total number of adults enrolled in formal institutions of adult education and training was 32,000. The figure of adults trained in the 15 labour market training centres stood at 17,100: the cost of training for 6,900 learners was covered by the Labour Exchange, for another 6,900 by their employers and 3,300 adults invested in their learning themselves. In 2002 the Service helped 83,900 adults to integrate into the labour market and trained 18,600 adults; provided counselling services to 32,800 people individually and 32,600 in groups. In the same year particular attention was paid to adults having special needs (e.g. disabled) and difficulty in finding a job. During the first half of 2003 9,300 adults (43.2% directed by their employers) attended different training programs in the 15
labour market training centres; 40,300 adults (77% of them unemployed) received counselling services – (20,500 individual and 19,800 group consultations).

Although the presented figures are the highest since the Service started its activities, adults’ continuous education in Lithuania is not sufficiently developed in comparison with other European Union countries. In Lithuania only 5-10% of adult citizens are involved in adult training programs; whereas in some EU countries (e.g. Sweden, Germany) this figure is over 40%. Only one fifth of companies plan and carry out refreshing training for their employees. State institutions work more systematically in this area than private companies. Employers of public administration, health care, education and energy state institutions regularly organise intensive continuous training courses for their employees; however, at present the funding of state institutions is becoming tighter, due to this the training provided is becoming shorter. Adults who are not funded by the employer find it difficult to participate in continuous education mainly because of their low income. What is more, the system encouraging employers to fund their employees’ training has not been created yet; besides, there is no legal basis regulating employers and employees’ rights in the area of refreshing qualification.

The Service closely cooperates with another institution providing training services in Lithuania - Market Exchange whose main objective is to help registered people and other job seekers to find a job according to their qualification and profession. The institution offers different market policy programs: vocational training, public works, works funded by the Employment Fund, starting one’s own business, job clubs, etc. to adults who do not have any profession, whose profession is non-marketable or to members of the society who find it difficult to integrate into the labour market.

Colleges (15 state and 9 private) and universities (15 state and 4 private) are institutions that play a particularly important role in adults’ continuous education. They provide day time, evening, extra-mural and distance forms of studies. In colleges theoretical studies lasting 3-4 years are combined with professional practice, and upon completion graduates acquire vocational qualification and higher non-university education.

Universities provide higher university education on two levels: under-graduate studies last for four years and students acquire a Bachelor’s degree; graduate studies of one and a half or two years finish with a Master’s degree. Adults having a Master’s degree are entitled to continue their education and apply for Doctoral studies.

In 2002 there were 21,000 students enrolled in state colleges and about 119,000 students in state universities. In 2001 the number of adults in evening and extra-mural departments was 40,000; over 20,000 adults took non-formal courses at Lithuanian higher education institutions.

Although higher education institutions are financed from the state budget, they have considerable autonomy in managing their resources, e.g. state universities have a different number of state funded students (having top grades on entering) mainly in day time departments; however, the majority of day time, evening and extra-mural students at tertiary level have to pay for their studies. Present trends in higher education show that adults’ needs to participate in this type of education are growing under the conditions of lifelong learning; that is why it is necessary to create support mechanisms for adults’ participation in continuous higher education.

Thus, formal teaching and learning covers all levels of education institutions and is regulated by the state. Due to this fact adult learners can be transferred from one level to another and the level of education provided by continuous education institutions corresponds to the level of education gained through adult education institutions.

In the case of formal adult education its contents is regulated by qualification requirements of the state register and it finishes by issuing a state accredited document or a certificate recognizing a successful completion of the whole course of studies, or a module as part of a definite program. If non-formal education is provided its contents is not regulated by the state (on condition that it must not include activities breaking the law) and its participants have an important say in preparing the course programs, setting its length and contents. Non-formal education has been lately encouraged by the state
and is partly state-funded. Today it covers all types of education not listed on the state education register and not in the form of a regulated module; it is provided by the state and other officially registered education institutions, clubs, libraries, unions, organisations and associations as well as accredited adult re-qualification and training centres (Concept of Lithuanian Education, 1992, p. 6).

It should be pointed out that at present particular attention is paid to the education of socially supported groups of adults - disabled, recruited soldiers, immigrants and convicts. This category of adults is provided with either formal or non-formal education depending on their specific purposes, e.g. this year Lithuania witnessed an unprecedented education possibility open to convicts sentenced to life imprisonment in Vilnius. Under the agreement between Vilnius Pedagogical University and Prison Department prisoners have been provided with access to higher education and in case of success they will be eligible to a degree. Although this fact has caused much debate nationwide it obviously proves the fact that Lithuania has become a democracy pursuing to provide equal opportunities to all its citizens as well as having made education accessible to everybody and in this way fostering openness in the society.

**Requirement for new basic skills**

In the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) a set of new basic skills necessary for employment and participation in modern knowledge society was outlined: IT skills, technological culture, foreign languages, entrepreneurship and social skills. The set of these new basic skills added to the traditional ones of literacy and numeracy has now become vital not only to young people entering the labour market and the world of active citizenship, but also to adult participants.

It is evident that in reality new basic skills have become powerful tools for effective and active participation in the modern knowledge society. New possibilities that are opening through the successful use of ITC technologies, command of foreign languages as well as effective usage of social skills, may give adults a new dimension of participation, active citizenship, openness and democracy.

High demand for vital new skills especially in IT and foreign language cause a potential threat of commercialization. Being on high demand IT and foreign language courses for adults promise high and constant financial revenue for the providing institutions. Meanwhile, the quality of the courses and competence of course providers are not always properly monitored. Therefore, in the light of necessity for acknowledgement of non-formal education, mechanisms of quality control are to be yet created. However, the effective command of the new level of literacy has become a new challenge for adults in Lithuania as well as in other countries. At this point adult education has to play the key role in fostering adults’ need to gain new basic skills, fostering their participation and openness in the society in general.

**ITC skills - new opportunities for openness in the society**

Requirements of today's world put forward significant challenges for adults to fully participate in daily social life and to develop their active citizenship. Technological changes and those in the ITC field provide the premise to change the traditional forms of citizens’ participation in social, economic and political life. ITC possibilities, the Internet for example, allow adults to overcome tremendous barriers of hierarchic order on both organizational and governmental levels. Electronic communication enables adult citizens of the society to make direct contacts with all levels of authority as well as allows the latter to have direct contacts with and a feedback from the people on their needs. Adult education in the field of technological culture and ITC literacy opens a tremendous opportunity to promote openness and transparency in the society.

In December 2002 the government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Concept of E-Government (Koncepcija, 2002) targeted to directly influence the governance of the state, to change the initiating process and implementation of decisions and, what is the most important – communication
between the population and public institutions. ITC application in the state governance is meant to open vast opportunities for higher cooperation between the population and state institutions for more transparent governance and clearer decision-making process. An electronic request or inquiry to any public administration institution is now equalized to a written request and requires an answer. The main target of the concept is to achieve that all public administration services were available online by 2005.

A futurist Alvin Toffler nearly a decade ago outlined the fact that new communications were killing hierarchy and allowing the lowest level employees to directly communicate with the highest level management (Toffler, 1991). Moreover, this is becoming true for the whole modern society – ITC allow citizens to directly participate in the governance and decision making and to contact public institutions thus providing direct feedback from the population.

By introducing the Concept of E-Government Lithuanian government has evidently provided a legal background for decreasing a hierarchic bureaucratic division in the society and promoting openness. In September 2002 a survey conducted by Law University of Lithuania and Open Lithuania Foundation (Valdininkai, 2003) showed that only 37% of answers were received to 1,100 electronic enquiries and requests sent to different ministries of Lithuania, county administrations and municipalities. Similar surveys of public institutions have been conducted in the EC since 1999. However, the Lithuanian survey results show that Lithuanian public institutions are still not sufficiently efficient in providing electronic communication with the population. The barriers to new openness in the society might be due to the lack of technological culture in adopting modern ways of communication, due to the lack of ITC skills for both, public servants and the population, and due to the lack of Internet connection for the population.

At this point adult education plays key role in decreasing ITC illiteracy among adults. In January/February 2002 a pilot survey conducted in Kaunas city (population 440,000; the 2nd biggest city in Lithuania) showed that 74.8% of the adult respondents were able to use computers, while nearly a quarter (25.2%) did not know how to use a PC (Fig. 1). The mentioned results may be interpreted depending on how we interpret the idea of IT literacy itself. On the one hand, almost 75% of more or less IT literate adults is a rather positive result. However, on the other hand, if IT literacy is indeed interpreted in the way as, e.g., numeracy or literacy is perceived, 25.2% of digitally illiterate adults in their working years is a rather scaring number. Besides, this is a self-evaluated answer allowing a certain amount of overestimation. While evaluating their knowledge of particular programs the respondents demonstrated even lower levels of skills. However, the majority of the respondents possess at least the main IT skills (Fig. 2): 66.7% are able to use the program Word (1/3 of the respondents cannot use Word), about half of the respondents (51.7%) are able to use program Excel, 62.5% can use the Internet, 60.0% can use e-mail.

Fig. 1. Digital literacy of the respondents

![Digital literacy of the respondents](image1.png)

Fig. 2. Ability to use certain software

![Ability to use certain software](image2.png)
The aim of this research was to measure self-evaluated new basic skills of adult employed people (over 30 years old) and work-searching unemployed people in Kaunas city, Lithuania, and to investigate the relation between the possession of new basic skills and the employment of the respondents of the survey. It has to be mentioned that this pilot survey was conducted in one of the major industrial and educational centers of Lithuania while the results of a similar survey conducted in another region of the country or in a rural area would presumably demonstrate a lower possession of new basic skills among adults. The type of the research was quantitative, the method applied was questionnaire form survey. The respondents (122 adult employed people over 30 years old and work-searching, unemployed people) for the research were chosen according to the random convenient method of selection seeking to interview employed people having higher university education as well as respected and popular professions (medical doctors, higher education institution/college teachers, business managers/general managers with higher education), employed people without higher education (shop-assistants), unemployed people possessing higher education and without it.

The data of this questionnaire survey were processed using SPSS (Windows 10) statistic survey software. The validity of research is 99.00 (p<0.0001). The questionnaire contained 50 close-ended questions that could be divided into certain question blocks: questions about foreign language skills, IT skills, skills to use various surrounding technical possibilities (technological culture), entrepreneurship, basic social skills and personal information.

The results of this survey display a higher level of IT skills of employed respondents than that of the unemployed (76.5% of employed and 65.5% of unemployed are able to use a personal computer, the Word program is used by 72.0% of employed and 58.6% unemployed, Excel — by 56.1% of employed and 44.8% of unemployed, Internet — by 68.3% of employed and 41.1% of unemployed, e-mail — by 65.9% of employed and by only 37.9% of unemployed), demonstrating the fact that gaining new skills highly increases employment opportunities.

It is also evident that the percentage of those who possess IT skills among highly educated respondents is prevailingly higher than that among the respondents with lower education (89.1% of all those who possess higher education and only 41.6% of all the rest respondents mentioned to be able to use a PC; Internet and e-mail can respectively be used by 78.3% and 77.1% of those with higher education and 27.7% and 22.2% of those with lower education). The high formal education level of the respondents, the learning skills that they possess secure adult learners better learning and consequently employment opportunities, while those with lower education demonstrate lower IT skills level within their group. It is repeatedly evident that highly educated people possess more activated learning skills allowing them to learn continuously and acquire new basic skills necessary for the participation in the Knowledge society.

Describing IT skills in relation with the respondents’ age groups, the trend is that the highest percent of skills to use a PC is in the youngest age group (within 30-35 years — 88.2%) and it decreases up to 60% of respondents in the age group of 51-55 years old. The lack of IT skills not only decreases their employment chances, but also greatly decreases the opportunities of those adults to be active citizens able to promote openness in Lithuanian society.

Despite the challenge of IT skills for adults there still is a lot to be done to develop a higher computer penetration and Internet usage. The results of the independent survey of scientists and experts on the human social development in Lithuania in 2002-2003 (Pagal internautų.., 2003) shows that Lithuania has lower density of telecommunications than other Baltic countries and fewer possibilities to connect to Internet, higher difference in the usage of telecommunications in urban and rural areas. The inhabitants of major cities of Lithuania have 3 times more personal computers than those in rural areas. In 2002 almost 20% of people in the urban areas possessed PCs and half of them were using Internet, while only 5% of those in rural areas possessed PCs and only 2% of the latter could use Internet. On the average only 3% of those possessing private PCs in Lithuania are connected to the
Internet. This means that Lithuania is behind the European Community countries and some other accessing countries in the total number of constant Internet users. Out of 100 000 inhabitants 680 are users of Internet in Lithuania, while in Estonia – 1480, in Latvia – 720, in EC countries – ~4000 users of Internet. The described status quo urges policy makers and businesses for joint efforts to increase computer and Internet penetration.

Different joint public and private efforts are being carried out to combat adult ITC illiteracy in Lithuania. Leading Lithuanian businesses – mobile telecommunications company Omnitel, telecommunications company Lietuvos Telekomas, the largest banks in the country Hansa-LTB and Vilniaus bankas as well as the largest Lithuanian IT companies Alna and Sonex Co – have come together and formed a Window to the Future alliance. The alliance has started a unique project aimed at the business support in developing information society. The Window to the Future initiative has currently drawn attention of other local companies as well as some foreign funds. 66 Internet access points have been established in cooperation with local governmental institutions all over Lithuania since the start of the project in May 2002. In January 2003 a new road sign Internet was launched and erected by the Window to the Future initiative. This sign will show the way to Internet access centres all over Lithuania.

In the end of 2002 the Government of Lithuania joined the Window to the Future project - The Ministry of Interior and Window to the Future alliance signed a cooperation treaty. According to the agreement, 300 new Internet access places will be established in several years’ time. The aim of Window to the Future alliance is to achieve the Internet penetration ratio of the European Union in Lithuania over the period of three years (by 2005).

Window to the Future alliance has launched a new teaching project to enhance the development of the use of the Internet. Computer training programe has been prepared together with the Ministry of Education and Science. People can take a free-of-charge Internet course for beginners and receive a certificate. The alliance plans to teach 20,000 adults in a year giving free basic 9 hour-long teaching courses on basic Internet usage.

The partners of the alliance pursue changing the currently existing situation in Lithuania where a certain so-called digital upper-society constitutes the market of electronic services, communication, and PC products. The emerging and growing public digital divide is neither beneficial to the society, nor to businesses. The mission of the Window to the Future alliance is to promote the use of Internet in Lithuania and in this way to give impetus to the growth of the standards of life, as well as Lithuania’s competitive ability among European and world countries. It is organised to stimulate the collaboration between businesses and state institutions, to promote the use of information technologies and to reduce digital divide among the public.

It is possible to achieve the Internet penetration average equal to that of the European Union under the following three conditions: 1) the Internet access has to be guaranteed to as wider public as possible; 2) training the public to use computers and the Internet and 3) developing electronic services useful to the public. According to Statistics Department (2002) there are about 2.5 million adults 20-80+ years old in Lithuania. The majority of young people (up to 30) are generally IT literate because they have already received computer education at school. There are no exact numbers available on ITC literacy among adults, however, even 20,000 people (~1 % of adults) with basic ITC education is a very positive and substantial effort in fostering ITC literacy among adults in Lithuania.

Foreign language skills – a window to open-mindedness

Limited skills of foreign languages characterized communist societies, where adults were restricted from gaining knowledge of other cultures and ideologies. Many adults in Lithuania still have very poor foreign language skills, which prevent them from getting to know social, cultural and economic pluralism of the world. Thus, adult education in the field of gaining foreign language skills has become
a powerful tool to foster openness in Lithuania.

The results of the same pilot survey on adult basic skills in Kaunas have shown that adults lack foreign language skills. As it might have been expected due to the historic past, respondents possessed the best skills of the Russian language — 68.6% have mentioned that they are able to fluently communicate in this language. However, in the context of Lithuanian integration into the economic market and social environment of the European Community, the major role in socialization and employment belongs to the knowledge of the major Western European languages: English, German and French, in certain cases more to English and German, while sometimes — only to the knowledge of English. According to the data of this self-evaluated survey, only 12.3% of the respondents think that they are able to fluently communicate in the English language, 3.3% — in the German language. About a quarter of all the respondents are able to read professional literature in English — 25.4% and in German — 9.9%. More respondents have mentioned that they are able to speak and understand these languages.

It might have been predicted that the survey of younger respondents would present higher levels of the Western European language skills. In the years of Lithuanian Independence (since 1990) the Russian language has lost its priority and the establishments of secondary and higher education have started to primarily teach Western European languages.

There exists an evident relationship between the formal education level of the respondents of this survey and higher levels of English and German language skills. Only respondents possessing higher education possess fluent foreign language communication skills. According to the data of this survey, not a single unemployed respondent (although the major part of them are those having higher education) is capable of fluent communication in any language of the European Community.

It is also interesting to investigate what, according to the respondents, has helped them most to learn the foreign language that they can speak best. The majority (77.9%) noted that they acquired the basics at school, 30.3% agree that they learnt the language during their studies in the institutions of higher studies (universities). The results of this survey show that respondents having no higher education are usually satisfied with the foreign language skills acquired at school or learn it informally in communication, while those possessing higher education are also more apt to learn it non-formally, investing their personal possessions. A higher degree of readiness of the respondents having higher education to learn foreign languages non-formally affirm an important fact about lifelong learning, i.e. that learning to learn which is acquired in one’s childhood and adolescence is critical.

Though the questionnaire did not specify which culture: American or British was meant, only 3.3% of unemployed and 16.9% of employed respondents have asserted to know the culture behind the English language. It has to be mentioned that the knowledge of the foreign culture is not merely a question of personal erudition. It is also closely related to the knowledge of that language as each language represents a certain culture, values, lifestyle and a way of communication and without knowing it adequate and full communication is not possible.

Rather low western language skills of adults in Lithuania mean a huge potential for adult education in various, mostly non-formal ways. There are well established and very popular language schools for adults, e.g. Soros House International, corporate language training programmes within companies as well as various intensive language training programmes for public servants such as in the military and customs sector that are becoming increasingly popular. The key point is that foreign language skills are increasingly growing among adults in Lithuania, especially among the active part of the employed population. The increasing international business and trade contacts raise a constant necessity for improving foreign language skills for adults. Thus, the growing number of adult population being able to read and relate in western languages decreases the tendencies of xenophobia, radicalism and alienation and at the same time increases the chances for democratic pluralism, free ideas and openness.
The importance of social skills in the development of openness in Lithuania

Among the most important skills for adults in today's democratic world as well as those emphasized in various European Union documents including A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) are social skills enabling people to successfully operate in teams. A group is prevented from effective work if its members are not able to apply communication, leadership, decision-making or conflict-solving skills. Most adults in Lithuania have never studied in groups and lack teamwork and active participation skills. Team work and other group working techniques are some of the most popular adult teaching/learning methods and play a very important role in fostering social interest, activity, responsibility, participation, ability to come to an agreement and openness to other attitudes and experiences.

Fig. 3. Characteristics of social skills

Social skills are not acquired for one’s whole life, they have to be constantly renewed. These skills help people to live together and be useful in participating in social and economic life of the country; they help to learn and carry out a multitude of tasks in vocational as well as community life.

Besides, it is worth to remember that the need to belong to a group is a very important factor in adult personality development. The feeling of belonging to a certain group is insufficient - it is essential to live through the feeling of commonness, share experience, joy, concern and know that you are a part of this group. The more an adult feels belonging to a group, the better his social interest is developed: active participation, attentiveness, responsibility, concreteness, and respect for each other.

Group work is inefficient when its members do not apply co-operation, leadership, decision-making, conflict-solving skills (Fig. 3). The latter as well as academic learning skills have to be developed. A lot of adults in Lithuania have never had possibilities of learning in groups, therefore, not all are capable of learning this way.

Tereseviciene, 1997). On the whole, group work has gained value in Lithuania as through group learning academic and social goals of adult education are better achieved.

Investigating the approach of adult educators and adult learners to traditional teaching and learning in groups (J. Dauksyte, 2002) in Lithuania it was determined that during educational reform Lithuanian educators have been attaching more value to group learning methods in addition to traditional teaching methods.

The pilot research (the sample: 192 adult learners, 40 adult teachers; questionnaire type) carried out in 2003 (M. Tereseviciene, G. Gedviliene) shows that adult educators apply learning in group methods more often while organising performance of practical tasks (70%), in seminars (57%), in project development (35%), and presenting theoretical materials (10%). Statistically significant differences have been obtained in the following areas: learners themselves more often than adult educators appreciate the expert method (p<0.0001), the mind map method (p<0.001) and discussions in teams (p<0.01). The method of problem solving (80%), the project (72%) and case analysis method (64%) (Fig. 4) have been named by adult educators as the most appropriate methods among group learning methods.

Fig. 4 Estimation of group learning methods by adult educators and adult learners

63% of the research participants noticed that while working in groups with other learners their communication improved (df=4, \(\chi^2=37.0\), p<0.01), their cooperation skills enhanced (df =2, \(\chi^2=12.40\), p<0.001). However, 37% of the learners mentioned some disadvantages of learning in groups, such as lack of trust in each other (18%), consensus (11 %) and skillfulness while working together (8%).

Comparing the attitudes of adult educators and adult learners towards the goals set for learning in groups, the following outcomes were revealed: adult educators were aiming at developing creativity (82%), the ability to express their thoughts (67%), developing initiative (60 %), responsibility (38 %) and diligence (27%). Similar outcomes were found in the learner group: the ability to express one’s thoughts was distinguished as the major goal (87%), whereas the development of initiative as the least important goal (23 %). Inexperienced adult educators faced more difficulties in identifying advantages of group learning; however, 57% of them stated that group learning developed social skills (p<0.001) and academic skills (p<0.01). 36% of the learners indicated that communication and conflict solving were very important (p<0.01) for successful group activity. 64% of the learners stated that information was best remembered through analysis and discussion (p <0.001).

Sometimes the process of learning in groups can be assessed in two ways: for some it is an advantage, for others it is a disadvantage (M. Tereseviciene, G. Gedviliene, 1999). Fig. 5 presents controversial evaluations of learning in groups according to four distinguished features:
The research indicated that the difficulties listed above are not insurmountable. If group work is planned thoroughly, potential problems can be foreseen and prevented. Moreover, group learning is important for the process of socialization and critical thinking. It is a complicated and long lasting process with a complex method application entailing no possibility of quick results. Only precise planning and step-by-step application of group learning methods may result in positive outcomes.
Conclusions

Great political and economic changes in post-communist Lithuania that began in the 1990s opened new vistas for its education system in general and adult education in particular. The introduction of the principle of the rule of law and political changes laid down the foundation for the democratic order of state and government and gave an impetus to the development of the new educational order. The greatest disadvantages of the Soviet education system (the goals of education, education methodology, the teaching contents, underdeveloped area of adult education) have inevitably made the concept of lifelong learning particularly important. The idea of lifelong learning was mentioned in a number of documents adopted in Lithuania in the 1990s and acquired particular importance in the light of the EU documents.

Basing upon the fundamental principal of the present day democratic education policy in Lithuania to provide all citizens of Lithuania with equal rights to education, adult education has become a major part of permanent education system. The processes occurring in the area of education in their turn strengthen the development of democracy adding force to the process of creating an open society in Lithuania.

The requirement of new basic skills is a new challenge for adults in Lithuania as well as in other countries. The ability to use new vast possibilities of ITC enables adults to participate in the country governance and decision-making in a totally different way. ITC skills allow adults to practice a very new way of breaking bureaucratic barriers by providing different levels of national and local government with authentic feedback.

Gaining foreign language skills is another important task for adults in Lithuania. A very intensive work of learning western foreign languages mostly within non-formal sector is taking place in Lithuania today. The ability to read and communicate in foreign languages does not only meet the needs of vocational nature, but also opens possibilities to get to know different cultures, values, opinions and outlooks. Foreign language skills open a new world characterized by democratic and intercultural diversity, tolerance and open-mindedness for Lithuanian adults.

According to the research results learning in groups is an active process of constructing social skills. Group learning methods (problem solving, expert method, discussion teams) are applicable and positive in developing social skills (attentiveness, warmth, specificity, responsibility, empathy, mutual respect, conflict-resolving, decision-making and leadership skills) for adults. This kind of social skill development gives new possibilities to the development of democratic processes among adults and openness in the Lithuanian society.

Both, the society in general and Lithuanian adult education system are undergoing dynamic changes striving to meet the requirements of market economy competition and to foster positive developments in the social order and atmosphere of the country. Despite of the evidence of gaps in possession of new basic skills among adults in Lithuania, it is obvious that combined efforts of private and public initiative and devotion of adult educators to active teaching methods play a very important if not the key role in fostering active citizenship, participation and openness in the Lithuanian society.
References


Concept of Lithuanian Education. (1992). In: http://www.smm.lt/Teisine_informacija/koncepcija/koncepcija2.htm#5_2


Department of Statistics under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. In http://www.std.lt


Langas i ateiti (Window to the Future Alliance). In http://www.langasiateiti.lt/english/


Pagal internautu skaičių Lietuva lenkia tik Rumunija ir Turkija (Accoring to the Number of Internauts Lithuania Overtakes only Romania and Turkey) (2003/08/26). In BNS in http://www.delfi.lt


Valdininkai elektroniniu pastu bendrauja nenoriai (Public Officials are Reluctant to Communicate by E-mail). (2003/02/11). In BNS in http://www.delfi.lt http://www3.lrs.lt/owa-bin/owarepl/inter/owa/U0038183.pdf