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## **INTEGRATION OF CREATIVITY-DEVELOPING ACTIVITIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: STUDENTS' ATTITUDE**

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**Summary.** The increasing significance of science and more intensive cooperation with foreign partners have created demands for plurilingual specialists, capable of providing solid research-based solutions, able to read the most advanced professional literature in a foreign language, participate in international conferences with foreign partners, negotiate and cooperate in scientific and subject-oriented activity while freely communicating in several foreign languages. However, in the case of specialized higher education institutions, such as medical or agricultural universities, foreign language learning is often oriented to the learning of occupational terminology; whereas acquisition of plurilingual communicative competence is much more than linguistic competence, it is a multifaceted competence and its acquisition can be enhanced by integrating creativity-developing activities into the program curricula. *The aim of the study* was to reveal the students' attitude towards the integration of creativity development when studying foreign languages at a higher education institution. The generalized results of the study suggest that even though students considered linguistic competence (vocabulary and grammar) to be most important in language learning, yet they valued the acquisition of socio-cultural competence as important in communicating cross-culturally. The students' attitude to the application of the elements of art in foreign language classes was positive, as these elements increased their interest and motivation in learning; integration of drawing and creation activities facilitated communication; the assignments became motivating and useful when communicating on intercultural topics. The students also positively evaluated the teacher's work, the teacher's assistance and positive approach to the evaluation of application of the elements of art by the students, which was the key element in the success of such classes. The importance of stress-free environment was singled out as a prerequisite for creativity expression and communication in a foreign language class.

**Keywords:** communicative competence; creativity; application of creativity-developing elements, foreign language teaching; student; teacher.

### **Introduction**

Creativity is one of the most important skills necessary for a successful self-realization of a person in professional, academic and personal domains in the digital 21<sup>st</sup> century. Innovative solutions to complicated and technology-based problems in the world of work and our everyday life can be provided only by people who, on the basis of their knowledge and imagination, can generate

unexpected and original ideas and not only understand work-related issues and deal with them efficiently but produce new knowledge, products and move the world forward.

It is evident that the development of creativity should be pervasive throughout the curricula of educational institutions, including the processes of language teaching and learning activities, i.e. acquisition of new language communicative competences. Although the concept of communicative language competence has been evolving since its introduction in the studies conducted by Canale and Swain (1980) and later complemented by van Eko (1986), who added a socio-cultural component to the existing four components (sub-competencies: grammatical, discourse, socio-linguistic, and strategic), language learners still consider the linguistic component to be the most important one. Today's understanding of communicative language competence embraces linguistic, pragmatic (both discourse and functional competences), strategic and socio-cultural (including socio-linguistic) competences (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 130). In Lithuania, communicative language competence has been defined and pursued as the overall aim of teaching and learning languages since the emergence of the first textbooks for foreign languages written by Lithuanian authors, based on the comparison of linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the Lithuanian and foreign language (Alma Stasiulevičiūtė – English, Vytautas Januškevičius – German and Edmundas Narbutas – French) in 1982 (Dobrovolskis, 2019). The belief prevails, though, among the language learners and even teachers that it is linguistic competence, or, more precisely, vocabulary and grammar, which should be given priority to in language education (Dulksnienė, 2016).

Taken into account the decreasing number of contact hours for the teaching of foreign languages in the majority of higher education institutions in Lithuania, more specialized, in particular, such as tertiary institutions preparing specialists in the engineering field, medicine, agriculture, etc., teachers have started facing a problem of being able to focus mainly on the linguistic part of the communicative competence development, i.e. grammar and vocabulary knowledge and skills, at the expense of developing all components of communicative language competence. The development of indispensable basic competences such as creativity related to the socio-cultural

context of the country in question lacks proper attention within a short span of time devoted to language teaching and learning in non-linguistic program curricula.

Therefore, it was important to investigate if integration of creativity-developing activities in the content of foreign language courses in a specialized university could improve language learning skills in general and contribute to better socio-cultural competence acquisition. The study was carried out in two specialized universities, i.e. providing studies in Medicine and Health Science and Agriculture field, assuming that the overall program content provided to students focused on specialized knowledge acquisition and analysis of the subjects far from socio-cultural area or creativity development areas. Presumably, their study methods and habits involved activities more focused on memorizing of a great deal of terminology, specialized and technical content analysis rather than communication or creativity. In terms of language studies, the study programs required the students to attend an English for Special Purposes course and take one foreign language course as an optional one, to be studied the whole year (12 ECTS in total, 60 hours), to enable them to participate in Erasmus and other exchange and mobility programs. For this reason, it was highly important for the teachers to be aware of the situation and integrate the elements of creativity-developing tasks in foreign language classes, which would help the students to become acquainted with the socio-cultural context in which this particular foreign language is used. Taking this context into account, integration of creativity-developing elements was included in the program as an experiment first and later as a part of a regular course program. Having implemented creativity-developing tasks into foreign language learning for several semesters, a research study was designed to analyze the students' attitude towards the integration of the elements of creativity development in foreign language classes.

**The aim of this study** was to reveal the students' attitude towards the integration of creativity development when studying foreign languages at a higher education institution.

**The objectives of the study** were the following:

1. To discuss the theoretical peculiarities of creativity development in the process of students' plurilingual competence development.

2. To integrate creativity-developing elements in university foreign language courses through a model of three types of activities: creative tasks, art awareness raising tasks, engagement in art creating tasks.

3. To investigate the students' attitude towards the development of creativity during foreign language classes, importance of environment and teachers' assistance.

### **Theoretical Background**

During the current stage of the development of science and technology, knowledge of foreign languages is especially important for all specialists employed in the labor market. In view of the ongoing processes of the reform of secondary schools and universities in Lithuania, the emphasis is placed on ensuring that upon graduation from higher education institutions, graduates are not only capable of communicating in several foreign languages but also acquire communication and critical thinking skills, understanding of the social context, skills in creativity, professional ethics, professional development and motivation, and life-long learning (Dulksnienė, 2016).

The importance of creativity has also been recognized on the strategic political level in the EU; the year 2009 was announced as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, and Member States were encouraged to promote creativity "as a key factor for the development of personal, occupational, entrepreneurial and social competences and the knows-being of all individuals in society" (The European Parliament & the Council, 2008). Such factors, contributing to this endeavor, were suggested: providing environment which allows people to be innovative and adaptable to the changing life situations; openness to cultural diversity; stimulation of aesthetic sensitivity, creative thinking and emotional development; raising awareness of the importance of creativity in various areas of human life; developing creativity and innovative capacity" (art. 2).

The Lithuanian State Advancement Strategy "Lithuania 2030" also acknowledges that creativity together with openness and responsibility are the main important values to be based on while implementing the vision of the strategy (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2012).

Although creativity and innovation have been recognized as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills worldwide (Piiro, 2011), researchers (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Weicht, 2018) argue that educational institutions are not well prepared for the development of creativity as they were designed to convey knowledge and provide each generation with information that was needed for living at that age. Advocating for continuous development of creativity throughout learning, Weicht (2018) emphasizes the discrepancy between the skills developed by our educational systems and the needs of society. She advocates for creativity development across both formal and non-formal education suggesting the establishment of entrepreneurship education programs, which integrate sustained teaching of creativity and develop innovative thinking skills.

### **Concept of creativity**

Creativity as a concept may be viewed from different perspectives. Xerri and Vassallo (2016) assert that being a multi-faceted concept creativity is rather difficult to define. They consider creativity to be “a state of mind”, “a boundary that we need to cross in order to discover our potential to do things differently and be an inspiration for others”. Some researchers attribute different understanding of the concept to cultural traditions. For instance, Amabile (1996) asserts that in the UK, there is a consensus that creativity is imagination-based activity whose aim is to create original and valuable results. This concept reflects the Anglo-Saxon tendency to emphasize the purposefulness and practicality of creative activity – i.e. the pursuit for a valuable product. Meanwhile, in the Nordic countries, creativity is more associated with a person’s attitude and ability to deal with the ever-changing challenges of life. Besides, while British researchers consider imagination to be the basis of creativity, others choose to ignore it, emphasizing, e.g. the heuristic nature of creativity instead (Vaicekauskienė, 2009).

Creative thinking in OECD *PISA 2021 Creative thinking framework* (1991) is defined as the “competence to engage productively in the generation, evaluation and improvement of ideas that can result in original and effective solutions, advances in knowledge and impactful expressions of

imagination" (p. 7). The authors of the framework emphasize the necessity to have special attributes and skills acquired, such as intelligence, domain knowledge or artistic talent, if we want our graduates to be able to provide innovative solutions to life and work related problems. They further explain two types of creativity, the directions that a number of researchers on creativity refer to and choose for their investigations: the 'Big C' creativity and the "little c" creativity. The former refers to the ability to produce art masterpieces, technological innovations which require "talent, deep expertise and high levels of engagement", i.e. a feature peculiar only to the gifted. The latter, the 'little c' creativity manifests itself in everyday activities at home, at school or at work and can be achieved by everyone, if people nurture it, practice it and are taught how to be creative. Kaufman and Baghetto (2009) expanded the dichotomy and proposed a Four C Model by adding a 'Pro-c', a development beyond the 'little c' which manifests as professional expertise in any creative area and a 'mini C' – a type of creativity which is inherent in learning if proper conditions are created. It is the latter type of creativity that our study will focus on.

Lithuanian authors define creativity from different perspectives. For instance, Jovaiša (2007) considers creativity to be a human activity which leads to the development of material and spiritual values worthy to the society; however, other authors include creating values which not necessarily have impact upon the society, such as everyday acts of creative activity. Daugėlienė (2014) provides a summary of several theoretical approaches to the multifaceted phenomenon of creativity: (1) the creative process; (2) the creative thinking; (3) features of the creative personality as a whole; (4) creative skills (p. 14). Generalizing the research of over half a century duration on creativity, Vaicekauskienė (2009) draws a conclusion that at present, the most popular definition of creativity is the ability to create new things. Even though creativity seems to be highly important in the modern society, educational institutions are still suspicious about the development of creativity and tend to attribute it to extramural activities rather than to the education process itself.

Researchers (De Bono, 2001; Craft, 2001) have identified multiple strategies for the development of creativity during the learning process.

However, strategies should be selected depending on a concrete learning situation – and the latter depends on the students, the teacher, the learning environment, and the aims of learning. De Bono (2001), a proponent of lateral thinking or systematic way of thinking creatively, suggests the Six Thinking Hats strategy which stimulates viewing the situation from various angles, whereas the Possibility Thinking technique (Craft, 2001) encourages the learners to seek answers to the question “what if?” Other researchers suggest using combinations of different strategies – they are learned and stored in memory as tools ready for use.

### **Development of creativity in foreign language learning**

Broadly speaking, researchers contend (Cuq, & Gruca, 2002; Maley & Peachey, 2015; Stepanek, 2015) that creativity can be developed in all levels of education and in all disciplines, language education not excluded. Stepanek (2015), the advocator of *Creative approach to language teaching*, asserts that language teachers are advantageous in developing creativity because of three reasons: firstly, as “language is creative in its very nature”, we express our ideas, react, respond, depending on our goals, competence or personal skills and abilities. Besides, the content in language classes is not limited to specialized subject knowledge, even in certain programs it may seem so (ESP), but we still focus on language and communicate our expertise and knowledge. Thirdly, “language classes can easily engage students in creative situations”, which require searching for not used or practiced up-to-now solutions, producing more than one creative, even “unclear and tentative solution”, providing interpretations, communicating in close to real life and authentic situations. When learning a foreign language, it is highly important to find “contact points” between the culture of the studied foreign language and the elements of our own culture. According to Krašovec (2009), the peculiarity of the works of art, comparing to those created in the target cultures, should be highlighted to facilitate the learners’ understanding of their cultural environment as well.

Describing the indispensable pre-requisites for including creativity-developing elements in foreign language classes, Schneider (2011) names

*environment* as number one. According to him, the environment should be friendly and stress-free, a classroom where everyone feels good. The teacher should ensure that all requirements for proper physical conditions are met, such as sufficient lighting and tables prepared for work. Reference materials, such as dictionaries or supplementary material for foreign language learning should be made available. Vaicekauskienė (2009) has stated that both *physical* and *psychological* environment significantly affect creativity. She generalized the conditions necessary for the psychological climate, including a positive approach to activity, pro-activeness, ingenuity, tolerance of differences (different personalities, ideas, activities, and aims), respect for personal autonomy (recognizing the right to have one's personal attitude), freedom to experiment (the right to try, fail, resume, and not be condemned or ridiculed for this), playfulness, and humor. The peculiarities of the physical environment are important as well. These include the abundance of visual details, nature seen through the window or compensated for with houseplants or pictures, finishing made of natural materials, and predominance of warm colors or pleasant contrasts (p. 11).

Schneider (2011) lists four other elements that are required for efficient creativity development in foreign language classes, such as proper *participants' and the teacher's behavior*. The teacher should not express a negative opinion about the learners' application of creative elements; however, the teacher may correct mistakes made in the use of the studied foreign language; the teacher should provide *assistance* related to the knowledge and skills in the vocabulary and grammar of the studied foreign language. Another important element is *organization of all classes that involve application of creativity-developing tasks*. All such classes should follow a similar "scenario" consisting of three parts: presentation and discussion of the task, performance of the task, and discussion on the work completed. Finally, the issue of *evaluation*, which is important and requires special attention. Positive comments expressed during the discussion help the students to evaluate their own work and positive evaluation is crucial for the success of such classes.

Researchers admit that the use of creativity-developing tasks in foreign language learning can *motivate* student learning. According to



Krašovec (2009), interesting topics and unexpected tasks help each learner reveal their feelings, create, and communicate on multicultural topics. Boogaards (1994) emphasized that the application of creativity-developing tasks facilitates the memorizing of foreign vocabulary as well as the understanding of cultural differences: when drawing and creating, learning is easier than when doing boring tasks; besides, tasks that personally involve students are more effective in the learning process.

The *teacher's role* becomes highly important in the development of creativity in foreign language learning. A good teacher is not only a source of knowledge and a guide in learning, but also an example of creative activity and a developer of professional ethics and attitudes required for creativity. However, teachers face problems in the educational process, and thus they sometimes not only fail to stimulate creativity, but even preclude its expression. Analyzing the issues of creativity development in general education Vaicekauskienė (2009) has stated that teachers are reluctant to integrate creativity-developing tasks in their taught subjects because of fear of losing control of the educational process, as creative activity is frequently unpredictable and difficult to plan beforehand. In addition, teachers may lack knowledge for designing their own creativity-developing tasks and applying them in the process of foreign language learning.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the importance of integration of creativity-developing or art-related activities in students' plurilingual competence development process has been acknowledged by the researchers. The main benefits of creativity-developing tasks have been singled out: such tasks encourage learners to learn better, allow them to get acquainted with a foreign culture and communicate about their own culture, discuss intercultural topics and even experience joy being engaged in creativity development activities, which altogether enhances the foreign language acquisition.

In this study, the authors will conceptualize creativity as the ability to produce innovative solutions while learning, following Kaufman and Baghetto's (2009) proposed 'mini C' type of creativity, which is inherent in learning if proper conditions are created. The concept of creativity-development activities will be operationalized as integration of creative tasks,

art awareness raising tasks, and engagement in art creating tasks in the teaching and learning foreign languages with the aim to make language learning more efficient, interesting, motivating, emotionally satisfying and safe, easier and personalized. Creativity development will also be related to the development of socio-cultural competence as an important part of communicative language competence development.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study on foreign language learning via the application of creativity-developing activities was conducted at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (hereinafter, LSMU) and Aleksandras Stulginskis University (hereinafter, ASU), now the Agriculture Academy of Vytautas Magnus University. As ASU merged with Vytautas Magnus University in 2018, the research was carried out in the spring term of 2017, and foreign language learning by applying creativity-developing tasks was introduced prior to the research, the decision was made by the authors of this study to use the name of the university which existed at that time, i.e. ASU. The curriculum of French, German and Italian language courses in the two universities included a model of three strands of creativity-developing elements added to the regular course program as illustrated below:

**Table 1**

*Three strands of creativity development activities integrated in foreign language learning*

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<b>Activities</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Application of creative tasks</b>	• viewing a movie and a discussion	2/semester
	• analysis of dialogues in a piece of literature work	2/month
	• listening and taking notes of popular song lyrics in target language	2/semester

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Activities	Tasks	Frequency
<b>Art work presentations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>visits to art galleries (real life/online)</li> <li>describing works by Lithuanian painters</li> <li>describing works by French, German, Italian painters</li> <li>analysis of colors, forms, shapes</li> </ul>	One time activity/ semester
<b>Engagement in art creation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>drawing and describing</li> <li>using wax coloring sticks to create pictures and describing them</li> <li>painting in water colors and presenting works of art</li> <li>creating works with glue &amp; powder</li> <li>describing senses</li> </ul>	One time activity/ semester

Firstly, concrete works or products of creative activity were included into the regular course program in the form of samples of creative tasks used for discussions or source material used for students' creative activities. For instance, the students watched a movie and discussed it, analyzed dialogues in a piece of literature in French, German and Italian, and tackled lyrics of some popular songs sung by representatives of the countries which speak the target language. The second strand was comprised of socio-cultural type activities directed to getting acquainted with the national painters and painters of the target cultures: the students were encouraged to visit local art galleries or find an art work online and prepare a visual presentation, analyzing their chosen paintings according to the presented scheme. The scheme included such steps as expressing opinion, paying attention to all visual elements, content (objects, places, scenes, people) and meaning of the piece of art.

The vocabulary items and grammar structures recommended for use complied with both the program and the task (topic) requirements. In addition, students also engaged in art creation activities themselves, using various art-creating techniques and integrating their learning of the foreign language: they drew and analyzed colors and shapes using wax coloring sticks, painted with watercolor, and created works of art using glue and powder. When integrating creativity-developing tasks into foreign language learning, it is highly important to provide a detailed explanation about the aims of learning, the tasks waiting for students, and the expected outcomes. It was essential to help the students understand the integration of three elements here: foreign language learning /

using and cultural awareness raising intertwined with experiencing the joy of being engaged in creativity-developing tasks.

At the end of the second semester, having studied a foreign language for two semesters and having been provided with plurilingual competence development opportunities enriched with creativity development activities, the students were invited to participate in the study, aimed at identifying the outcomes of the culture-enriched language studies. The students were requested to fill in anonymous online questionnaire surveys.

### **Research Participants**

The studied population consisted of 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-year LSMU and ASU students who were learning a new, previously not studied, foreign language (French, German or Italian) that could be selected from multiple languages offered in the curriculum. The total number of the participants of the study was 196, 112 students being from LSMU, and 84 students from ASU. 127 of the research respondents were studying the French language, 48 – German and 21 – Italian. The study was based on the principle of the participants' voluntary participation – this principle was observed for ethical reasons. The aforementioned condition created a situation where the criteria imposed by random sampling could not be met; therefore, a non-probability convenience sampling method was chosen. This study was carried out observing the respondent anonymity principle to acquire honest responses.

### **Instruments**

In the quantitative part of the study, we applied a written survey using a questionnaire consisting of 31 questions. The questions were distributed into three blocks: *demographic information* (4 questions – e.g. gender, grade point average (GPA) score, age, etc.), *the evaluation of students and teachers' foreign language competence* (10 questions – e.g. "How do you evaluate your foreign language knowledge and skills?", etc.), and *the evaluation of the application of the elements of creativity in foreign language learning* (16 questions – e.g. "Did you like the use of artistic tasks when learning

a foreign language?”, etc.). The block of demographic questions was used to identify significant differences between the studied groups – e.g. whether the environment of different universities, age, gender, GPA, or studying in a state-funded student place or not-funded student place influenced the development of students’ creativity in language learning. The accumulated data was stored in a database.

## **Methods**

Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS 22.0 for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). During data analysis, we calculated descriptive statistics and verified statistical hypotheses about differences between frequencies of mean values and the interdependence between attributes. When verifying statistical hypotheses, the level of significance was set at 0.05. Interdependence between qualitative attributes was evaluated by applying the chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) criterion. Depending on the sample size, either exact (for small samples) or asymptotic  $\chi^2$  criterion was applied. The normality of the distribution of quantitative variables was verified by applying the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The comparison of the mean values between two groups was performed by applying Student’s t-test and the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test.

## **Research Findings**

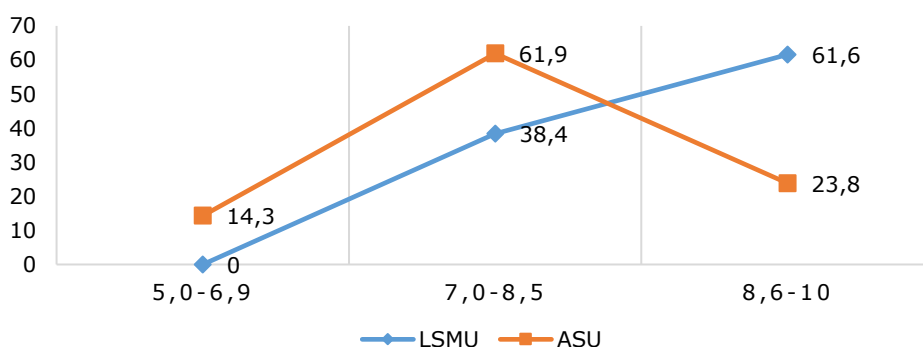
The study aimed at revealing and comparing the students’ attitude to the outcomes of integration of creativity-developing tasks in foreign language learning, which could allow us to evaluate the efficiency of application of creativity-developing activities in the development of students’ plurilingual competence. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that no similar studies have been conducted in Lithuania so far.

The respondents were of the similar age – the majority of them (82.7%) were 20–22 years old. By gender, more respondents (74.4%) were females. Nearly one-half of the respondents (45.4%) had very good or excellent grade point average scores studying at the tertiary institution.

However, the comparison of the results of studies (GPA) between the LSMU and ASU students revealed a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.000$ ) – more LSMU students had very good or excellent marks showing the evaluation of their study achievements at the university (Fig. 1). The result is not surprising, as this university tends to attract the students who graduate from secondary education with much higher grade point average scores and are determined to study at the medical institution more intensively and longer than at any other tertiary institution because of its specificity. Over one-half of the respondents (63.8%) were state-funded students.

**Figure 1**

*Comparison of the respondents according to their Grade point average, %*



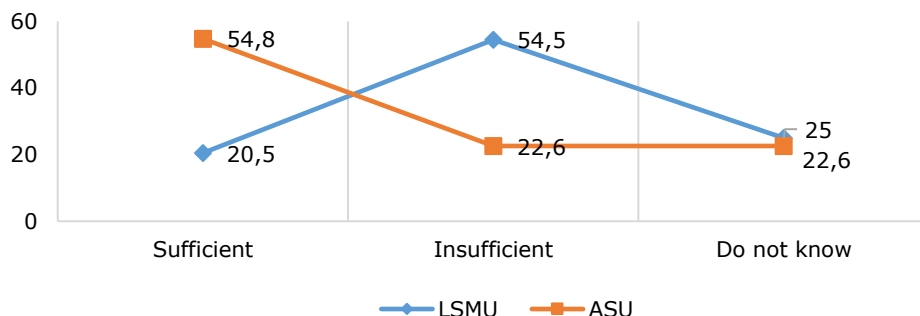
Furthermore, the respondents were also asked to evaluate if the foreign language knowledge and skills acquired during the studies at the university were sufficient for them or if they felt a necessity to continue improving this competence. What we observe overall is that one-third of the respondents (35.2%) reported having acquired sufficient knowledge and skills, whereas slightly more students evaluated their foreign language competence as insufficient, i.e. 40.8% of the subjects considered that they had not acquired sufficient knowledge or skills during their studies. Almost one fifth of the respondents admitted having no opinion about the sufficiency of foreign language competence.

Still, as can be seen in Figure 2, the analysis of the research findings reported by the respondents of each institution separately in relation to the self-assessed sufficiency of the acquired foreign language competence,

yielded statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ) differences. Over half (54.5%) of the research respondents-LSMU students thought that they had acquired insufficient knowledge or skills, compared to only 22.6% of ASU students, who considered their acquired foreign language competence as insufficient.

**Figure 2**

*Sufficiency of foreign language knowledge and skills acquired during studies, %*



In addition, a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.019$ ) was found concerning the sufficiency of foreign language knowledge and skills when comparing groups of state-funded students and those who had to pay the tuition fees themselves. More state-funded students (42.4%) admitted having acquired insufficient knowledge and skills in the studied foreign language which is not surprising having studied the language only for two semesters in total.

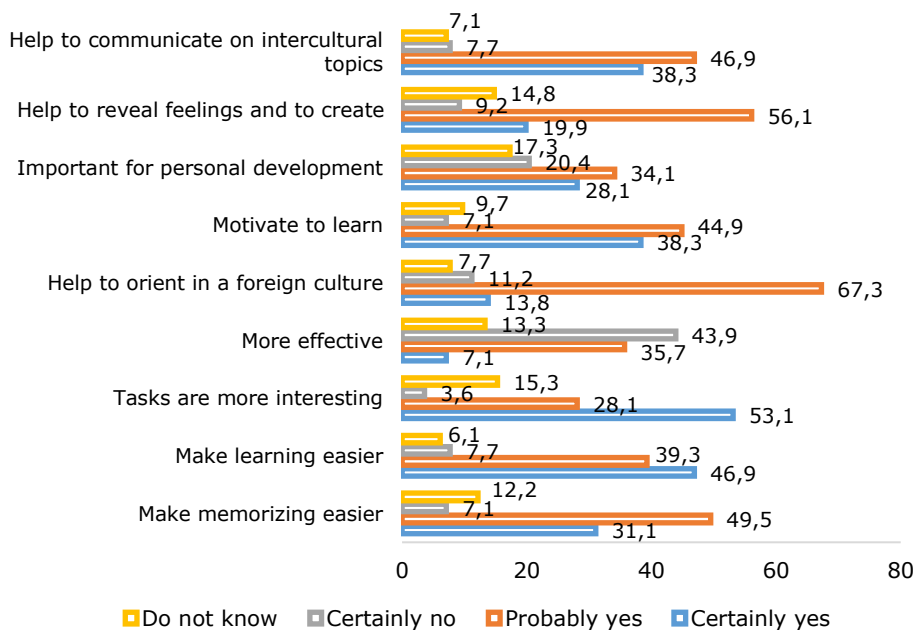
Further on in this study, we aimed to identify the most important content areas in the foreign language learning from the students' point of view. The obtained data showed that a large proportion of the students thought that while learning a language it was most important to study vocabulary (48%) and grammar (39.8%), i.e. to develop their linguistic competence, while only 12.2% of the respondents thought that familiarizing with the socio-cultural context was also important. Notwithstanding that, when being asked to evaluate the statement that the understanding of the socio-cultural context of the studied foreign language helps to communicate in a foreign language in a more concrete way, the majority of the respondents (56.1%) fully agreed with the statement.

The analysis of the students' opinion on the application of creativity-developing tasks started with asking students to prioritize the tasks with cultural elements in foreign language classes. It was found out that the majority of the respondents preferred movies (54.1%) and one third of them gave preference to music (34.2%), and only a few of the students preferred literature related tasks (1%). However, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of the students (72.4%) liked the use of artistic tasks in foreign language learning. The comparison of the LSMU and ASU student groups yielded a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.000$ ) in the evaluation of the use of creativity-developing tasks. This result showed that LSMU students evaluated the use of such tasks in foreign language learning more favorably.

Next, we analyzed the students' opinion on the effects of creativity-developing tasks upon of their foreign language learning. For this purpose, the respondents were asked to evaluate statements about the outcomes of application of creativity-developing tasks, including presentations and engagement in creating.

**Figure 3**

*Evaluation of application of creativity-developing tasks, %*





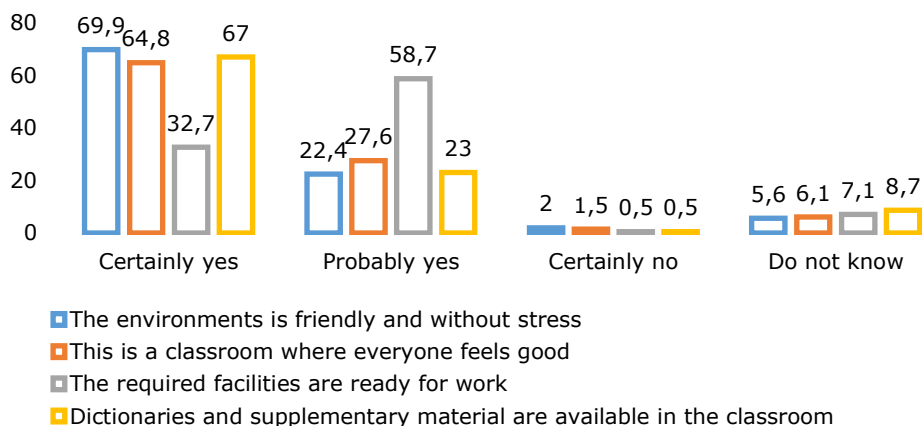
As can be seen in Figure 3, each second respondent (53.1%) was certain that when learning a foreign language with integrated creativity-developing elements, the tasks became more interesting, and almost one out of three respondents (28%) was almost certain of that. Almost each second respondent (46.9%) was also certain that learning was easier when applying drawing and creating techniques and a similar number of the respondents (39.3%) chose the variant 'probably yes'. 38.3% of the respondents were certain and even more of them almost certain (44.9%) that such tasks motivated and helped to communicate on intercultural topics (especially in case of art related presentations task).

However, 43.9% of the students did not think that creativity-developing tasks that involved students personally were more effective than traditional grammar or vocabulary learning focused tasks, and one fifth of them (20.4%) indicated that the application of such tasks was not important for their personal development. The comparison of the responses between the LSMU and ASU student groups did not reveal any statistically significant differences. A tendency can also be observed that in many cases the respondents were positive but rather reserved in expressing their opinion or were actually not certain and chose the variant "Probably yes" instead of "Certainly yes", in such cases as assessing the importance of art-related activities as a useful way to prepare them to better orient themselves in a foreign culture (67.3% of the respondents chose this option) or to reveal their feelings and create (56.1%) or even to communicate on intercultural topics (46.9%) or memorize vocabulary more easily (49.5%). It might be assumed that students had difficulty relating these tasks to broader statements.

The learning environment is important for integrating creativity-developing tasks; therefore, students were asked to evaluate the learning environment during their foreign language classes.

**Figure 4**

*Evaluation of the learning environment, %*



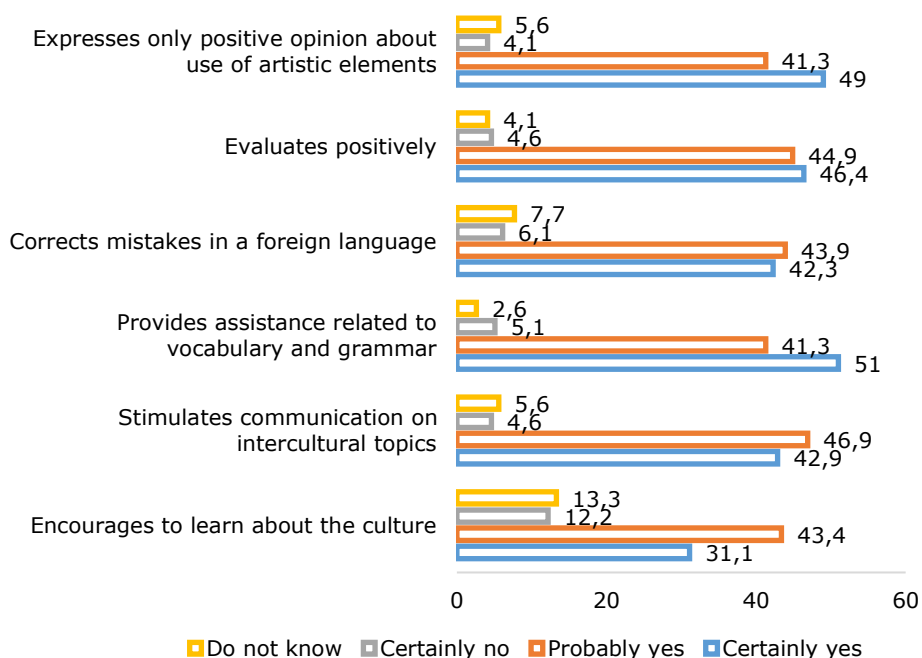
The obtained results show (Fig. 4) that a large proportion of the investigated university students found the learning environment to be friendly and without stress (69.9%), and over half of the respondents (64.8%) stated that everyone felt good in the classroom, and that they had enough dictionaries and supplementary material for foreign language studies (67%). However, evaluating the readiness of the facilities for work, only one third (32.7%) of the respondents were certain that the furniture and required study facilities were ready for work, and 58.7% unsure about it (marked 'probably yes'). Only a few (about 2%) of the respondents admitted feeling not good and evaluated the environment as unfriendly and stressful.

In this study, we also wanted to identify the students' opinion about the teachers' work during foreign language learning with integrated creativity-developing tasks. As seen in Figure 5, almost all the variables measured received positive scores (in the range between 74.5% – 92.3%). The highest number of the respondents were satisfied with the teachers' assistance in providing linguistic support, evaluating them positively and expressing a positive opinion about the use of artistic elements. The overwhelming majority of the respondents also agreed that teachers stimulated communication on intercultural art-related topics (87.8%). However, 12.2% of the students felt lack of encouragement to learn about the target culture on

the part of the teacher, and 13.3% had no opinion with regard to this issue. About 86.2% of them agreed that teachers corrected their mistakes made when using the foreign language during creativity-developing tasks, and they accepted it as teachers' assistance in foreign language learning.

**Figure 5**

*Evaluation of the teachers' work during creativity development integration, %*



The comparison of the results between LSMU and ASU students revealed four statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.005$ ) in the evaluation of the following statements: the students' opinions diverged with regard to teacher's encouragement to learn about the culture of the studied foreign language, the teacher assistance provided in related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the vocabulary and grammar of the foreign language, the teacher positive evaluation of artistic work and correction of language mistakes. In the former three cases more of the LSMU than ASU students evaluated the teachers' activity more favorably, but evaluating the teacher's work in correcting mistakes in the use of the studied foreign language, more

LSMU students (9.8%) than ASU (1.8%) students admitted that teachers were not correcting their mistakes during oral activities. The difference is statistically significant ( $p = 0.002$ ).

## **Discussion**

The importance of life-long learning and improvement of plurilingual competence acquisition is continuously increasing, and thus the curriculum of university studies should prepare students to become capable of adapting to the new changes and reacting creatively in their professional activity.

The analysis of the respondents' attitude towards the knowledge and abilities of a foreign language acquired during university studies showed that on average, nearly one-third of the students emphasized having not acquired sufficient knowledge or skills. However, comparing the results between the two universities, the respondents' opinions diverged: almost the same percentage of LSMU students considered having acquired insufficient foreign language knowledge, while ASU students – sufficient and, consequently, only one fifth of LSMU student was not satisfied with the acquired competence in comparison with one fifth of the ASU students who were satisfied with their foreign language competence. In addition, more state-funded students thought that they acquired insufficient knowledge and skills. The results might be caused by overall intention of students to acquire plurilingual language competence. Having studied the second foreign language for only two semesters and thinking about its application in future professional careers, LSMU students might have felt lack of proper preparation to use the language in real life cross-cultural encounters; therefore, they needed to continue studies. For ASU students two semesters of additional language learning (taking into account that they also had ESP classes) was sufficient as presumably their future perspectives might not involve broad application of this language in their careers.

Although the goal of language learning as achieving communicative language competence which consists of more than linguistic language competence has been prevailing for half of the century, language learning for the majority of the research respondents still means learning vocabulary and

grammar. Consequently, these two aspects were noted as most important in foreign language learning, even if the importance of socio-cultural competence was recognized by admitting that knowledge of the cultural context helps to communicate in a foreign language. The majority of the subjects liked the application of art-related and creativity-developing tasks in foreign language learning. They expressed preference to the use of movies and music related activities instead of favoring literature-related activities. Having in mind that the research respondents were the students of the so-called Generation Z, i.e. born from 1995 onwards, who grew up with their smartphones in hand and are used to communicating through images and texting rather than reading long texts, this choice of activities is justifiable. LSMU students more positively evaluated the application of creativity-developing tasks in foreign language learning.

Overall, the students acknowledged that creativity-developing tasks increased the effectiveness of their foreign language learning. The respondents indicated that when learning a foreign language with the use of creativity-developing elements, the tasks became much more interesting than the ordinary traditional activities. Furthermore, drawing and creation facilitated learning of the new vocabulary and its retention (they memorized the words more easily and knew where to apply them), and that such tasks motivated and helped them to express their ideas on art-related intercultural topics. However, some respondents were more critical about creativity-developing tasks that involved students personally, i.e. they found it hard to relate the engagement and use of such tasks for their personal development.

The study also confirmed the researchers' opinion that the learning environment was of utmost importance for the integration of creativity-developing tasks (Stepanek, 2015; Vaicekauskienė, 2009), and they evaluated plurilingual competence development tasks with integrated creativity-developing activities as spaces where they felt good as the environment was friendly and not stressful, they had sufficient reference and supplementary material available for learning a foreign language.

The students positively evaluated the teachers' work. Over one-half of the respondents indicated that during foreign language learning involving the use of creativity-developing tasks, the teacher provided assistance related

to the use and acquisition of knowledge and skills in a foreign language and did not express negative opinion with regard to the use of creativity-developing elements by the learners. It shows that the atmosphere the teachers created in class and the teachers' attitude while evaluating students' efforts while they were trying something new and not experienced before (in this case, creative work and explaining this creative work, i.e. integrating two new skills) were very important. It also confirmed that people are vulnerable and sensitive to the opinion of others and this should be taken into account by the teachers, especially if such personal creativity involving tasks are integrated.

However, a number of the students thought that their teacher certainly did not encourage them to learn the target culture and did not always correct their language mistakes. Concerning the lower score received on the former, an assumption can be made that the students might have expected their teachers to directly urge them to learn about the target culture; as in general, the students were quite satisfied with the teachers' fostering of intercultural awareness raising in stimulating communication on cultural issues. In contrast, the issue of correcting language mistakes requires additional attention on the part of the teacher. It should be agreed with the students that although correction of language mistakes assists in language learning, but during communicative activities, the teacher is not expected to correct their mistakes, ensuring them that the mistakes will be noted down and discussed individually or in class after the communicative activity.

### **Conclusions**

At a higher education institution, practical classes in foreign languages should be transformed into activities requiring active and creative student engagement. Creativity-developing tasks may be used as a supplement if not as a substitute of traditional teaching because assignments of such type encourage the learners to learn more efficiently, allow them to get acquainted with elements of a different culture, provide material for communication and engagement in discussions on intercultural topics and allow creating stress-free and enjoyable language learning atmosphere.

Generalization of the results of the study led to the formulation of the following statements:

- As the students prioritize linguistic aspects in foreign language learning, admitting that understanding of the socio-cultural context helps in communication, the teachers should draw students' attention on the importance of overall communicative competence development for cross-cultural encounters nowadays.

- The most preferable creativity-developing activities for students were related to watching and discussing movies and listening to music and recognizing lyrics rather than reading literature. The overall students' attitude towards the application of creativity-developing tasks in foreign language classes was positive: the tasks were interesting, drawing and creation facilitated learning, and such tasks motivated and helped to communicate on intercultural topics. The students of LUHS provided higher evaluations on the use of such tasks in plurilingual competence development than the respondents from ASU.

- The students positively evaluated the teachers' work during their engagement with creativity-developing tasks: they thought that the teacher provided proper assistance related to the acquisition and use of vocabulary and grammar of the foreign language and did not express a negative opinion about their application of creativity-developing elements. The students also thought that the teachers' positive evaluation was crucial for the success of such classes.

In the study, numerous comparisons of the discussed issues between the studied groups were performed – if their opinion differed by age, gender, the university, the grade point average, and whether the students paid for their tuition or were in state-funded places. The comparisons yielded very few statistically significant differences, except for those between the universities: although LSMU students evaluated teachers' work in correcting their mistakes lower, their overall evaluation of the use of creativity-developing tasks while learning foreign languages was higher.

- Failure to find statistically significant differences between the groups leads to a suggestion that the crucial factor in the development of students' creativity in language learning is the application of creative tasks by

the teacher rather than such factors as the learners' gender, grade point average, or aspect of being in state-funded places or paying for tuition.

### **Limitations of Study**

Although the study provides evidence that inclusion of creativity-developing activities into students' plurilingual competence development classes in tertiary institutions is beneficial, it did not attempt to measure the efficiency of the new method, and it is based on students' self-assessed opinion; therefore, its results might be applicable only if applied while teaching languages under similar conditions and to similar audiences. Furthermore, as different languages were taught by different language teachers this might have had impact upon different results obtained.

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## **KŪRYBINIŲ VEIKLŲ INTEGRACIJA MOKANTIS UŽSIENIO KALBŲ: STUDENTŲ POŽIŪRIS**

**Santrauka.** Sparčiai augantis informacijos srautas, nauji dalykiniai ir kultūriniai ryšiai su užsienio šalimis bei studentų galimybės dalyvauti tarptautinėse *Erasmus* studijų mainų programose, praktikoje užsienio šalių įstaigose, tarptautinės studentų konferencijos – tai tik keli veiksniai, sąlygojantys išsilavinusio darbuotojo rengimą, kurio viena svarbiausių dalių yra daugiakalbė kompetencija, t. y. praktinis gebėjimas bendrauti keliomis užsienio kalbomis. Užsienio kalbos mokymasis aukštojoje medicinos mokykloje yra skirtas mokytis profesinės kalbos terminijos. Tačiau įgyti daugiakalbę komunikacinę kompetenciją reiškia ne tik įsisavinti ir taikyti lingvistines kompetencijas, bet ir išmanyti šalies kultūrą, įgyti tarpkultūrinę komunikacinę kompetenciją. Ir ši daugiafunkcė kompetencija gali būti įgyjama integravus kūrybingumo užduotis į kalbų mokymosi procesą. Taigi šio darbo tikslas – pristatyti praktinį kūrybingumą ugdančių užduočių modelį ir atskleisti studentų požiūrį į kūrybingumo užduočių taikymo raiškos ypatumus studijuojant užsienio kalbą dviejose aukštosiose mokyklose. Darbe taikyti mokslinės literatūros analizės ir anketinės apklausos metodai. Apibendrinant atliktą tyrimą galima teigti, kad respondentai savo užsienio kalbų kompetenciją vertino vidutiniškai gerai. Jų nuomone, mokantis kalbų svarbiausia yra lingvistinė kompetencija (leksika ir gramatika), tačiau socialinio-kultūrinio konteksto supratimas taip pat svarbus bendraujant tarpkultūrinėje erdvėje. Studentai teigiamai įvertino meno elementų taikymą užsienio kalbos pratybose: užduotys tampa įdomesnės, piešiant ir kuriant mokomasi lengviau, tokios užduotys motyvuoja ir padeda bendrauti tarpkultūrinėmis temomis. Studentai akcentavo klasėje sukurtos ir gerai jaustis padedančios aplinkos svarbą. Dėstytojų pagalbą mokantis ir atliekant kūrybines užduotis vertino teigiamai, o teigiamas dėstytojo vertinimas atliekant kūrybingumą ugdančias užduotis paminėtas kaip svarbiausias tokių pratybų sėkmės elementas.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** komunikacinė kompetencija; kūrybiškumas; kūrybinių elementų taikymas; sociokultūrinė kompetencija; užsienio kalbų mokymas; studentas; dėstytojas.