HUMAN, TECHNOLOGIES AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION, 2026
https://doi.org/10.22364/htqe.2026.09

CASE STUDY OF ADULT LEARNERS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AFTER THE RESTORATION OF LITHUANIA'S INDEPENDENCE

Toma Naumčiuk[1]

[1] University of Latvia, Latvia

ABSTRACT

Research into English-language use in Lithuania following the restoration of independence in 1990 is important for understanding the historical factors that shaped the development of English proficiency among the Lithuanian population. In particular, examining foreign-language education during the Soviet period can help explain why many individuals who received their schooling before 1990 subsequently had limited opportunities to develop and use English. As sources documenting Soviet-era language education become increasingly scarce, oral testimonies from individuals who experienced this educational system provide valuable first-hand evidence of language-learning practices and experiences that may otherwise remain undocumented. Such accounts can also contribute to a better understanding of the linguistic experiences of the Soviet generation and their implications for subsequent generations in Lithuania and the wider Baltic region. Therefore, this study draws on a review of relevant literature and four semi-structured interviews conducted in Panevėžys, Lithuania. The participants comprised three older adults and one working-age adult who were born in the Soviet Union and had studied English at school prior to the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990. The interview data indicate that English-language instruction in the participants' schools was generally characterised by limited opportunities for practical language use and teaching approaches that did not sufficiently develop communicative competence. Overall, the findings suggest that the limited English proficiency reported by participants can be associated with several interconnected factors, including the relatively limited availability of qualified English teachers, pedagogical approaches that prioritised formal language knowledge over communicative practice, and the limited practical relevance of English in the Soviet-era linguistic environment. In particular, the dominant position of Russian in education, employment, and travel, combined with the limited relevance of English in participants' everyday lives at the time, further restricted opportunities to use and develop English.

Keywords: *adult learners, Baltic countries, English language, English language usage, Restoration of Lithuania's independence, Soviet Union*

Introduction

English has become one of the most widely used languages for international communication, education, employment, travel, science, and cultural exchange (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2015). Its growing global significance has contributed to its increasing importance as a foreign language in educational systems worldwide (Nunan, 2003). In Lithuania, however, the development of English-language proficiency needs to be considered within the specific historical and sociolinguistic context of the Soviet period. The experiences of individuals who received their education under the Soviet system were shaped by a linguistic environment in which Russian occupied a dominant position in education, employment, public administration, and everyday communication (Ehala, 2013; Ivanauskas, 2009). Consequently, opportunities to learn and use English were substantially different from those available to subsequent generations.

The linguistic situation in the Baltic states provides an important context for understanding these experiences. During the Soviet period, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania underwent significant political, social, and linguistic transformations, including changes in language use, language hierarchies, and patterns of bilingualism (Druviete, 1997; Plakans, 2011). Russian was given a privileged position within the Soviet educational and institutional system (Ehala, 2013; Plakans, 2011), while Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian remained the national languages of the respective republics but operated within a broader environment characterised by the institutional dominance of Russian. The historical development of the Baltic languages was also influenced by earlier periods of Germanisation and Polonisation (Plakans, 2011). These experiences demonstrate the importance of language as a component of national and cultural identity and help explain the complex linguistic environment in which the Soviet generation was educated. As Ozolins (1999) argues, language constitutes an important element of national identity and plays a significant role in maintaining the cultural continuity of smaller linguistic communities.

This historical context is particularly relevant to the linguistic experiences of Lithuanians who attended school during the Soviet period. The linguistic experiences of the Soviet-era generation were shaped by the prominent position of Russian in education and everyday communication, while opportunities to develop practical English-language skills were more limited (Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2003; Ivanauskas, 2009). English was taught alongside other foreign languages in Lithuanian schools, but its practical relevance and opportunities for communicative use were constrained by the wider sociolinguistic and political context of the Soviet period (Monk, 1990; Ivanauskas, 2009). Following the restoration of independence in 1990, the position and practical importance of foreign languages in Lithuania changed substantially as the country moved away from Soviet language policies and became increasingly integrated into European and international structures (Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2003). Following independence, Lithuania experienced profound political, economic, social, and educational changes, including increased interaction with Western European countries and greater integration

into international institutions and networks. These developments significantly increased the practical importance of English for education, employment, travel, and international communication (Mole, 2012). The contrast between the linguistic experiences of the Soviet period and those that emerged after 1990 therefore provides an important basis for examining why members of the older generation may have had limited opportunities to develop and use English.

Importantly, recollections of Soviet-era language education constitute a gradually disappearing source of evidence. As members of the generation educated under the Soviet system grow older, their personal accounts provide an increasingly valuable opportunity to document educational experiences that may not be fully captured in institutional records. A carefully reported, ethically conducted, and historically contextualised set of life-history interviews can therefore have scholarly value in its own right, particularly when examining how former pupils experienced and interpreted English-language education. At the same time, the use of a small qualitative sample requires the scope of the claims to remain proportionate to the evidence. Rather than seeking to generalise to the wider Lithuanian population, the present study uses four interviews to provide an in-depth account of individual experiences and recollections of English-language provision in late-Soviet Lithuanian schooling.

Against this background, the present study examines the factors that may have contributed to limited English-language proficiency and use among Lithuanians educated during the late Soviet period and considers how these experiences shaped their use of English following the restoration of independence in 1990. More specifically, it provides a description of English-language provision in late-Soviet Lithuanian schooling as recalled by former pupils. The aim of the study is to examine how former pupils remember and evaluate English-language teaching in Lithuanian schools during the late Soviet period, highlighting its main characteristics and the experiences associated with it. The object of the study is the experience of English-language education and its perceived influence on subsequent English-language use among individuals educated in Lithuanian schools during the late Soviet period.

The study combines a review of relevant scholarly literature with a qualitative case study based on four semi-structured interviews conducted in Lithuania. The literature review examines the historical and linguistic context of the Baltic states, with particular attention to foreign-language education and the changing position of English before and after the restoration of independence. The empirical component explores participants' recollections and evaluations of English-language education during the late Soviet period. Accordingly, two research objectives were formulated: a) to examine the historical and linguistic context of foreign-language education in the Baltic states prior to 1990 through a review of relevant scholarly literature; b) to explore former pupils' experiences and perceptions of English-language education through four qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in Lithuania.

Historical Context of Baltic Countries in Soviet Union

Small states such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have historically faced significant security challenges due to their geographical proximity to and relationship with larger neighbouring powers. Russia, in particular, has employed various forms of political and military power to pursue its strategic objectives in the region. Crowther (2023) characterises Russian political warfare as a significant security concern in the Baltic region and emphasises the particular vulnerability perceived by the Baltic states, which have experienced Russian and Soviet domination historically. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 provides a contemporary example of the security challenges faced by smaller states in the region, as Ukraine, despite its considerable geographical size and population, has faced military aggression from a substantially larger neighbouring power (Crowther, 2023).

The history of the Baltic states has been characterised by successive periods of political domination and territorial conflict involving larger neighbouring powers. Russian imperial rule significantly influenced linguistic and cultural life in Lithuania. Following the 1863–1864 uprising, the Russian imperial authorities expanded policies of Russification that had initially been implemented in the Lithuanian lands to other parts of the Baltic region (Plakans, 2011). As Plakans (2011) notes, the systematic policy of Russification implemented in the Lithuanian and Polish lands from 1864 was subsequently extended to the Baltic provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland (p. 256). Thus, the processes of linguistic and cultural Russification affected not only Lithuania but also Latvia and Estonia, although their historical experiences and the intensity of these policies varied across the region.

During the period of Russification, the status of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian was increasingly challenged by policies that promoted Russian as the language of administration, education, and public life. In the Estonian and Latvian territories, some Russian officials even referred to Estonian and Latvian as "dialects" rather than languages, while the use of the Cyrillic alphabet for publications in these languages was actively encouraged (ibid). In the Lithuanian lands, restrictions on the publication of Lithuanian-language materials in the Latin alphabet had been introduced earlier, following the 1863. At the same time, Russian, Polish, and German remained important languages in various institutional and socioeconomic domains, with their use required in some areas of government employment and public life (ibid). These policies contributed to an asymmetrical linguistic environment in which Russian acquired greater institutional prominence, while the Baltic national languages faced significant restrictions and pressures on their development and public use.

During the Soviet period, Russian acquired substantial institutional and practical importance in Lithuania. Russian was promoted through the educational system, and Soviet language policy increasingly strengthened its position in schools, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s (Ivanauskas, 2009). Knowledge of Russian also provided access to a wider range of educational and employment opportunities across the Soviet Union,

contributing to its practical relevance in everyday and professional life. The resulting linguistic environment created an asymmetrical form of bilingualism in which Lithuanians were generally expected to acquire Russian, whereas Russian speakers had considerably fewer incentives to acquire Lithuanian (Ehala, 2013).

In contrast, the practical relevance of English was considerably more limited within the Soviet linguistic environment. Because Russian functioned as a widely shared lingua franca across the Soviet Union, individuals could communicate across different Soviet republics without necessarily acquiring an additional foreign language. Knowledge of Russian therefore provided access to communication, education, employment, and travel across much of the Soviet space, reducing the immediate communicative necessity and motivation to develop practical English-language skills. Pavlenko (2006) describes Russian as a lingua franca across the territory of the former Soviet Union, while Kreindler (1997) notes that approximately 62% of non-Russian populations reported knowledge of Russian as either a first or second language. Consequently, although English was taught in some Soviet schools, opportunities to use it for authentic communication were comparatively restricted, particularly when individuals' educational, professional, and travel-related needs could largely be met through Russian.

Overall, English had relatively limited practical significance in Lithuania prior to the restoration of independence, apart from those who pursued the language for personal, educational, or other specific purposes. This situation contrasts with the present, when English has become a widely used lingua franca and is increasingly needed due to individuals' educational, professional, travel, and communicative needs. In contrast, during the Soviet period, Russian was institutionally imposed and functioned as the dominant language of communication, thereby reducing the practical necessity and opportunities to use English (Pavlenko, 2006; Kreindler, 1997).

In addition, a case study by Ķestere et al. (2021), focusing specifically on Latvia but also relevant to the broader Baltic context, revealed that researchers during the Soviet period had limited opportunities to use English and, consequently, to travel to Western countries, communicate with international scholars, exchange knowledge, and participate in international academic collaboration. This restricted opportunities for researchers to access and disseminate knowledge beyond the Soviet academic environment. Similarly, Ķestere and Stonkuvienė (2020) note that doctoral dissertations in the Baltic states were commonly written in Russian until 1990, indicating that the practice of conducting doctoral research and writing dissertations in national languages or English developed more extensively only after the restoration of independence. The transition to new academic and evaluation standards following independence also created challenges for researchers, as Soviet academic regulations differed considerably from those increasingly adopted in the international academic community (Ķestere & Stonkuvienė, 2020).

Following the restoration of independence, the Baltic states gradually introduced reforms aimed at restructuring their educational systems and overcoming the legacy of Soviet-era education (Hogan-Brun, 2007). In Latvia, for example, the reintroduction and strengthening of Latvian as the language of instruction required substantial changes to

established educational practices (Stikute, 2020). Teachers had to adapt to new curricula and experiment with teaching methods that supported the use of Latvian in schools (Stikute, 2020). Over time, these changes contributed to the strengthening of Latvian language and cultural identity, while the institutional and social prominence of Russian gradually declined (ibid).

In conclusion, the influence of the Soviet regime on the Baltic states was substantial, including the introduction of institutional and educational practices that strengthened the position of Russian in public life and schooling. For adults educated during this period, these experiences continue to influence their foreign-language knowledge, learning habits, and attitudes towards language learning. The restoration of independence thus entailed not only political transformation but also a gradual reorientation of language policy, education, and cultural practices towards the promotion of national linguistic and cultural values. (Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2003). This transition also created new language-learning needs for adults, particularly as English became increasingly important for international communication, employment, education, and mobility.

Adult Language Learning and Language Policy

Adult language learning is closely related to learners' previous educational experiences, social circumstances, and perceived needs. Knowles et al. (2015) argue that adult learners differ from younger learners in that their learning is often closely connected to existing experience, immediate needs, and the practical application of acquired knowledge. This perspective is particularly relevant to adults who received their schooling during the Soviet period in Lithuania. Their approaches to foreign-language learning were shaped by an educational environment in which Russian had a strong institutional and communicative position, while English had considerably fewer opportunities for practical use (Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2003; Ivanauskas, 2009). Consequently, their current attitudes towards learning English may reflect not only their individual abilities but also the linguistic environment and educational practices in which their initial language learning took place.

Motivation is another important factor in adult foreign-language learning. Dörnyei (2001) describes motivation as a complex factor influencing both the initiation and continuation of second-language learning. In the context of adult learners, motivation may be particularly connected to the perceived relevance of a language to present-day needs, including employment, travel, education, social communication, and access to international information. For the generation educated in Soviet Lithuania, these motivations may differ substantially from those that existed during their school years. While Russian was highly relevant to everyday and institutional communication during the Soviet period, the restoration of Lithuanian independence and the country's subsequent integration into European and international contexts increased the practical importance of English (Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2003).

From this perspective, language policy and individual motivation should be considered together. Language policies establish the linguistic environment in which individuals acquire and use languages. On the other hand, personal motivation influences how individuals continue learning later in life. The experiences of Lithuanian adults who studied English before 1990 therefore provide an opportunity to examine how an earlier language-policy context may continue to shape foreign-language learning in adulthood. Their experiences are particularly relevant because the transition from Soviet to post-independence Lithuania involved a substantial reorientation of language policy and educational practices (Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2003). For adults who had limited opportunities to use English during their school years, learning or relearning the language later in life may consequently represent not only the acquisition of a foreign language but also an adaptation to changed social, educational, and professional requirements.

In this context, adult language learning can be understood as a process influenced by the interaction of previous educational experience, language policy, present-day needs, and motivation. This perspective is particularly important for understanding the experiences of Lithuanian adults educated before 1990, whose opportunities to develop practical English-language competence were shaped by a very different linguistic environment from that of contemporary Lithuania.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory qualitative case-study design combining a review of relevant academic literature with four semi-structured life-history interviews. The empirical component focused on four individuals in Panevėžys, Lithuania, who had experienced English-language education in Lithuanian schools during the Soviet period. The study sought to explore how former pupils recall and evaluate English-language teaching and learning before the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990, and how the linguistic and educational environment of that period may have influenced the practical relevance of English.

The literature review was undertaken to establish the historical, linguistic, and educational context of English-language learning and use in the Baltic states, with particular attention to period before and after 1990. The interview data were subsequently considered in relation to the historical and scholarly literature in order to contextualise individual experiences within the broader linguistic and educational environment of the Soviet period.

Relevant academic literature was identified using Google Scholar, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCO APA PsycArticles, and SAGE Journals. The literature search focused on publications addressing Soviet-era language policy, foreign-language education, English-language teaching and use, and the linguistic and educational history of Lithuania and the other Baltic states. Particular attention was given to sources providing historical evidence concerning the position of Russian and English within

the Soviet educational system and to research examining changes in language and education policies following the restoration of independence.

Further, the empirical component consisted of four participants from Panevėžys, Lithuania. Participants were selected according to a predefined eligibility criterion: they had to be Lithuanians and had to have started learning English at school before 1990. This criterion ensured that participants had direct experience of English-language education during the Soviet period and corresponded to the historical period examined in the study. Hence, the sample included three older and one working adult. Participants were recruited on the basis of accessibility and voluntary participation.

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted on 17th of December in 2024 at one of the higher education institutions in Panevėžys. All interviews were conducted in Lithuanian, the participants' native language, to allow them to describe their experiences comfortably and without the additional linguistic demands of communicating in another language. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, and all four interviews were completed within a one-day period.

The interviews consisted of nine questions addressing (see Appendix 1) participants' experiences of learning English at school, teaching methods, opportunities to use English, the perceived relevance of English during the Soviet period, and their subsequent experiences with English. The questions and responses were relatively short and focused on the participants' personal recollections.

The interview data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. No audio or voice recording devices were used during the interviews. The researcher reviewed the written notes taken during each interview and identified key points and recurring themes in relation to the nine interview questions. These points were then organised into a comparative table, allowing responses to be examined systematically across participants and similarities, differences, and recurring patterns to be identified. Given the short duration of the interviews, the limited number of participants, and the concise nature of the responses, no automated or software-based transcription platform was used. On the other hand, to support the trustworthiness of the analysis, the original written by hand notes from each interview were retained as an audit trail, providing a record of the participants' responses and the basis for the points included in the comparative analysis. The researcher subsequently translated the recorded responses from Lithuanian into English for the purposes of conducting Table 1 and presenting it, as well.

Also, the study was exploratory and involved only four participants, therefore the analysis did not seek statistical generalisation. Instead, the responses were examined descriptively to identify common themes concerning English-language teaching, opportunities for language use, the perceived usefulness of English, and the influence of the wider Soviet linguistic environment.

Finally, participation in the study was voluntary. No personally identifying information was collected or reported, and both the participants and the educational institution with which some participants were affiliated are anonymised in the article. The study

was conducted for the purpose of documenting and exploring historical experiences of English-language learning during the Soviet period. Moreover, the interviews were short, involved a small number of participants, and therefore were conducted without audio recording or collection of identifying personal information, the study did not involve the collection of sensitive personal data.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged:

First, this is an exploratory case study of only four individuals in Panevėžys, and the findings therefore cannot be statistically generalised to the wider population of Lithuanians who studied English during the Soviet period.

Secondly, identifying participants who had studied English during the Soviet period presented a sampling challenge, as relatively few adults in the target population in Panevėžys had begun learning English before 1990.

Third, the study relies on retrospective accounts of educational experiences that occurred several decades ago. Participants could therefore have had difficulties recalling specific details of their English-language classes, and their recollections may also have been influenced by subsequent experiences and present-day interpretations.

Fourth, the absence of audio recordings also means that the analysis is based on the researcher's contemporaneous notes rather than verbatim interview transcripts. Furthermore, the translation of participants' short responses from Lithuanian into English was conducted by the researcher, which may involve some loss of linguistic nuance. Nevertheless, the interviews provide first-hand recollections that can contribute to the documentation of a historical period for which opportunities to collect such personal accounts are gradually diminishing. The findings are therefore interpreted as exploratory evidence of individual experiences rather than as representative evidence of the entire generation.

Fifth, identifying relevant scholarly literature presented several challenges. Research addressing the linguistic and educational context of the Baltic states during the Soviet period was often based on earlier publications, while more recent studies specifically examining the position of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian alongside Russian were comparatively limited. Google Scholar was therefore used extensively to identify relevant scholarly sources, particularly for establishing the historical context of the study. Additional literature was identified through databases including the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), EBSCO APA PsycArticles, and SAGE Journals.

Results

Information on participants' English-language learning experiences, language use, and perceived relevance of English was collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews as part of the qualitative component of the study. The interview questions

were designed to elicit participants' retrospective accounts of English-language education during the Soviet period and/or before the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990, when participants were children, adolescents, or young adults. The interview instrument consisted of nine questions addressing participants' educational background, experiences of English-language learning, opportunities for language use, perceived need for English, attitudes towards the language, and factors motivating their English-language learning at the time and subsequently.

Four life-history interviews were conducted to explore participants' recollections of English-language teaching and learning during the Soviet period. Participation was voluntary, and the interviews were conducted anonymously. Participants were asked to provide limited demographic information, including their year of birth and place of residence, as well as information concerning their English-language learning experiences. The responses were systematically organised in a comparative table (see Table 1) to facilitate data reduction and comparison across participants. The interview questions addressed the following areas: year of birth; place of residence; location of schooling; age or year at which English learning began; duration of English-language learning; contexts in which English was used; perceived need for English; attitudes towards English; and motivation to learn English both at the time and subsequently (see Appendix 1).

Table 1. Case study: interview results

Participants	Age	Learning period	Teaching methods	Language usage	Motivation
Participant 1	68y/o (1956)	5th–11th class; individually; group courses (from 2020)	Very poor: teacher was not fluent; just reading	No need then; was enthusiastic in learning it and now tries to talk to grandchildren	To learn and speak then and now
Participant 2	65y/o (1959)	5th–11th class; work courses; group courses (from 2020)	As now	No need then; for learning and fun, talking to grandchildren now	To learn and speak now
Participant 3	65y/o (1959)	5th–11th class; Music Academy (1 year); work courses; group courses (from 2022)	Average then; very strict in studies: translating, reading, story-telling, etc.	No need then; only for work now	To learn and speak now because of work and travels
Participant 4	51y/o (1973)	5th–11th class; studies; work courses	As now	No need then; only for further studies and work now	To learn and speak now because of work and travels

Source. Own research.

Given the small sample and the geographical scope of the study, the research is designed as an exploratory case study focusing on participants from Panevėžys. The findings therefore provide insight into individual experiences of English-language learning in this specific local context and should not be interpreted as representative of the Lithuanian population as a whole or of the other Baltic states. Nevertheless, the findings may provide a basis for identifying patterns that could be examined in larger-scale research involving participants from different regions of Lithuania and, potentially, Latvia and Estonia.

Most participants were originally from Panevėžys; one participant had lived in a rural area of the Panevėžys region before moving to the city in the third grade. All four interviews were conducted at a higher education institution in Panevėžys, where three participants were senior students and one was employee. The sample comprised three pensioners and one working adult, including three women and one man. For all participants, English was learned as a second foreign language after Russian during their school education, typically from the fifth to the eleventh grade.

The interview data did not indicate a clear relationship between participants' age or year of birth and their reported quality of English-language instruction. Participants born in different periods, ranging from the 1950s to the 1970s, described instances of teaching that they perceived as insufficiently specialised or effective. At the same time, the accounts suggest that competent English teachers were present, although participants perceived them as relatively uncommon. Across the interviews, participants reported the frequent use of reading, writing, and listening activities, whereas opportunities for developing spoken English appeared to be considerably more limited. Speaking practice was described as an infrequent component of English-language instruction.

One notable exception was reported by Participant 3, who recalled English lessons as relatively intensive and structured during one particular school year. According to this participant, lessons involved substantial translation, regular speaking activities, and retelling previously read texts. Another recurring observation by Participant 3 was about teachers' uncertain level of English-language proficiency, with some perceived as having only limited command of the language.

As shown in Table 1, participants generally did not perceive English as having strong practical relevance during their school years. Their motivation to study English was instead associated primarily with personal interest and curiosity about a foreign language that was less familiar and less widely used in their immediate environment than Russian. In this respect, English was sometimes perceived as a new or relatively unfamiliar language rather than as a necessary means of everyday communication. This contrasts with the contemporary context, in which English is widely used for international communication, education, employment, travel, and other purposes.

The experiences of Participants 4 is particularly relevant because he was younger than the other participants and began learning English shortly before after the period of the restoration of independence. His accounts suggest that changes in the political and linguistic environment did not necessarily result in an immediate transformation of

English-language teaching practices. Also, for example, Participant 4 and surprisingly, Participant 2 reported that the English teachers' performance was similar to nowadays teaching. On the other hand, both of them agreed that they still want and need to relearn English now due to their owns reasons, like work or communication with children who live abroad. This information suggests that, although participants described their school-based English language learning as broadly comparable to contemporary approaches, the learning process may nevertheless have been insufficiently effective, as evidenced by their need to resume or continue learning English later in life.

Overall, the interview findings suggest several factors that may have contributed to participants' limited present-day English proficiency. First, English had relatively limited practical relevance within the Soviet linguistic environment, where Russian was widely used for education, employment, communication, and mobility. Second, participants reported relatively few opportunities to use English for practical communication outside the classroom. Third, several participants questioned the consistency or professional preparedness of some English teachers. Taken together, these factors may help explain why participants who began learning English before 1990 generally reported limited confidence or fluency in spoken English compared with the greater opportunities for English-language exposure available to younger generations today.

Finally, these findings concerning motivation further illustrate the changing role of English across the two periods. The three older participants generally described their initial motivation as voluntary and related to personal interest or curiosity about English as a relatively unfamiliar foreign language. In contrast, the younger participant began learning English around the period when its social and practical relevance was increasing. In the present context, participants reported renewed motivation to improve their English for purposes such as communicating with family members living abroad, travelling independently, and employment. Some had subsequently returned to English-language learning through organised group courses. Although these findings cannot be generalised beyond the four participants, they illustrate how changes in the linguistic environment and the practical value attributed to English may influence both initial and later-life motivation to learn the language.

Conclusions

- The paper's most defensible contribution lies in its documentation of these experiences. This generation's recollections of Soviet-era language schooling represent a gradually disappearing source, and a carefully reported, ethically conducted, and well-contextualised set of four life-history interviews has value in its own right, provided that the conclusions remain proportionate to what such a small sample can support.
- The Russification of the Baltic states created a linguistic environment in which Russian was widely required in education, employment, politics, and everyday communication, thereby reducing the practical need and opportunities to use English. Travel

within the Soviet Union was also generally conducted within a Russian-speaking environment. Moreover, the literature analysis and case-study findings suggest that opportunities to learn and use English were limited and that the availability of English-language specialists in Panevėžys schools (or even in other Lithuania's cities) was relatively low. Where English instruction was provided, participants' accounts indicate instability in English-language provision with considerable variation in teachers' perceived proficiency and teaching practices. These factors may have contributed to the limited development of practical English-language competence (i.e., speaking) during the Soviet period. On the other hand, the participant's account of a rigorous year at the Music Academy contrasts with the experiences of other participants and suggests considerable variation in the quality and intensity of English-language provision.

- The case study also revealed an important limitation: only a few respondents could recall specific teaching methods used in their English lessons. In some cases, more than 30, 40, or even 50 years had passed since participants completed their schooling, making detailed retrospective accounts difficult. Consequently, the study cannot establish precisely how English-language teaching methods differed from those used today or identify specific methodological deficiencies. The limited recollection of teaching practices should therefore be considered when interpreting the findings.
- Today, the generation educated during the Soviet period consists largely of older adults, many of whom may need to learn or relearn English. Their earlier foreign-language education was shaped by learning environments that provided limited opportunities for practical English use, while English itself had relatively little relevance in their everyday lives at the time. Consequently, further research involving a larger sample is needed to examine these experiences more comprehensively and to identify teaching and learning approaches appropriate for older adult learners, taking into account their age, previous foreign-language learning experiences, current needs, and motivations.

REFERENCES

Crowther, G. A. (2023). The Baltic Sea region at an inflection point. *PRISM, 10*(2), 6–17.

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://shorturl.at/IhjzN

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press. https://shorturl.at/TALx3

Druviete, I. (1997). Linguistic human rights in the Baltic States. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 127*, 161–173. https://shorturl.at/xVDZe

Ehala, M. (2013). Russian-speakers in the Baltic countries: Language use and identity. In V.-A. Vihman & K. Praakli (Eds.), *Negotiating linguistic identity: Language and belonging in Europe* (pp. 89–110). Peter Lang.

Hogan-Brun, G., & Ramonienė, M. (2003). Emerging language and education policies in Lithuania. *Language Policy, 2*(1), 27–45. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022933612844

Hogan-Brun, G. (2007). *Language-in-education across the Baltic: Policies, practices and challenges*. Comparative Education, 43(4), 553–570. https://short.do/PLDmrp

Ivanauskas, V. (2009). Rusų kalbos plėtra ir Lietuvos TSR švietimo politika devintajame dešimtmetyje [Expansion of the Russian language and the education policy of Soviet Lithuania in the 1980s]. *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis, 2008*(1), 111–135.

Jenkins, J. (2015). Repositioning English and multilingualism in English as a lingua franca. *Englishes in Practice, 2*(3), 49–85. https://doi.org/10.1515/eip-2015-0003

Ķestere, I., Rubene, Z., & Ozola, I. (2021). Educational sciences between "real" Moscow and the "imaginary" West: The case of Latvia (1989–1999). In S. Van Ruyskensvelde, G. Thyssen, F. Herman, A. Van Gorp, & P. Verstraete (Eds.), *Folds of past, present and future: Reconfiguring contemporary histories of education* (pp. 267–288). De Gruyter Oldenbourg. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110623451-015

Ķestere, I., & Stonkuvienė, I. (2020). From national to global? Research on the history of education in the Baltic states (1990–2015): Examining doctoral theses. *Histoire de l'éducation, 154*, 75–91. https://doi.org/10.4000/histoire-education.5575

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.). Routledge.

Kreindler, I. (1997). Multilingualism in the successor states of the Soviet Union. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 17*, 91–112. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500003299

Mole, R. (2012). The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, discourse and power in the post-communist transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Routledge.

Monk, B. (1990). The specialized language school in the Soviet Union at the time of "perestroika." *ELT Journal, 44*(1), 38–45. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/44.1.38

Nunan, D. (2003). The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. *TESOL Quarterly, 37*(4), 589–613. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588214

Ozolins, U. (1999). Between Russian and European hegemony: Current language policy in the Baltic states. *Current Issues in Language and Society, 6*(1), 6–47. https://shorturl.at/mOi5d

Pavlenko, A. (2006). Russian as a lingua franca. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 26*, 78–99. https://shorturl.at/53XiW

Plakans, A. (2011). *A concise history of the Baltic States*. Cambridge University Press.

Stikute, E. (2020). Changes in the teaching of native literature: The case of Latvia. In I. Ķestere, E.-S. Sarv, & I. Stonkuvienė (Eds.), *Pedagogy and educational sciences in the post-Soviet Baltic States, 1990–2004: Changes and challenges*. University of Latvia Press. https://shorturl.at/Ojslf

APPENDIX 1

Interview questions:

1. When were you born?
2. Where do you currently live?
3. Where did you attend school?
4. When did you start learning English?
5. When did you stop learning English?
6. In what contexts did you use English?
7. Did you need to use English in your everyday life?
8. did you enjoy learning English?
9. What motivated you to learn English at the time, and what motivates you to learn or use English now?