

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING (BOOK REVIEW)

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Sebestyén Krisztina (2023): *Kik és miért tanulnak németet az érettségit adó képzésekben?*

Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen

Krisztina Sebestyén's book contains 11 numbered chapters, of which four are devoted to the literature, one chapter focuses on the presentation of the research, while three chapters present the results of the research. At the end of the volume, there is a summary, the cited literature and the appendices.

In the introductory chapter, the author discusses the relevance of the volume and thus of the research, and why it is important to address this topic. In this section, she defines the key terms she uses in the book, trying to make clear the meaning she gives to each term. Examples of key concepts include language acquisition, mother tongue, effectiveness, success, or motivation.

In the second chapter, the educational policy situation and historical aspects of German are presented in Hungary. The historical tradition of the German language still has an impact in Hungary today, which is underpinned, for example, by the German national minority self-governments and German national minority schools. For this reason, the author also provides spatial maps showing the areas affected by German nationality. Focusing on the school, the author compares German with English in several aspects, such as the number of language learners and the type of institution where these children study. After a review of the numbers, the documents governing language teaching also look at how many hours and on what basis students learn a foreign language. The chapter concludes with a comparison of language teaching methodologies.

The third major chapter reviews the literature on the factors influencing students' achievement and the factors that influence language choice. Language choice is

unquestionably influenced by the family background and the environment in which the child is brought up. The choice of institution, and thus the choice of foreign language(s), depends on the family background. There are many factors that influence how a child performs and learns a foreign language, of which Krisztina Sebestyén highlights the role of language teachers.

In chapter four, the author focuses on the achievement's indicators that show the popularity and effectiveness of English and German. To illustrate these, the author uses diagrams to show the number of participants in the National Secondary Schools Studies Competition, the number of language examiners in English and German over time, and the results of the two-level school-leaving examination, where the data are also compared at the county level. The literature chapters make use of a large amount of up-to-date Hungarian, English and German cited literature, which the author has duly aligned and collated. These chapters can therefore provide a good reference for other research or for further development of existing ones.

From chapter five onwards, the research and its results are presented. Krisztina Sebestyén conducted a questionnaire survey among 11th grade students, who learned German and/or English, and their language teachers in the counties of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The aim of the research was to investigate what motivated the students to choose a foreign language or languages and how family background influenced this choice. The research covered not only the learners but also their language teachers, where it focused on the impact of years in the teaching profession and the differences between teachers who taught German or English as foreign languages. The database of the study is noteworthy because the author tried to construct a proportional sample in the two counties, where a 10% sample was drawn between both teachers and students. As a result, nearly 900 pupils completed the pupil questionnaire and 43 teachers of German as foreign language and 57 teachers of English of foreign language completed the teacher questionnaire. Institutions where it was not possible to obtain a school leaving certificate were excluded because the author wanted to compare the future plans of the students and it was possible only between the secondary schools with school leaving exams. During the research, the researcher chose the statistical procedures appropriately, and the variables of the questionnaire were drawn and compared appropriately. Three groups of foreign language variables are created: those who learn English only, those who learn German only and those who learn both. It is important to note that the book also includes questionnaires of her own compilation, which may be of use to other researchers.

In the chapter six, the author examines the role of family background in determining the choice of a foreign language. The chapter discusses the factors that influenced language choice at primary school – which language is usually continued to learn at secondary level – and then looks at foreign language choice at secondary level. It distinguishes two groups based on family background (low and high family background), which it also compares with the four clusters formed by the factors influencing secondary school choice (“Profession-oriented Commuters”, “Those Wishing to Break Out”, “Higher Education-oriented Locals, “Survivors”).

Chapter seven focuses on foreign language attainment and language learning goals. The academic achievement variables are linked to the average grade point averages in each subject in grades 9th and 10th by language studied, by county. Other indicators of achievement are whether pupils have already passed a language examination. Foreign language learning objectives are examined along several variables, such as further education, employment. It also compares these objectives by county, learners’ family background and language learning groups.

Chapter eight focuses on language teachers, their professional experience, how they work, and what methods they use to teach a foreign language as effectively as possible. For teachers, it looks at what teaching elements are important to teachers depending on how many years they have been working as teachers or what language they teach. Teachers in Hungary are obliged to attend in-service training, so it is also looking at this. This is also important because it gives us an insight into what teachers of different foreign languages teachers consider important and how they do it.

The final chapter summarises the results of the research, where the author examines her hypotheses and places the research in a broader context. Her main findings are that foreign language choice at secondary level is already determined by the foreign language at primary school, with German learning being more important for pupils of higher social status. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds also have lower foreign language outcomes, and those from higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to focus on language exams and further education, while the other group tends to focus on employment. Pupils feel the importance of English, so those who learn German want to learn English, while the reverse motivation is not true. There is an age difference in the goals that language teachers set themselves, with those with more work experience tending to focus on practical application. German as foreign language teachers place more emphasis on grammar.

Overall, the book is a well-edited volume with a logical arc in which the new findings are well supported by the literature. The volume is rich in time-series data on different aspects of foreign language teaching. They help to place German in relation to English, and thus can serve as a starting point for further research. The novelty of the volume is that it provides a thorough description of two counties in a large sample, based on the learning motivations behind foreign language learning at secondary level, which is well complemented by a study of the teachers of the foreign language of their pupils. The volume is very rich in information, which is difficult to summarise in a short guide, and is therefore well worth reading. I recommend the book not only to teachers and researchers who live and research in the two counties under study, but also to all professionals interested in foreign language teaching and learning, because it contains comprehensive information that is relevant internationally and can be adapted to different countries.

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