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## THE PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH BY POLISH AND LITHUANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

### Introduction

Recently, our modern society and, comparatively, all spheres of human existence have been influenced by the globalisation process. Globalisation is a process in which people live in one common world where individuals and nations are becoming more and more dependent on one another due to various political, social, cultural and economic factors, and new technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet support the process of globalisation enabling immediate communication and interaction among people from all over the world (Giddens, 2004). As a result, people become global citizens aware of global issues who are interested in problems of other countries and know other cultures. This interest in other countries than one's own and the perception of the diversity of world's culture is indeed a part of global awareness.

The field of education is influenced by globalisation, as well. If human beings want to be ready to operate efficiently in the global context, they have to be prepared and educated appropriately. Many legal documents regulating education processes present a newly formed tendency called *Global Education* (hereinafter referred to as GE). This concept is mentioned and crystallised in many official European Union and United Nations documents and legal acts. GE is closely related to the *Goals of Education for Sustainable Development*. The main emphasis is on the acquisition of various skills, such as critical and creative thinking, communication, conflict management, active participation and contribution to the life of society, demonstrating respect to the Earth and its diversity. In order to achieve these goals and globalise education, specific actions may be implemented: developing appropriate education programmes on consumer and health education, culture and religion, agriculture and tourism; educating through Information and Communication Technologies; changing youth lifestyles forming a more positive attitude to the world, etc. GE aims to provide knowledge on

democracy, civil and political culture, to form skills and positive experience, which is undoubtedly important for a person who wants to be a global citizen in the European multicultural society. In 2015 the *Conception of Global Education* was established in Lithuania. It presents the aim and goals of the conception and emphasises the importance of this tendency of education for the identity of each Lithuanian citizen. Also in Poland the notion of global education is introduced and promoted in schools in *Wieloletni program współpracy rozwojowej na lata 2016-2020* (2015). The aim of the initiative is to promote global development and expand citizens' knowledge about international cooperation and global problems.

The European Council promotes GE as education that empowers people to familiarise with the modern globe and the existing issues. The European Union umbrella organization CONCORD issued the *Statement on Development Education and Awareness Raising* in 2004. The aim was to enable every person in Europe to have life-long access to education to become aware and understand global development and global concerns. It is based on the values of solidarity, equality, empathy and democracy. Organizing GE in any type of educational institution a new concept related to the global education, *Global Citizenship Education*, was promoted. UNESCO (2014), OXFAM (2008), Maastricht Global Education Declaration (2002) and European Parliament (2012) define the conception of *Global Citizenship Education* as education comprising knowledge, values, competences which are important to ensure constant development of the peaceful, safe, correct, tolerant, equal and sustainable world. Considering the scope of such education, it is important to organise the process of teaching and learning in a specific manner in order to satisfy requirements of a global citizen who demonstrates digital intelligence and technological literacy. Newly developed and adapted traditional methods of teaching and learning process have to be closely related to the 'global' measures as ICT, foreign language and multicultural dimensions.

The European Union Council pays huge attention to the language and plurilingualism policy, focusing on the promotion of multilingualism and language learning in the European context. The experts of the Council emphasise that the process of learning languages and their usage have to involve an entire population and that it should lead to the preservation of a cultural, social, intellectual and political elite, and, on the contrary, it has to be available for every ordinary person. The Council Resolution on the European Strategy of Multilingualism (2010) stresses the foreign language skills development, its close relation to intercultural competence and its importance for national and international contexts: "Significant efforts should still be made to promote language learning and to value the cultural aspects of linguistic diversity at all levels of education and training, while also improving information on

the variety of European languages and their dissemination across the world”, as stated in the *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* (2010).

According to the EU Council, the role of multilingualism and foreign language learning is relevant for a modern citizen who demonstrates willingness to be an active participant of global life. In 2014, The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council provided *Conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences* in which linguistic diversity is referred to as a fundamental component of the European culture and intercultural dialogue, and the ability to communicate in a language other than one's mother tongue is acknowledged to be one of the key competences which citizens should seek to acquire.

Currently, the European society, including the countries to be analysed herein such as Poland and Lithuania, develops very rapidly through the processes of intercultural integration, economic reforms and education technology. Furthermore, as Sederevičiūtė (2005) states, new technologies are created and implemented, and the significance of high quality education is emphasised, with information and knowledge becoming the most important resources in the global context. The citizens are very concerned about their intellectual level, the ability to use modern information technology and the English language competence in order to participate in international projects, exchange programmes or international joint programmes at higher education institutions. Young people should be able to know, understand and apply appropriate knowledge in practice and not just graduate from a higher education institution with an average and incomplete set of professional knowledge and skills. Considering this issue, the educational institutions should not be afraid of being open and innovative organizations, i.e. to develop continuously.

As Mačianskienė (2010) notes, being familiar with the diversity of the European languages is a necessity for daily existence. All foreign languages establish more opportunities for individuals' personal development and the deepening of communication capabilities. Currently, good knowledge of a foreign language, mainly English, is one of the basic requirements in production, trade and service spheres. Students, having English language skills, can think, present findings, critically evaluate circumstances and penetrate into cultural and moral spheres of a daily life. English is today's global language, *lingua franca*, used in international communication in both professional and private life. It is the language of conferences, scientific publications, business and entertainment, as well as the most popular foreign language taught at school. Therefore, being able to speak English, but also other foreign languages, is no longer an asset, but a must.

According to the estimates available e.g. on the website [europelanguagejobs.com](http://europelanguagejobs.com), approximately two billion people study English worldwide and citizens of various countries find it more appealing and practical to have a common language in a local and international context. Throughout the emerging generations of many nations, proficiency in English is almost ubiquitous as people are becoming more and more serious about language learning due to diminishing business and educational boundaries. Statistics in Lithuania show a positive tendency of the foreign language usage. English is the most popular foreign language to be learned today, Poland and Lithuania included. With more and more Poles and Lithuanians moving and working abroad, especially after 2004, i.e. the year of access to the European Union which gave the possibility to work abroad legally, the United Kingdom and Ireland being among the most popular destinations, their need to learn and use English has increased. As a result, 61.49 % of the Polish population use English in their daily life. Lithuania provides a significantly smaller percentage, English is spoken by 30% of total population, according to [truelithuania.com](http://truelithuania.com) website. The main reasons are intensive globalisation, positions overseas and a constantly growing number of incoming and outgoing tourists.

Following the analysis of the EU documents regarding multilingualism and foreign language acquisition, the necessity and process of foreign language literacy development is a key priority for the European Council, and relationships with the rest of the world have to be expanded starting from acquiring and strengthening foreign language skills required by the Information Age and a rapidly changing reality.

Despite being a tool that facilitates communication, English may be perceived as a threat to other languages and cultures. Unlike other languages, English has more non-native than native speakers (detailed data available on Wikipedia), which means that more people speak it as a second or foreign language than as a first language. This in turn means that many English users speak other languages as a mother tongue and presumably come from various cultural backgrounds. The popularity of English may then undermine the importance of these languages and cultures. It cannot be denied that most, if not all, languages of the world are nowadays witnessing a flow of Anglicisms, i.e. English words used to replace native ones. As a result, numerous linguistic studies in various languages describe the functioning of Anglicisms in the recipient language (see: Görlach, 2007). In some sense, this can be treated as a sign of our times, an inevitable phenomenon caused by political, economic and cultural factors and resulting in a language change (Van Roey, Granger & Swallow, 1995). Actually, the phenomenon of the influence of one language on another is not a recent one: the history of each language is a history of its contacts with other, usually neighbouring, languages and loanwords are a natural consequence of this fact (Fusco,

2008). In addition, military contacts and occupation of a given territory may impose a foreign language to the local community. What may be treated as exceptional is the fact that English is now a global language and that its impact is world-spread, with a significant role played by the media in the dissemination of the language.

The question that one may want to ask is whether this dominance of English over other languages is really perceived as a threat, especially by speakers of smaller, less-known languages? Or maybe English is not as dominant as some may suggest? Then, one may be interested in how educational institutions, universities included, should respond to that reality, as they are expected to prepare students for future professional and private life in the modern reality.

In order to address these issues, a study was carried out in which Polish and Lithuanian students were asked to answer questions related to their perception of English dominance in today's world and possible benefits and threats stemming from this phenomenon.

## **The study**

In order to have an insight into how the influence of English on other languages and its role in creating global awareness are indeed perceived, a study among Polish and Lithuanian university students was conducted. The survey was carried out at the University of Zielona Góra, Poland, and Klaipėda University and Klaipėda State University of Applied Sciences, Lithuania among 250 and 87 students, respectively. The survey was run in the respondents' mother tongue, Polish or Lithuanian.

In total, the respondents were asked twelve questions concerning the phenomenon of English as a global language. While other responses were presented in the preceding publications (Kapica-Curzytek, Karczewska & Sharp 2019; Karczewska 2019; Žegunienė & Karczewska 2018), in the present paper the focus is put on the following questions:

1. Can you observe the dominance of English in today's world?
2. If so, what are the benefits of this situation?
3. If so, what are possible threats related to English being a global language?
4. In what spheres is English dominance most perceptible?

Answers given to the above mentioned questions were expected to show whether the respondents perceived English as a dominant language and if it was more of a benefit or a threat. It has to be explained that the study was conducted in Zielona Góra and Klaipėda, two towns of similar population (about 140 000 and 160 000 inhabitants, respectively), at the local universities. While the Polish respondents were students of

foreign language philology (135 of them studied English, the others studied other languages), the Lithuanian respondents were students at various faculties. The main idea of the study was to investigate similarities and differences between Polish and Lithuanian students. English was expected to be perceived as a global language in both countries, but what seemed absolutely intriguing were the students' attitudes towards the dominance of English in today's world.

Both countries, Poland and Lithuania, are Eastern European countries which remained under the Soviet influence after the World War II. However, Poland remained an independent country, even if a satellite state of the Soviet Union, while Lithuania was one of the Soviet republics, a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), so it was not an independent country. In this case, the impact of the Russian language seemed to be far more intense and meaningful in the territory of today's Lithuania, with Russian being the official language of the entire Soviet Union, than in Poland where the Polish language has never been dominated by Russian.

As the entire population of Poland is of about 38 million while the population of Lithuania is of less than 3 million, two options seemed possible: either the Lithuanian students would be particularly careful to protect their language from the English dominance or they would be eager to learn English in order to be able to communicate with foreigners or to go abroad to study or work. In the first case, English would be perceived as a threat for smaller, less popular languages, while in the second case it would be a great opportunity to widen one's perspectives. The survey was expected to bring answers to this question. In addition, it was supposed to show in which aspects of life English is most dominant.

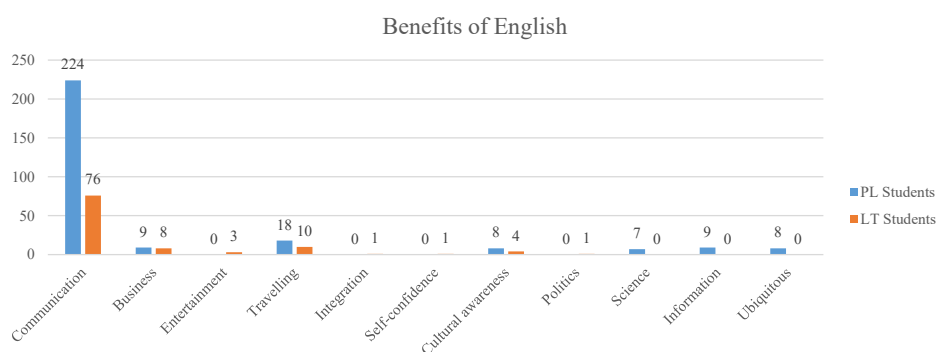
## Results

As stated in the previous part, the study was conducted among 250 Polish (hereinafter referred to as PL) and 87 Lithuanian (hereinafter referred to as LT) students. The first question, about the perception of English as a dominant language, was a closed-ended one, with either "yes" or "no" answer. Among the Polish respondents, 245 out of 250, equal to 98%, stated that they could observe the dominance of English in today's world. Among the Lithuanian respondents the percentage was even higher, as all the 87 students surveyed (100%) gave a positive answer to this question.

Such a firm approach demonstrates an undeniably special status of English in the Polish and Lithuanian contexts. A few phenomena may be considered as a basis for such a situation: the interviewed students relate their studies of that language to the online search for information, educational literature, student mobility opportunities

and international projects where communication and other activities are based on the English language. Furthermore, career prospects and global business motivate students to demonstrate integrity with that language; in addition, the English language is very closely related to the entertainment sphere (the Internet, films, games, etc.) that involves young people and occupies a central part of their personal life. This leads to a situation where English is perceived as a dominant, global language whose position is stronger than the position of other languages. There was no relevant difference between the Polish and Lithuanian respondents in this regard and this approach seems to reflect general tendencies.

In the following question of the study the respondents were asked to name benefits stemming from the fact that English is, in their opinion, a global language. The surveyed students provided a huge number of facts illustrating their positive approach to English and its benefits, as can be observed on the graph below.



**Figure 1.** Benefits of the English language

The obtained data revealed a vast diversity of the benefits of speaking the English language. The most popular answer was the statement that the dominance of English results in easier communication, as a majority of the respondents (224–PL and 76–LT) noted that English is beneficial for an international communication process in which representatives of different cultures have to establish a mutual relationship necessary for business and educational reasons. Thus, the process of communication is more successful and the global perspective is being expanded. The ease of communication refers to the fact that one is able to communicate with people of different origins in English, so there is no need to speak other languages and there is no risk that communication will not be possible at all.

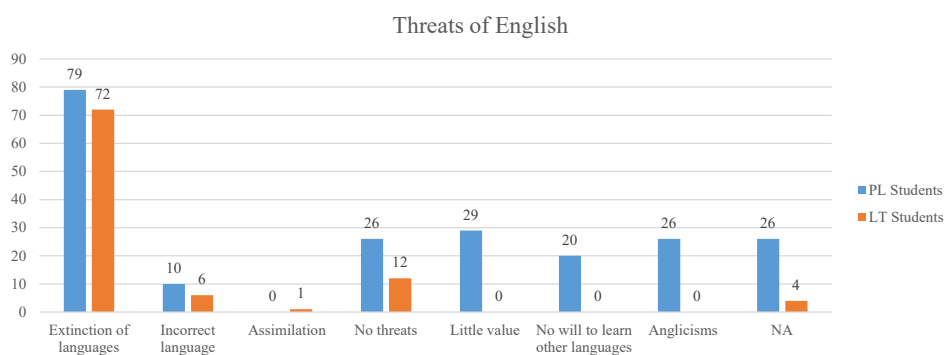
This answer actually shows two more aspects of today's linguistic reality. First, it is less necessary than in the past to study foreign languages other than English, such as German or French, as anyway one is able to communicate in English with foreigners from different countries. As other questions in the survey showed, also students majoring in French, German or Russian frequently use English in international communication. The other observation is that English is used by Polish and Lithuanian students mainly to communicate with other non-native speakers of English, not its native speakers as one might think (Kapica-Curzytek et al. 2019). This fact enables us to draw the conclusion that English is indeed a global language, a common tool used in international communication. This seems to be a perspective that also educational institutions should take into account. This problem will be discussed in one of the following parts of the paper.

Even if the ease of communication was the most frequent answer, some other ideas were presented, too. For instance, the respondents relate success in business to English as well, but not so assuredly; just 9 (PL) and 8 (LT) students respectively indicated benefits related to the use of English in making business, presumably due to their future professional considerations. The respondents are still studying according to their chosen study programme and they do not tend to demonstrate their future professional plans. Travelling and activities related to this sphere were indicated by a slightly higher number of the respondents (10–LT and 8–PL). As the youth are not bound up with marital relations, family or other personal limitations, they are willing to travel and they understand beneficial usage of the foreign language. As a matter of fact, English is an international language, so travelling is easier and every person, despite the geographical location, can freely communicate in English. The role of the English language in raising cultural awareness was mentioned by 8 (PL) and 4 (LT) students. This proves students' intelligence and perception of the diversity of the world, which leads to a positive world-view demonstration; entertainment activities are closely related to this category because innovative technology allows students to get involved into online/virtual activities which are almost impossible without speaking English. Consequently, the following answers were given by the Lithuanian students, such as self-confidence (1), integration (1), and politics (1), and by the Polish students, such as science (7), information (9) and the fact that English is ubiquitous (8). The popularity of English can be therefore explained with the fact that it is easy to learn English as it is ubiquitous, so people have constant access to it. Thanks to this language, people have access to information, can develop their careers and develop their personality.

The revealed and presented aspects testify how beneficial the English language is for the students who are engaged into various activities, such as communication, travel-

ling, entertainment and deepening cultural awareness. These data present an entire spectrum of situations in which English can, and indeed is, used, which confirms its role as a medium of international professional and private communication.

Having analysed the core of the issue, a presentation of counter arguments is essential. Question three focused on possible threats caused by the dominance of English in today's world. As stated earlier, it was interesting to see if the respondents would name any threats that English could cause and whether there would be any difference between the Polish and Lithuanian students in this point. The results are shown on the graph below:



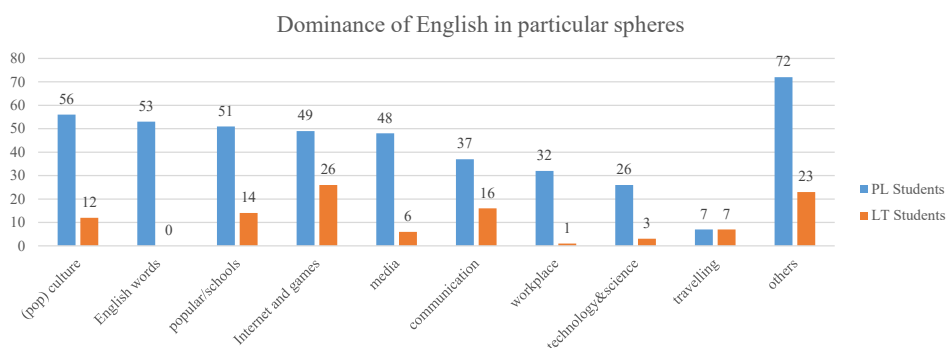
**Figure 2.** Threats of the English language

The obtained data witnessed that 79 (PL), equal to 32%, and 72 (LT) respondents, equal to 83%, are familiar with the most topical threat – the extinction of other languages, among which the Lithuanian and Polish languages. Frequent usage of any foreign language may result in the extinction of an “ignored” language. If the popularity of English increases, the use of the respondents’ mother tongue will definitely decrease. It is necessary to add that the citizens of Poland and Lithuania, especially young people, incorporate English words into their native language. As a consequence, the Polish and Lithuanian languages may extinct, according to the students’ responses. In addition, the popularity of English leads to the next threat – incorrect language that was mentioned by 6 of the Lithuanian respondents. The grammar rules are ignored due to their complexity; the students find the English language easier to learn and use, thus correct and fluent Lithuanian is difficult to maintain. Another observation, given 29 times by the Polish students (LT=0), was that other languages could lose their importance, become useless, which can be connected with another opinion of the Polish students, expressed 20 times (LT=0), that there could be less need and will to study other languages than English. This tendency can be observed

at universities where philologies other than English are chosen by fewer and fewer students. Additionally, assimilation of language and cultures has been indicated by 1 Lithuanian respondent. That fact demonstrates further threats of the English language and leads to circumstances unfavourable for the Lithuanian and Polish residents, i.e. no language – no national identity. Nevertheless, not all the respondents noted threats related to the dominant position of English in contemporary world, as 26 (PL) and 12 (LT) students noted that the English language did not demonstrate any threats for their language/country and respectively 26 Polish and 4 Lithuanian students had no opinion on the issue (NA – no answer). Apart from the points presented so far, 26 Polish respondents (LT=0) focused on linguistic results of the dominance of English, i.e. a significant number of Anglicisms appearing in other languages which can “pollute” the recipient language.

The revealed results prove that despite its beneficial aspects, a few negative consequences of the dominance of English still exist. Fortunately, the respondents are aware of both situations and demonstrate understanding of possible threats and the necessity to maintain and represent national identity in the global arena.

The following part of the survey aimed to present spheres which are influenced by the English language. So, the respondents provided a diversity of such spheres, which can be observed on the following graph:



**Figure 3.** Spheres under the English language influence

The results show that answers given by the Polish and Lithuanian students were convergent, differences regarding the number of students indicating a given answer. The most popular answers were: the Internet and games, indicated by 49 PL and 26 LT respondents; (pop) culture, understood as the popularity of English music, books or films, indicated by 56 PL and 12 LT students; and the fact that English is a global language popular in schools (51 PL and 14 LT respondents). English is also

dominant in the media (48 PL and 6 LT students), and it is the language of international communication (37 PL and 16 LT students). The dominance of English can be observed also in the language itself, with a massive flow of Anglicisms being used. This phenomenon was referred to by Polish students only (53 PL). Among other answers more popular in the Polish survey one can mention the dominance of English in the workplace (32 PL and 1 LT student), English being the language of technology and science (26 PL and 3 LT respondents), while the usefulness of English when travelling was indicated by 7 Polish and 7 Lithuanian students. To sum up: the dominance of English in pop culture (no. 1 among PL and no. 4 among LT students), the Internet and games (no. 4. PL/no. 1. LT), schools (no. 3 in both PL and LT), media and communication (no. 5 PL and no. 6 LT) were mentioned by both Polish and Lithuanian respondents in varying proportions. The sphere of travel was mentioned by 7 respondents in both groups, which gave it no. 5 among the Lithuanian students, but was one of the components labelled “others” in the case of the Polish questionnaires, outnumbered significantly by other answers. The most significant difference is that the Polish students mentioned the flow of Anglicisms (53 indications) while the Lithuanian students did not mention this phenomenon.

After a precise analysis of the gathered data it can be concluded that the benefits and influence (positive or negative) of the English language on other languages and cultures are obvious and well perceived by the students. That language may be beneficial providing opportunities for better communication, education and career. Controversially, threats exist and have a negative impact on national identity, correct usage of the mother tongue and assimilation of cultures.

### **Implications for higher education**

The study conducted among Polish and Lithuanian students may be treated as a starting point for a discussion about practical implications for higher education institutions whose role is to prepare young people for their future life (see also: Karczewska 2017). The very fact that English is perceived as a global language means that one is expected to be able to communicate in this language regardless of the study programme chosen. Both foreign language students and those studying at other faculties should develop their skills in English as a foreign language as nowadays it is an essential skill in almost any workplace. In addition, as students focus on practical uses of English in their professional and private life, universities should respond to these expectations and put more pressure on efficient communication, i.e. make students able to speak and write in English. Furthermore, students should get acquainted with vocabulary and

forms of communication typical of their branch of studies, such as business, tourism or logistics, as this is what they will need in their future workplace. Nowadays, English is present in almost all Polish and Lithuanian school and university curricula as the main foreign language to learn, so that graduates can compete with their counterparts from other European countries on the labour market.

A significant role of English cannot be denied, it helps an academic society to prosper internationally and establish cooperation among various higher education institutions despite their physical distance. If under any unforeseen circumstances English disappears, any other language will be definitely used instead of that. A common language as English nowadays is a prerequisite for academic collaboration leading to efficient students' preparation for their future activities. Studying and using English enables young people to be more competitive in the job market and to move up the career ladder. It provides access to undergraduate and postgraduate courses, either in their native country or overseas, and to work-related professional development courses. English enhances students' ability to engage with the internet and social networking sites. This in turn increases the ability to access information, work more efficiently, and cultivate friendships with people around the world, and allow enhanced access to unbiased news about world events (see the *English Effect* report by British Council).

However, the study lets us draw some more detailed conclusions. The answers related to possible threats posed by global English show that the respondents are afraid that their mother tongue may become extinct one day. What is significant is the fact that 72 out of 87 Lithuanian students, equal to 83%, are considering this possibility while only 79 out of 250 Polish respondents, equal to 32%, share these concerns. This may indeed prove that smaller language communities are more concerned about the future of their language. However, the Polish respondents seem more aware of other possible threats of the English dominance, such as a flow of Anglicisms, no will to learn other languages as one can communicate everywhere in English and, as a result, a loss of other languages' value in today's world. Even if it is impossible to stop language changes, educational institutions may well contribute to the protection of the local language. In practice this can mean teaching students to pay attention to the correctness of their production in their mother tongue. They should be particularly sensitive to the number of Anglicisms they use and be familiar with possible native equivalents that could be used to replace them.

In addition, other languages and cultures are to receive more attention. As stated earlier, speaking English is no longer an asset, but a must, so another point is to

convince students to learn other foreign languages, such as the languages of the neighbouring countries and business partners, i.e. Russian or German.

Undoubtedly, English gives access to information and enables communication as well as raises cultural awareness. Universities should also promote these values, e.g. by showing how to search reliable sources of information and how to become independent users of the English language which is not an object of studies as such, but a tool indispensable in modern communication, especially in the case of speakers of less-known languages, such as Polish and Lithuanian. As a result, university graduates who speak English well (and other languages, too) may play the role of leaders of an international and intercultural dialogue and cooperation who may contribute to shaping global awareness in their local *milieu* and in their society. The role of the University is to raise this awareness and teach students how to promote the idea of globalisation and international - intercultural cooperation so that they can become true citizens of the global village.

## Conclusions

The necessity to know any foreign language is precisely determined in the EU legal documentation and acts. This issue is relevant for the citizens of whole Europe considering the spheres of business, economics, professional and personal life. Currently the situation in the global arena is changing rapidly and it is influenced by changes in the education system and labour market. A majority of the youth is engaged in international activities, projects and business, which leads to acquiring new skills where the English language is a key priority.

The study conducted showed that Polish and Lithuanian students perceive the English language as a global language used in international communication. They do understand how useful it is in both professional and private life. At the same time, the respondents are aware of the fact that the dominance of English may lead to the extinction of other languages, an extensive use of Anglicisms as well as reduced motivation to study other languages and their meaning being marginalised. The role of educational institutions, including universities, is to respond to this reality. On the one hand, students are expected to become competent users of English, also in the area of their studies. On the other hand, cultural and linguistic diversity should be promoted as well in order to stop further marginalisation of languages other than English.

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## POSTRZEGANIE JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO PRZEZ POLSKICH I LITEWSKICH STUDENTÓW: WNIOSKI DLA UCZELNI WYŻSZYCH

### Streszczenie

Język angielski jest obecnie językiem globalnym, *lingua franca* komunikacji międzynarodowej, zarówno służbowej, jak i prywatnej. Aby dowiedzieć się, jak jego wpływ na inne języki i rola w kreowaniu świadomości globalnej są faktycznie postrzegane, przeprowadzono badanie wśród polskich i litewskich studentów. Odpowiedzi na pytania zawarte w ankiecie są przedstawione w ujęciu porównawczym polsko-litewskim, aby dostrzec podobieństwa i różnice pomiędzy ankietowanymi z dwóch europejskich krajów, które zostały członkami Unii Europejskiej w 2004 r. i od tamtej pory szybko się rozwijają. Badanie jest przyczynkiem do dyskusji na temat praktycznych wniosków płynących z uzyskanych wyników dla szkolnictwa wyższego, jako że oczekuje się, aby szkoły wyższe odpowiadały na wymagania współczesnego świata i oczekiwania studentów związane z ich przyszłym życiem zawodowym i prywatnym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** język angielski globalny, Polska, Litwa, nauczanie języków, szkolnictwo wyższe

## THE PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH BY POLISH AND LITHUANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

### Abstract

It cannot be denied that English has a special status in today's world, being used in international communication in both professional and private life. In order to have an insight into how the influence of English on other languages and its role in creating global awareness are indeed perceived, a study among Polish and Lithuanian university students was conducted. Answers to the questions included in the survey are presented in a comparative Polish – Lithuanian key in order to trace similarities and differences between the respondents in two European countries which joined the European Union in 2004 and has been fast developing since then.

The study is a starting point in a discussion on practical implications for higher education stemming from the results of the research as it is believed that educational institutions are expected to respond to today's world's requirements and students' expectations related to their future professional and private life.

**Keywords:** global English, Poland, Lithuania, language teaching, higher education institutions