

# THE VALUE OF NON-LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES: LEARNING ENGLISH FOR BETTER EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL WELLBEING

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**Summary:** *There is a growing body of research on language didactics that recognizes the potential of innovative methodologies, which may develop both linguistic and non-linguistic skills of language learners. In CEFR Companion Volume (2020), traditional language competences (listening, reading, speaking and writing) have been re-defined and replaced by four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation. Such a shift in language teaching has proposed an idea that language learning is much more than developing the linguistic competence of the target language; in particular, a variety of non-linguistic skills may contribute to one's better cultural, social or emotional well-being, higher self-esteem, career opportunities and acculturation in a host country. Therefore, attempts have been made to measure language students' non-linguistic achievements, trying to examine the added value of such innovative teaching. The current study aims at: (1) exploring the experiences and needs of language students of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), Lithuania in regard to the development of non-linguistic competences; (2) analyzing what non-linguistic skills research participants need for a successful integration into the global multilingual society and better individual wellbeing; (3) overviewing the potential of mediation and Tandem language learning as useful methodologies to improve students' non-linguistic skills. To achieve the research aims, a quantitative research methodology was applied and short semi-structured interviews were conducted with three samples: (1) 256 VMU students from different faculties and study-years; (2) 23 ESOL students from Boston English Academy, Great Britain and 15 students of the Lithuanian language for foreigners, delivered at VMU (mediated language lessons) and (3) 14 Tandem participants (learning Ukrainian or Lithuanian). This study has identified that international students, economic or war migrants need a number of cognitive, social and emotional non-linguistic skills for a successful integration into a host country and the preservation of their national identity, language and culture. Current research has revealed that mediated language teaching has a great potential to help develop these non-linguistic competences and become a useful tool of learning a foreign language and improving personal, intrapersonal, social, cognitive or emotional non-linguistic competences. Finally, the research has proved that such non-linguistic competences, as empathy, mediation skills, intercultural competence, ability to summarise information and tolerance have been developed during Tandem language learning.*

**Keywords:** *non-linguistic competences; mediated language teaching; Tandem language learning; acculturation.*

## Introduction

Recent focus on plurilingualism and the need to possess competences in languages other than English are changing established attitudes and methodologies of teaching English. Although it cannot be denied that the competence of English is still an important asset for most students in order to find success in academic and professional career, new benefits of learning English and other languages have recently appeared. Current EU language policy emphasizes respect for linguistic diversity, the creation of intercultural dialogue and new opportunities to improve learning performance (Iskra, 2022). In this context, attention is placed not only on social agents as individuals but also on social groups and interaction during the teaching / learning process (Language Education Policy, 2022).

Growing interest in languages has created new attitudes towards language policies, methodologies and skills: language competences have become important not only for mobility, education and employment, but also for “strengthening democratic citizenship and social cohesion” (Language Education Policy, 2022). Traditional language competences (listening, reading, speaking and writing) have been re-defined and replaced by four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation (*CFR Companion Volume*, 2018). New competences, such as mediation and plurilingual / pluricultural competence, described in *CFR Companion Volume* (2020), have suggested an idea that both linguistic and non-linguistic competences could be improved in the language classroom. Experienced language educators and policy makers stress the potential of real-life oriented teaching and learning or an ‘action-oriented approach’, which may offer both linguistic and non-linguistic benefits for a language learner (Piccardo et al, 2022). It has been proved that some non-linguistic competences acquired by learning a foreign language may contribute to better learning abilities, such as better “executive functioning”, ‘creativity’, ‘decision-making skills’ and ‘memory retrieval skills’ (Wallin, 2019). In this context, researcher Wallin claims that empathy, developed by learning a language, may contribute to better social wellbeing as learners realize that things can be represented in more than one way: “they need to match their language to the language of others (interlocutors) for successful communication, so they better understand the others’ mental states” (Wallin, 2019, p. 6).

Language researchers and practitioners describe a variety of methodologies that may help develop students’ non-linguistic competences during language lessons. The study conducted by Sayer and Ban (2013) illustrates the added value of non-linguistic competences improved during the English program on primary school students (Sayer and Ban, 2013). Instead of measuring students’ linguistic achievements, the researchers focused on examining their non-linguistic skills, using the ‘5 Cs’ as an analytic framework: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. The research findings showed that the activities during the English classes had changed the children’s worldview on multilingualism, had reinforced learning across other subject areas, connected the students to their migrant family members and had increased their intercultural awareness (Sayer and Ban, 2013). Describing an innovative approach to inclusive plurilingual education at primary level, Little and Kirwan (2019) conclude that the inclusion of children’s home languages in the language classroom has become an important instrument to improve their non-linguistic competences, such as their autonomy, self-esteem, collaboration, transferring other skills to other areas of learning, openness and self-awareness, creativity, increased motivation and translanguaging (Little and Kirwan, 2019).

Mediation, another recent innovation in the didactics of languages, can also be applied to improve non-linguistic skills. According to *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2020), the mediator ‘acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities (e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation)’ (CEFR, 2020, p. 90). In such a way, the mediator (a language student) uses the language for real communication and interaction, frequently focusing more on his / her peers’ needs and creating / interpreting real-life situations. As mediation involves making communication possible between two or more people who are unable to communicate directly with one another, such interaction requires not only linguistic but also non-linguistic skills. Some examples of mediation could be “paraphrasing what a politician said on the news, summarising what a friend wrote in an email,

or explaining a story in a language more familiar to the learner” (Hunter, 2019, p. 23). Paraphrasing, summarising or explaining are the essential skills in both linguistic and non-linguistic subjects, not to speak about the need to be empathetic with your partner in order to bring intelligibility into the conversation. Such learning conditions promote creative, critical and empathetic thinking, drawing upon the existing knowledge and making decisions and choices. Morozova et al. (2021) observe that in negotiation activities a mediator needs to possess “professional culture, ethics, etiquette and communication skills as well as negotiation” (Morozova et al, 2021, p. 686). North and Piccardo (2016), internationally recognized researchers on mediation, conclude that mediated teaching has completely changed traditional language pedagogy, moving from the level of an individual and focused on acquiring grammatical or lexical knowledge to the social level, focused on constructing meaning with the help of linguistic and non-linguistic competences (North and Piccardo, 2016).

Despite of growing numbers of innovative English teaching methodologies and research on students’ linguistic achievements, empirical research addressing the non-linguistic benefits of language learning and their relation to the increase of learners’ self-esteem, social wellbeing and better career opportunities is lacking. The idea to use the language as a resource and a tool for developing useful non-linguistic skills and simultaneously improve students’ linguistic competence is still new in most language classrooms. What is more, debate still continues about the best strategies for the management of a multilingual and multicultural classroom frequently managed by a monolingual and monocultural teacher.

## Methodology

The study aims at exploring the experiences and needs of language students of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), Lithuania in regard to the development of non-linguistic competences. Addressing the following research questions in the present paper, it also overviews the potential of mediation and Tandem language learning as useful methodologies to improve students’ non-linguistic skills:

1. What non-linguistic skills do students need for a successful integration into the global multilingual society and better individual wellbeing?
2. What non-linguistic competences have students of different languages improved in language learning classes at university?
3. How can mediation strategies and activities organized during language classes improve learners’ non-linguistic skills?
4. What non-linguistic skills can be developed in Tandem language learning?

To achieve the research aim, a quantitative and qualitative research methodology was applied and three studies related to the acquisition of non-linguistic competences were conducted.

The first online questionnaire was handed to 256 learners of different languages at VMU. The extensive survey was designed to gather data about general language learning practices and experiences at the university mentioned above. However, this particular paper focuses only on the data indicating the participants’ linguistic background, their opinion on the relevance of the English courses to their professional career, non-linguistic competences improved in language classes at university and their preference to participate in Tandem language learning. All aspects of the research procedure were conducted in Lithuanian (the native language of most students) and, when needed, in English.

In order to develop insight into the role of mediation in learning the host country’s language in Great Britain and Lithuania, the second study was carried out. The research aimed

to explore how mediation activities and strategies can be applied in ESOL and the Lithuanian language for foreigners courses. Among its other objectives, the study was carried out to explore the enhancement of mediated language teaching, leading to new opportunities to develop students' non-linguistic competences and soften linguistic/cultural barriers in a host country. All aspects of the research procedure were conducted in Lithuanian, English or Russian, depending on the language the respondents were most comfortable with. The study was based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative research data, obtained using an opinion survey and semi-structured interviews with students after mediated language lessons.

The third and final study intended to explore how Tandem language learning could help international students better integrate into the community of a host country. The study used a survey to research: (1) the development of the Lithuanian and Ukrainian students' non-linguistic competences; (2) learners' attitudes towards such form of learning as the means of overcoming emotional and social barriers in a host country. For these reasons, a survey, involving a group of 14 Tandem participants, was conducted in the Lithuanian and Ukrainian languages.

Finally, the results of all three surveys were analyzed and an attempt was made to answer the final questions: (1) which non-linguistic skills students consider as the most important for better professional and social wellbeing; (2) which non-linguistic skills can be improved during mediated language lessons and Tandem learning activities. After having found the answers to the above-mentioned questions, the researcher aimed to establish new understanding of the use the target language and different language teaching methodologies as resources and tools for developing useful non-linguistic skills and simultaneously improving students' linguistic competence of the target language.

## Sample

**Survey 1. Non-linguistic competences of VMU language students.** The research sample for the first survey was selected on the basis of the following criteria: all the participants were the students of different language courses, delivered at VMU.

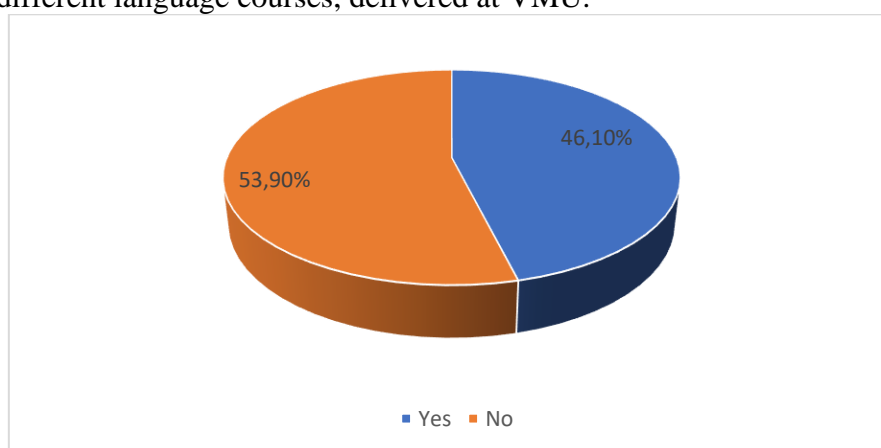
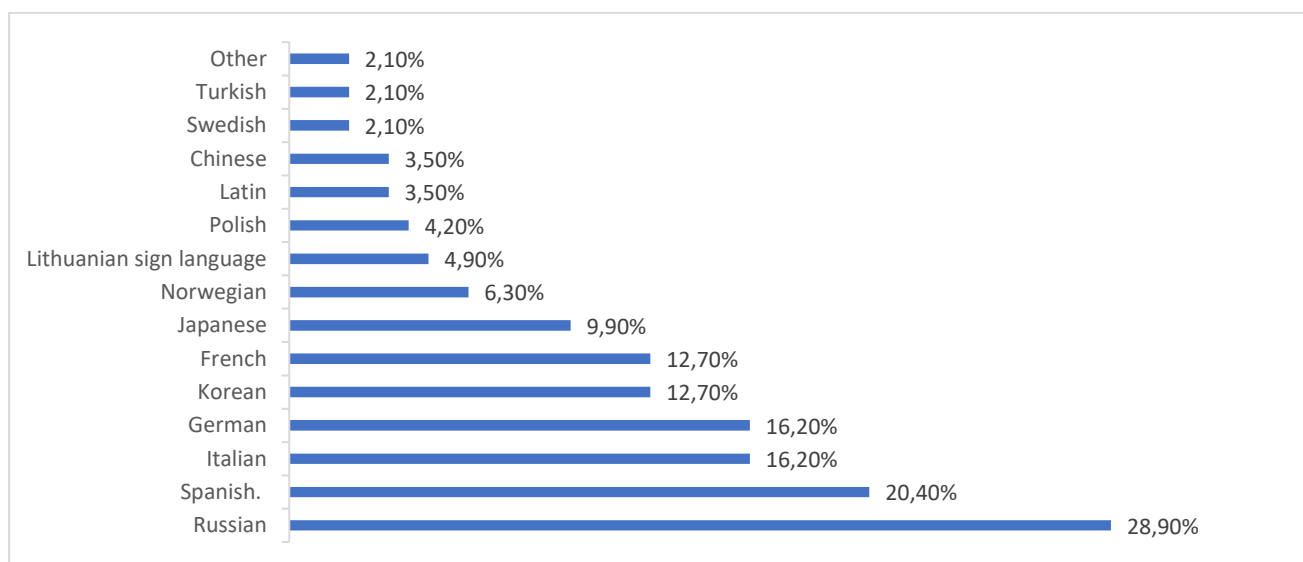


Figure 1. Other than English language learning experience at VMU

The survey involved 256 students, aged 18-26, from different faculties and study-years. The students were asked to self-evaluate which non-linguistic competences they had improved in different language courses at VMU. The respondents' language learning experience at VMU, which is presented in Figure 1, demonstrates that more than half of the research participants

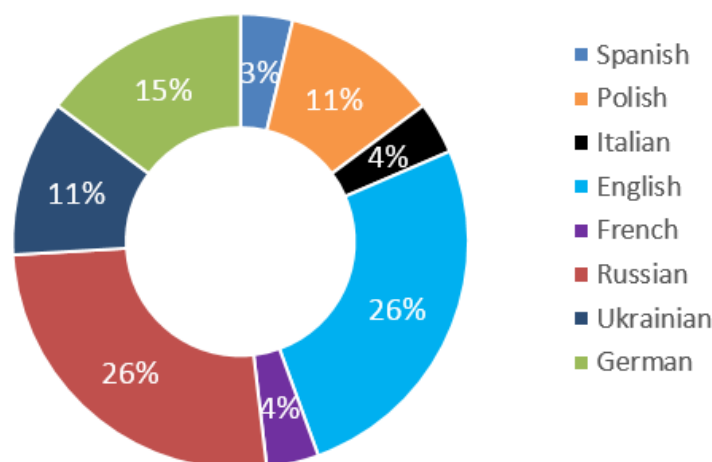
have studied another language (other than English) at VMU. It is worth noticing that all VMU students have a broad choice of over 30 languages to learn and 24 credits for language learning at VMU. As Figure 2 shows, Russian, Spanish, Italian and German have been indicated as the most popular languages to learn.



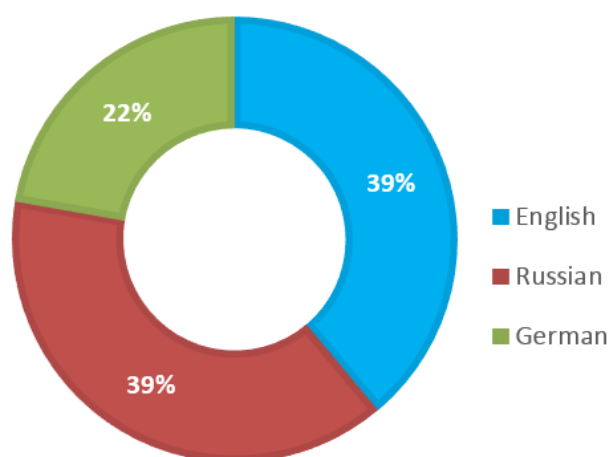
**Figure 2. VMU students' language choice**

**Survey 2. The use of mediation to improve students' non-linguistic competences.** The participants were 23 ESOL students from Boston English Academy, Great Britain and 15 students of the Lithuanian language for foreigners, delivered at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. The respondents' age varied from 20 to over 60 and they had come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds (Lithuanian, Russian, Polish (ESOL students) and Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian, French, Norwegian, Chinese, Kazakh, Indian, Kurd and Malaysian (the students of the Lithuanian language)). The research sample was selected on the basis of three criteria. Firstly, all research participants were learning the host country's language (English or Lithuanian). Secondly, to explore how mediation helps to improve non-linguistic skills at different levels, the research subjects' competence of the target language was different: the students of the Lithuanian language for foreigners were at the elementary or pre-intermediate levels (levels A1 and A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)) and ESOL students were at the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels (levels A2 and B1 according to CEFR). Thirdly, the respondents had come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.

**Survey 3. The development of non-linguistic competences in Tandem language learning.** The research sample for the last survey was a group of 14 Tandem participants (7 Lithuanian and 7 Ukrainian), aged from 17 to 50. The social status of the respondents varied as secondary school pupils and teachers, university students and lecturers had participated in Tandem. Figures 3 and 4 show the linguistic repertoire of the research subjects:



**Figure 3. Linguistic repertoire of Lithuanian students (Lithuanian L1 - 100 %)**



**Figure 4. Linguistic repertoire of Ukrainian students (Ukrainian L1 - 100 %)**

The research subjects were selected on the basis of two criteria. Firstly, all participants were learning their partner's home language and teaching their partner their native language in Tandem. Secondly, to explore how such form of non-formal language learning / teaching helps to improve non-linguistic skills, the learners had been pre-taught to use real-life oriented learning / teaching methods, such as mediation, before they started language learning / teaching with their partner. The most important criteria for making Tandem pairs were the students' linguistic competence of the language of instruction (English or Russian) and their place of living to ensure face to face learning / teaching possibilities. To ensure the validity of the measurement, the researcher of the current paper turned to two experts in language teaching asking them to consider the content validity of the questionnaires and questions for the semi-formal interviews.

## Results

### Survey 1. Non-linguistic competences of language students of VMU

The study aimed at exploring the experiences of language students of VMU in regard to the development of non-linguistic competences. To achieve the research aim, the students were asked to self-evaluate which non-linguistic competences they had improved in different language courses at VMU (Figure 5):

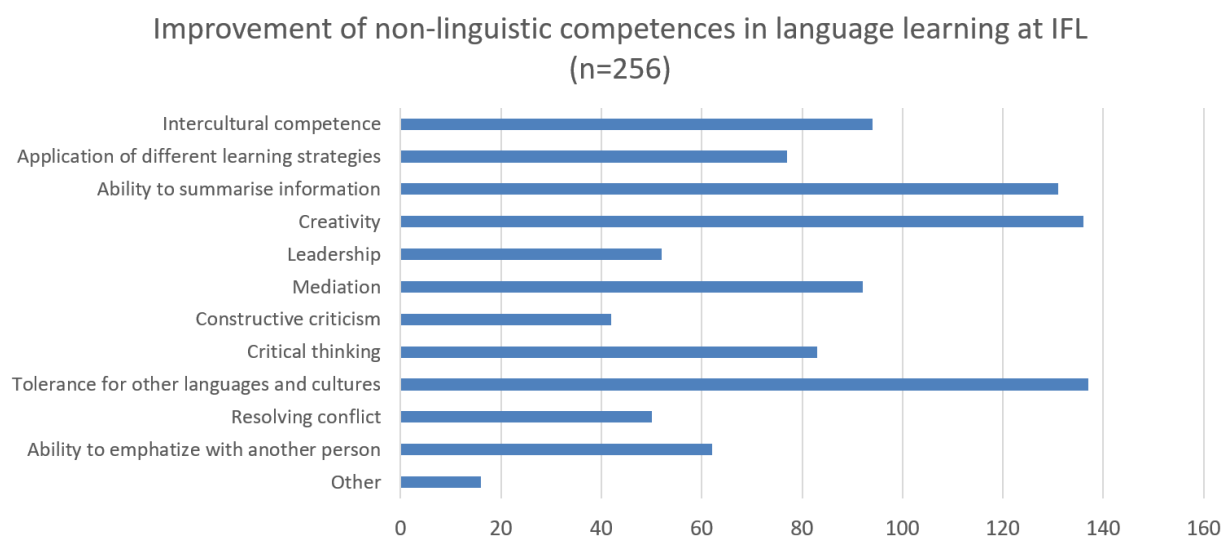


Figure 5. The improvement of non-linguistic competences in language classes at VMU

It is important to note that language teachers of VMU were not instructed to specifically use any teaching strategies, developing non-linguistic skills for this particular research. Some of the students had confessed that it was the first time they contemplated the improvement of non-linguistic competences during language lessons. As the results indicate, more than half of the respondents admitted that they had become *more tolerant to other languages and cultures*, which is quite logical as language classrooms at VMU are quite multilingual / multicultural and VMU language teachers constantly raise their didactic competence in how to use such diverse classrooms as a powerful teaching resource. *Ability to summarise information* and *improved creativity* are also mentioned by over half of the research participants. About a third of the respondents indicated having improved other useful non-linguistic skills, such as *intercultural competence*, *mediation*, *critical thinking* and *the application of different learning strategies*. Such results might be explained by the fact that VMU language teachers are actively involved in different projects, focusing on innovative language teaching strategies, some of which promote the development of both linguistic and non-linguistic skills.

Despite quite positive and optimistic results, it might be fair to conclude that more language teaching activities could be focused on the development of positive communication competences, such as *constructive criticism*, *resolving conflict* or *ability to empathize with another person*. This is how language lessons would improve not only students' linguistic competence and IQ, but also their EQ, which may generate physical, social, and psychological health and wellness. To achieve such aims, mediated language teaching, which helps "to manage behavior and relationships" (Lieberman, 2020), could be introduced in the language classroom.

## Survey 2. The use of mediation to improve students' non-linguistic competences

The second research aimed to explore how mediation activities and strategies can be applied to develop students' non-linguistic competences and soften emotional/social barriers in a host country. The study was based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative research data after mediated language lessons:

- *Mediating a text: relaying specific information in speech;*
- *Mediating communication: acting as an intermediary in informal situations.*

The mediated language lessons were carried out by an ESOL lecturer (Boston English Academy, Great Britain) and the lecturer of the Lithuanian language for foreigners (Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania), who dedicated some time to define the concept of mediation and introduced the participants to the purpose of the study. The tasks for students were adapted for their particular level and focused on traditional topics, such as at the restaurant, booking a hotel or in a shop. However, these common situations were practised applying mediated strategies and activities, where the students needed to:

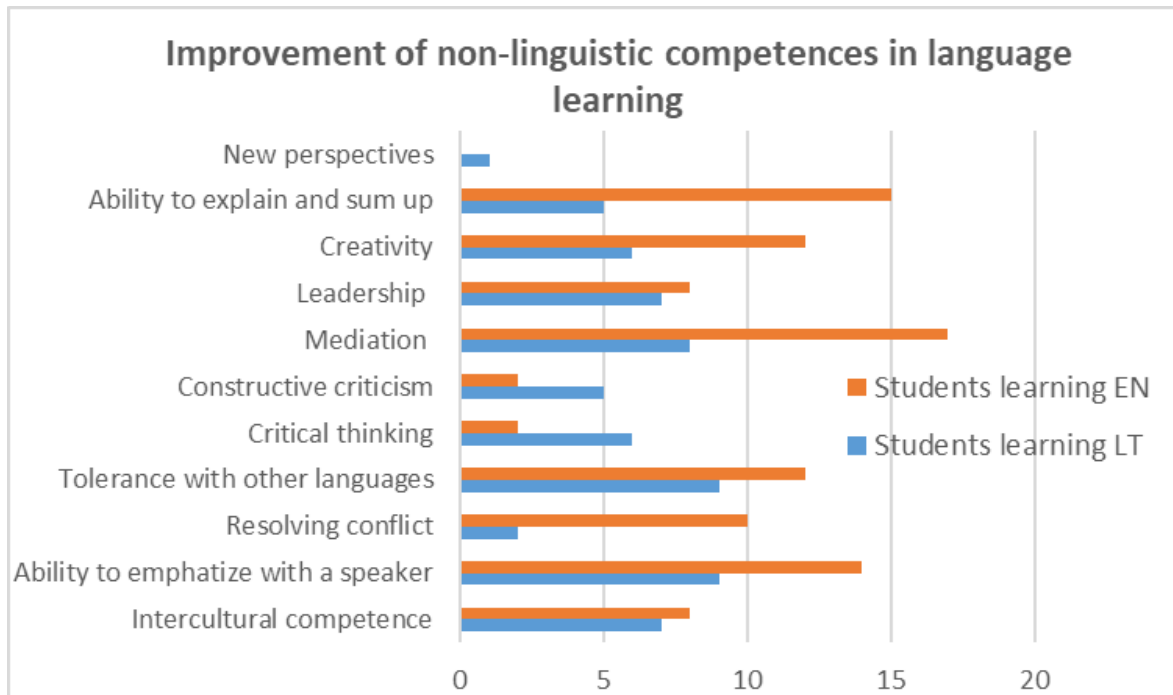
- *summarise the main points of the written text (the restaurant menu) in their native or target language;*
- *report the information from illustrations (the hotel brochure) in their native or target language;*
- *explain the information to their partner;*
- *provide simple and clear instructions to their partner to solve a problem or initiate a solution;*
- *resolve conflict (between a shop assistant and a client) in simple language;*
- *explain cultural differences in behaviour, attitudes or accepted manners;*
- *shift from one language to another, when needed;*
- *try to recognize their partner's emotions and feelings;*
- *show interest and empathy by asking questions;*
- *express agreement and understanding;*
- *provide their partner help with formulation in the target language, when needed.*

(adapted from mediation descriptors in *CFR Companion Volume*, 2020)

It is important to note that the students were pre-taught all necessary functional language, depending on their linguistic competence of the target language, and the tasks were designed following mediation descriptors in *CFR Companion Volume* (2020). Both lecturers noted that their students had enjoyed such mediated lessons, which seemed non-traditional, funny, more motivating and more useful and realistic. Figure 6 represents ESOL learners' and the students' of the Lithuanian language for foreigners self-evaluation of non-linguistic competences, improved during mediated lessons:

As Figure 6 presents, most respondents (especially students learning English) claimed having improved their mediation skills, which is quite a logical outcome as, in this case, both language teachers were consciously applying mediation strategies and activities during their language lessons. It seems that the students have improved their EQ as their self-evaluation of the abilities to explain and sum up, empathise with a speaker and resolve conflict is quite high. Finally, the participants claimed that they had improved their intercultural competence and had become more tolerant with other languages, which goes hand in hand with the results of the first survey.





**Figure 6. The improvement of non-linguistic competences in mediated language classes**

The second part of the research aimed to analyse the participants' attitudes towards necessary non-linguistic skills, which could help acculturate in a host country easier and faster. Following the results of semi-formal interviews, a slight difference between two samples can be distinguished. The students of the Lithuanian language for foreigners emphasise that such non-linguistic competences, as *tolerance, patience, creativity, flexibility, teamwork, interpersonal and communication skills, the ability to empathise with another person and adapt to new things*, are the most significant in a host country. Most ESOL learners believe that *communication, respect, courtesy, tolerance to other languages and cultures, the knowledge of traditions, the political situation, the laws and rules of a host country* is a key step in understanding the British way of life, being essential non-linguistic skills for their survival in an English-speaking country. As ESOL learners were mostly economic migrants, living in Great Britain for a longer time, they had put an emphasis on the need to understand and respect the host country. Meanwhile, the students of the Lithuanian language for foreigners had concentrated on cognitive and emotional non-linguistic skills, which can help an international student acculturate in a new country faster. Furthermore, the importance of not forgetting one's own 'roots' by preserving memories and fostering the culture and history of the homeland and teaching children their mother tongue, was stressed by the participants of Boston English Academy, UK. The obtained research results reveal that it is significant for almost all language students not to lose the connection with their native country and preserve their national identity:

*"It is important because more people can learn something new and fascinating about your country and culture. If my language and culture were threatened, I would want to preserve it because it is part of my identity".* (a student of the Lithuanian language)

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*“You will always be a newcomer in another country and you will not find new roots, if you lose your native ones”.* (an ESOL student)

On the basis of the survey results, it might be concluded that mediated language teaching can help develop non-linguistic competences, which, according to the respondents, might soften emotional and social barriers in a host country. Both groups of the sample agree that mediation can be a useful tool of learning a foreign language and sharing one’s native culture and traditions with local communities. Personal, intrapersonal, cognitive or emotional non-linguistic competences, developed during mediated language lessons, can make one be less anxious in unknown social interactions in a host country and, at the same time, respect and be proud of one’s own national identity. Therefore, it would be fair to conclude that in order to enhance students’ social wellbeing, the content of mediated language lessons should include the topics, connected with accepted manners and behaviour, taboos, misunderstandings, traditions, laws and rules in one’s national culture and a host country. To create the space for improving learners’ emotional wellbeing, mediation activities in the language classroom could focus on recognising others’ emotions correctly and acting upon them, resolving conflict, being tolerant, emphasising with the speaker and, in general, “helping others understand people, texts, types of discourse or languages” (CFR, 2018, p. 126).

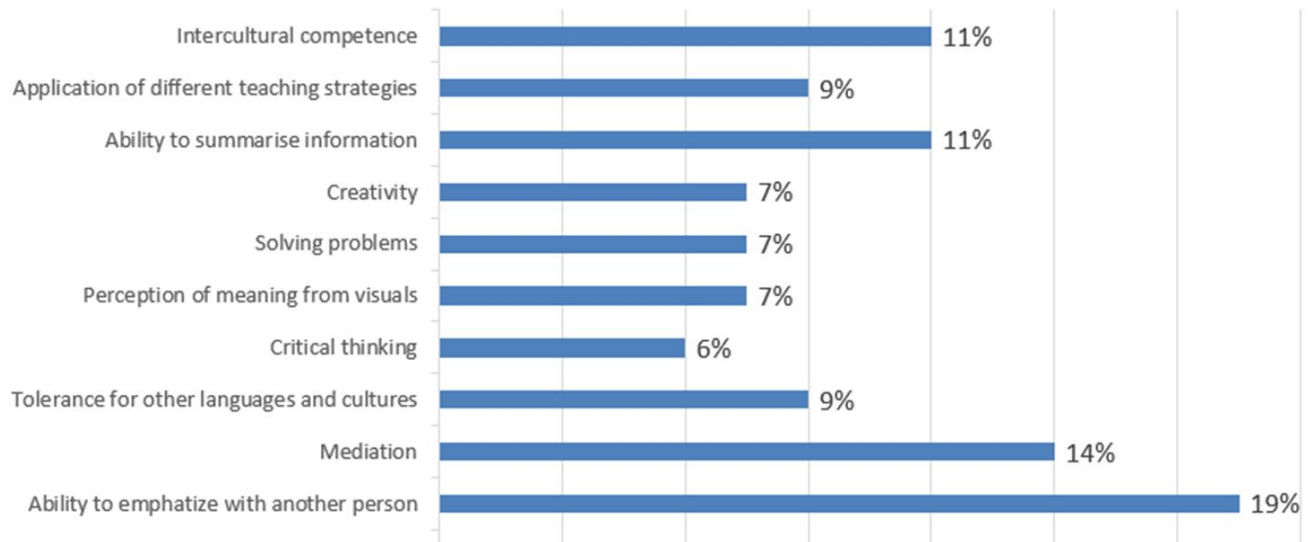
### **Survey 3. The development of non-linguistic competences in Tandem language learning**

The third and final survey aimed to: (1) explore how non-formal language learning / teaching in Tandem may help improve students’ non-linguistic skills and (2) analyse research participants’ attitudes towards such form of learning as the means of overcoming emotional and social barriers. Although it is almost impossible to pinpoint the exact date when such form of learning appeared as it is more a “widespread practice rather than a method based on theory” (O’Rourke, 2007), Tandem learning has taken many forms and has had many aims since the late 1960s. In the present case, Tandem language learning was organised in order to help Ukrainian refugees learn Lithuanian and Lithuanians – Ukrainian. The second aim of such non-formal learning was to ‘make connections’ and help ‘newcomers’ faster acculturate and integrate into the local community in Lithuania.

Before announcing the research results, it is important to pinpoint that Tandem pairs had been introduced to useful tools, sites and apps of the Lithuanian and Ukrainian languages and had been pre-taught to use real-life oriented learning / teaching methods before they started language learning / teaching with their partner. The students were advised to choose non-formal places and activities for their meetings, such as chatting over a cup of coffee, going shopping, visiting local museums, meeting at the gym, going to the cinema or a club. Moreover, the participants were informed that they should focus on improving useful real-life skills, for example, filing in a form in the bank, getting the doctor’s appointment, finding useful information, using public transport, etc. A significant aspect of such a form of learning / teaching is constant thinking about his / her partner’s needs, emotions, experiences or learning outcomes, which requires good emotional intelligence. In general, such learning / teaching is closely connected with emotions as partners usually encourage each other, laugh together, speak about the things that worry them, help each other and frequently become quite good friends. Good cognitive abilities are also necessary for Tandem learning as each time one has to plan a short language lesson, make a revision, ask and answer questions or even learn one’s native language better. Thus, it was expected by the researcher of the current study that Tandem

students would improve a variety of non-linguistic competences, which they had naturally needed to apply during the process of learning / teaching languages.

Figure 7 shows students' self-evaluation of non-linguistic skills, that they have improved during Tandem language learning and teaching:



**Figure 7. The improvement of non-linguistic competences in Tandem language learning**

The results have proved the primary expectations that such non-formal and action-based form of language learning may develop one's empathy (19 %), mediation skills (14 %), intercultural competence (11 %), ability to summarise information (11 %), tolerance for other languages and cultures (9 %) and other necessary real-life skills. Furthermore, all the research participants had agreed that their emotional and social wellbeing had improved. Apart from recognising that learning the basics of the target language was really useful, Tandem learners had emphasised the positivity of support, emotions, learning methods and the environment. Making friends and developing relationships was something that had created an added value to the whole experience. The personal story about one Ukrainian girl is worth mentioning: the girl described her wonderful Easter experience at her Tandem partner's home, which had helped her survive that terrible situation, when her family and friends were in Ukraine, being attacked by bombs and suffering from sheer terror.

Finally, it should be noted that the improvement of a variety of non-linguistic competences had encouraged the research participants become more proud of their national identity:

*“It was an incredible experience because I had an opportunity to teach fascinating things about my country and culture. If my language and culture were threatened, I would do my best to preserve it because it is part of my identity”.* (Lithuanian Tandem participant)

*“Great shock, depression and being different. This is how I felt, when I came to Lithuania, when war in Ukraine started. My Tandem partner has helped me to calm down, learn the basics of the Lithuanian language and be strong again to fight for my identity and native country”.* (Ukrainian Tandem participant)

## Conclusions and recommendations

On the basis of the survey results, it might be concluded that the usage of innovative language teaching methodologies can enhance not only language learners' linguistic competences, but also their non-linguistic skills, which may contribute to their better social and emotional well-being. Therefore, it might be claimed that constructing meaning and simulating real-life situations during a language lesson with the help of linguistic and non-linguistic skills has become a great shift in language teaching.

This study has identified a number of cognitive and emotional non-linguistic skills that international students might need for a successful integration into the host country, such as *patience, creativity, flexibility, teamwork, interpersonal and communication skills, the ability to empathise with another person and adapt to new things*. Meanwhile, economic migrants put an emphasis on the need to understand and respect the host country, which requires *communication skills, respect, courtesy, tolerance to other languages and cultures, the knowledge of traditions, the political situation, laws and rules of a host country*. The obtained research results have revealed that it is significant for new comers not to lose the connection with their native country, national identity, language and culture.

The analysis of the first study, focusing on the students of different languages, which were taught by language teachers not instructed to specifically use any teaching strategies, developing non-linguistic skills, has indicated some insights into the nature of language teaching. The data has shown that a number of students admitted having improved a variety of non-linguistic competences, being unaware of that during the language learning process. This might indicate that language learning focuses on human interaction, understanding and explaining, solving problems together, agreeing and disagreeing, trying to understand another point of view and many other cognitive and emotional skills, which make an important part of non-linguistic competences. Therefore, it would be possible to claim that with the use of special methodologies, specifically aiming to help learners' improve both linguistic and non-linguistic skills, new opportunities for language learning could be created.

Current research has revealed that mediated language teaching has a great potential to help develop the non-linguistic competences of language learners and can become a useful tool of learning a foreign language and improving personal, intrapersonal, social, cognitive or emotional non-linguistic competences. It is important to have in mind that in order to enhance students' social wellbeing, the content of mediated language lessons should include the topics, connected with accepted manners, behaviour, traditions, laws and rules in one's national culture and a host country. To create the space for improving learners' emotional wellbeing, mediation activities in the language classroom should focus on recognising others' emotions correctly and acting upon them appropriately, solving misunderstandings and being positive.

The results of the final survey have shown that Tandem language learning, although not being an innovation in language didactics, can be used innovatively to improve learners' non-linguistic skills. According to the research participants, such a form of learning might be the means of overcoming emotional and social barriers in a host country. This attitude has been proved by the respondents' acknowledgement of their better emotional and social well-being at the end of Tandem language learning. Apart from recognising that learning the basics of the target language was really useful, Tandem learners had emphasised the positivity of support, learning methods, the environment and developing relationships. The research has proved that such non-linguistic competences, as *empathy, mediation skills, intercultural competence, ability to summarise information and tolerance* have been developed during Tandem language

learning. Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this paper offers insights into the change of the language didactics, the treatment of language learners as social agents, the shift of language teaching content from hypothetical and far from real-life situations in textbooks to meaningful tasks, focusing on the development of real-life skills. Further research could be conducted on the assessment of non-linguistic competences and their impact on the level of students' linguistic skills, students' motivation to learn the target language or even teachers' satisfaction with the language teaching process. The research results can only confirm the above-mentioned hypothesis that language teaching is much more than developing the linguistic competence of the target language; therefore, the study might be beneficial for language policy makers and language teachers, encouraging them to use this great potential of innovative content and form.

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