

COMPARISON OF IN-PERSON AND REMOTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS: CASE STUDY OF TEACHING LATVIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The presentation is based on a study of the effectiveness of teaching A2 level Latvian as a foreign language (L2) comparing in-person and remote teaching models. The author has conducted analysis of the both and compared the effectiveness of each in teaching Latvian as a foreign language in the context of Latvian language policy.

The article provides the research results on the learning outcomes obtained by adult learners through in-person and remote teaching models. The study evaluates the performance of learners who have completed the same 160-hour programme consisting of 3 modules: a language acquisition course (120-hour), a language club (32-hour), and individual or small-group consultations (8-hour). Upon completion of the programme, language learners took the unified state language proficiency test (Certification) organised by the National Centre for Education (NCE). Since 2023, the state language proficiency test in Latvia has been conducted in 4 parts in person using digital tools, with a separate assessment for each language skill. The test is passed only if all parts (listening, reading, writing, speaking) are successfully completed. The article will evaluate the learning performance of language learners assessing the benefits of each type in terms of learners' learning style, strategies, and individual learning characteristics.

Keywords: *language skills, in-person teaching model, remote teaching model, L2 learning effectiveness*

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning languages in the context of contemporary geopolitics, internationalisation, and intensive mobility has become an essential component of modern life. Multilingualism broadens the experience of a language user, opening up new opportunities for cultural communication, socialisation, and collaboration.

The Latvian language has not only gained an equal status within the family of European Union languages and a political niche in the major European Union organisations, but it is also recognised as a significant historical and cultural asset that enriches the communicative and intellectual experience of various European peoples. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (1) was developed by the Council of Europe to ensure uniformity among member states in educational and cultural matters concerning foreign language acquisition and to promote transparency and consistency in the learning and teaching of modern languages across Europe. The framework was officially published in 2001. CEFR is a general system that outlines what language learners need to acquire in order to use a foreign language effectively in practice. CEFR provides a common basis for the development of language learning programmes or guidelines, qualification levels, textbooks, examination tasks, and curricula in all European countries.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) (2), developed over several years and launched in 2001 alongside the CEFR, serves as a complementary tool. The ELP was developed by the Language Policy Programme of the Council of Europe to support the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence and to allow users to record their language learning achievements and their experience of learning and using languages.

The significance of national languages is increasing at a time when the European Union has established the right for every European to speak their native language, while also emphasising multilingual practices. People are encouraged to learn languages at all ages, educational levels, and in all professional

fields. Research and practice in language acquisition are being developed, methodological materials are being created and made accessible, innovative methods are being disseminated, and collaboration among specialists and scientific contacts are being expanded.

The methodological and didactic traditions of learning Latvian as a foreign language (L2) have developed in close connection with the political background and the opportunity to adopt global experiences in foreign language teaching and learning, which was limited during the Soviet occupation. Although the acquisition of Latvian as L2 was significantly transformed in the post-Soviet decades, it mostly evolved in the direction of bilingualism. In the current geopolitical situation, the issue of learning Latvian by adult audiences has become topical. This is related to ongoing migration and integration processes and new legislative norms concerning the state language policy and its use in focus groups such as third-country nationals, asylum seekers, repatriates, re-emigrants, diaspora representatives, and others.

Speaking about the educational heritage in this field, Arvils Šalme, the author of the book “Fundamental Issues in Learning Latvian as a Foreign Language”, notes that in a very short period, the practice of learning Latvian has managed to adopt many significant ideas that have been successfully used in the didactics of major world languages over an extended period. This shift moved from instructivism and cumbersome, decades-old teaching doctrines to an active, communication-oriented teaching and learning philosophy, while also preserving many national traditions and characteristics in the learning content (Šalme 2011:8).

The topicality of learning Latvian as a foreign language is determined by several newly introduced political norms in Latvia. On 6 September 2022, amendments to the Immigration Law (4) were adopted, stipulating that permanent residence permits for non-citizens and citizens of the Russian Federation who previously held Latvian citizenship will be extended in 2023 only if they demonstrate Latvian language proficiency at A2 level (previously A1 level). This regulation, at the time of its adoption, applied to more than 20,000 individuals. Information compiled by the National Centre for Education (VISC) indicates that 11,861 people took the state language examination in 2023. Half, or 54.4%, of all examinees were aged 66 to 74, while 44.3% were aged 30 to 65. One percent of the examinees were older than 75, and 0.3% were aged 16 to 29. The examination was largely passed by Russian citizens in the age groups of 16 to 29 and 30 to 65, with pass rates of 59% and 61%, respectively.

In 2023, out of 17,865 Russian citizens required to take the state language examination, 12,780 individuals registered for it. Of those registered, 919, or 7%, did not attend the examination. On their first attempt, 39%, or 4,633 individuals, passed the exam. 51 %, or 6,022 individuals, took the exam twice, while 2%, or 232 Russian citizens, took it three or four times. Despite the number of attempts, 46%, or 5,494 individuals, did not succeed in passing the exam. (5)

Another group of individuals required to take the Latvian language as a foreign language examination to legally reside in Latvia is identified by the law “On the Entry and Stay of Foreigners and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Latvia” (6). Previously, this law stipulated that permanent residence permits could be granted to foreigners who had their residence in Latvia as of 1 July 1992 and were registered in the population register. This law ceased to be in effect on 1 May 2003 with the enactment of the Immigration Law. The amendments to the Immigration Law approved by the Saeima on 20 June 2024 stipulate that these Russian citizens’ permanent residence permits will be valid until 15 July 2025, provided that the necessary documents for applying for the status of a permanent resident of the European Union are not received by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs by 30 June 2025. However, until 17 November 2025, residence permits will remain valid for those who will need proof of state language proficiency for applying for EU permanent resident status. This applies if, by 30 June 2025, information will have been received indicating that the individual has taken the state language proficiency test at least once and has been scheduled for a retake, but the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has not received the necessary documents for the EU permanent resident status application by 31 October of the following year. The new requirements are expected to affect approximately 5,000 Russian citizens, according to representatives from the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has previously informed that many of these individuals are Russian military retirees and their family members.

The amendments to the General Education Law of 29 September 2022, which mandate the transition to instruction in Latvian from 1 September 2023, completely eliminate the bilingual teaching model previously used in many schools until the adoption of the law. The Latvian Ministry of Education and Science refers to this change as the transition to a “unified school” (7) and notes the benefits of this process, stating that “the previous approach to the language of instruction in minority education programmes did not fully ensure the quality acquisition of the state language at all educational levels. Insufficient knowledge of the state language may limit young people’s integration into society and hinder the successful development of their professional careers. It is equally important for minority students to learn the state language to ensure they have: the opportunity to participate as effectively as possible in public, cultural, and economic life; the opportunity for further education; and the ability to study minority languages and cultural history in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and international rights” (7).

The new legal regulations, whose origins are rooted in the geopolitical climate established by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, have created a situation in which at least 30,000 adults up to the age of 75 need to learn Latvian and pass the Latvian language test at A2 level. This number is further increased by over 40,000 Ukrainian citizens who hold residence permits in Latvia, as well as the rapidly growing number of immigrants from Armenia, Georgia, India and other countries.

By 1 September 2023, 6,796 citizens of the Russian Federation had registered for the examinations (to be completed by 30 November). The law stipulates that if the language test is not successfully passed by 1 September 2023 and an application for a retake has been submitted by 30 November, the retake must be completed. If the test is passed, the application for EU permanent resident status must be received by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs by 31 December 2023. If the retake is also unsuccessful, an application for a two-year residence permit may be submitted.

Third-country nationals arriving in Latvia do not form communities. They are dispersed fairly evenly across the country, reflecting Latvia’s population distribution model - densely populated capital city and sparsely populated towns outside the capital. In this situation, to provide opportunities for residents in areas where it is not possible to form groups due to a lack of learners, a remote learning model is being implemented. It is worth noting that currently, in state or European Union-funded Latvian language courses, each learner has the option to choose which model to use for learning Latvian as L2. The skills of educators and the trust of adult learners in the remote model were established during the Covid-19 pandemic, which reinforced various technology-based educational models of remote or distance learning. Even after the pandemic, this model has become the new normal in formal and non-formal education without compromising the quality of education. Distance learning (DL) offers numerous advantages as a mode of teaching and learning (8), including the ability for learners to “save time due to shorter travel times. There is no need to be on the road to beat traffic just to be in the classroom. Study materials are available and just need to be downloaded” (8). In language learning, there is often debate about which model is more effective - whether remote learning can be as effective as in-person instruction. The answer to this question depends on several factors: how skillfully the educator can use each model, the proficiency in integrating digital technologies into the teaching process, whether learners have choices in their mode of study, and the previous outcomes of using both models. Kacia Ray notes that “it is important to note that in remote learning environments, versus virtual learning environments, the learner and teacher are not accustomed to having distance during instruction. This may pose a challenge to both teacher and learner that can be accommodated for through specific support structures” (9). In the adult learner demographic, particularly among those aged 50 and over, there is less interest in remote learning models. Additionally, there is a lack of trust in the remote learning model within this age group. This observation extends beyond learners to include education policy implementers, education process managers, and coordinators. It aligns with Ray’s perspective that “designing lessons for remote delivery is a little more detailed than creating a lesson that will be delivered in person simply because in person you can read the class and determine if students are understanding and then make adjustments on the fly. In a remote environment, one must assume there will be a lack of understanding and include extensions and remediations in the lesson design” (9). To implement effective remote training, systematic methodological support for educators and the exchange of best practice examples are essential, highlighting the challenges, benefits, and risks of the remote

model. By addressing L2 management, methodological issues, and learner motivation in the remote education model comprehensively, high effectiveness can be achieved, as evidenced by learner growth and achievements.

The core of the article is a study that consolidates and analyses the results of the project “My Latvian Language Portfolio” ID No. PMIF/13.2./2023/1/10, conducted by the non-governmental organisation - Daugavpils University Association for Lifelong Learning, Culture, and Science Communication “Intellect Park” (10). This project examines the effectiveness of Latvian language acquisition as a foreign language in both in-person and remote learning models. The goal of the project is to enhance the development of Latvian language competence among third-country nationals, improving their ability to use the language in daily communication and fostering their full participation in all areas of social life. The project is scheduled to run from 01 August 2023 to 31 July 2026.

The project “My Latvian Language Portfolio” falls under the activities of the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund for the planning period 2021-2027, specifically activity 13.2, which focuses on the “Integration of third-country nationals into local society, promoting the use of the Latvian language and opportunities for its acquisition”. The delegated authority for integration activities in Latvia is the Ministry of Culture. The project is co-funded by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (75%) and the Latvian state budget (25%), making it free of charge for the target audience. Within the project, the programme offered to adult learners was a 160-hour course consisting of three modules: a language acquisition course (120 hours), a language club (32 hours), and individual or small-group consultations (8 hours). The programme and its modules were delivered in two models: in-person and remote. The in-person model was implemented in Daugavpils, the second-largest city in Latvia, where the ethnic composition includes Latvians as a minority (21%) and Russians as the majority (47%).

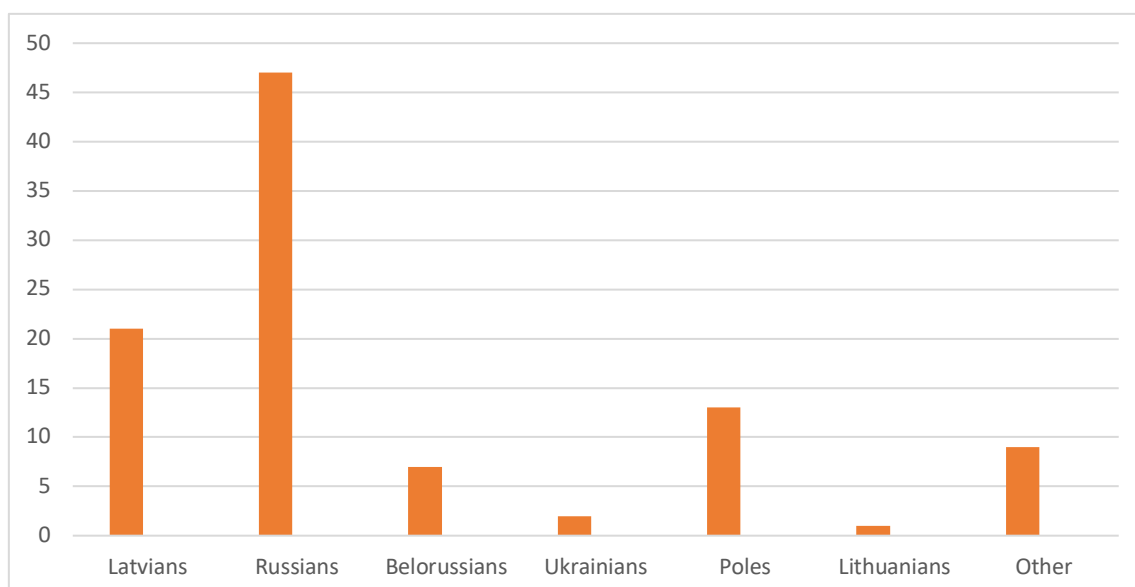


Fig. 1. Ethnic composition of Daugavpils in 2023, % (Source: Central Statistical Bureau)

<https://www.daugavpils.lv/pilseta/iedzivotajiem/>

In the remote model, third-country nationals from all regions of Latvia participated, including from the following cities: Riga, Liepāja, Ventspils, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jūrmala, Salaspils, Balvi, Valmiera, Roja, Carnikava, Lapmežciems, Zilupe, Indra and Viļāni. Before being admitted to the Latvian language training programme, applicants completed a preliminary test to confirm that their knowledge corresponded to the previous level of language acquisition (excluding A1 level). Each learner underwent an interview to assess their motivation and computer skills. If their computer skills were insufficient for the course programme and examination requirements, consultations were arranged to strengthen their

IT usage skills. Upon starting the course implementation (with a target of training 516 people over 3 years), more than 400 potential learners applied following the announcement, and the intensity of applications and the number of people wishing to learn remained consistently high throughout the project's implementation.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Materials

The state language proficiency examination in Latvia is organised by the State Language Proficiency Examination Department. The examinations are conducted centralized. A person taking the exam must participate in all four parts of the test (12); otherwise, the result of the examination will not be issued, and the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs will not have grounds to make a positive decision regarding the issuance of a residence permit in the Republic of Latvia.

Each skill test includes three tasks. The duration for the listening comprehension test is 25 minutes, the reading comprehension test is 30 minutes, the writing test (handwritten on paper) is 35 minutes, and the speaking test, conducted either via videoconference or in person, lasts 10 -15 minutes.

The examination coordinator provides each person with a code generated by the information system. Before the test, each person must authenticate themselves in the information system to complete the listening comprehension and reading comprehension tasks. Upon completing these parts, the person is given the writing tasks. On each task sheet, the person writes the code assigned by the information system. The speaking test is conducted in turn, one person at a time. Before the speaking test, the person must present a valid identification document once again to the examination coordinator or evaluator.

Each skill test is scored out of 15 points, with the maximum total score for the examination being 60 points (100%). The minimum passing score is 9 points (60%) for each skill.

At A2 language proficiency level, a person should be able to understand and use frequently used vocabulary and basic phrases in both written and spoken forms. This ability should be relevant to specified topics and situations primarily related to the person's professional activities, personal interests, daily needs, and everyday life.

From August 2023 to June 2024, the Latvian language programme of the project "My Latvian Language Portfolio" was implemented at A1, A2, and B levels. The study will focus exclusively on those learners who studied Latvian at A2 level (192 individuals) with the goal of passing the state language proficiency test at the National Centre for Education (VISC). This level is specifically required by the new language policy regulations to obtain residence permits.

2.2. Methods

To establish the empirical basis for the study, the Data Collection method was employed. Frederick Erickson states, "In qualitative research, analysis is a boot-strapping operation in which, reflexively, assertions and questions are generated on the basis of evidence, and evidence is defined in relation to assertions and questions. Data analysis, informal and formal, begins as one is negotiating entry to the research site. It often continues in restudy after supposedly 'final' reports are written." (11) The data used in the study were collected and processed by the Daugavpils University Association for Lifelong Learning, Culture, and Science Communication "Intellect Park" from the project's data repository. This study employs a research methodology related to hermeneutic interpretation as a crucial element to uncover aspects that identify strengths and weaknesses in L2 learning in both in-person and distance learning models. A comparative analysis of the two L2 learning models will be conducted using a comparative method, based on the state language proficiency test results of 192 individuals at A2 level.

3. RESULTS

The study analysed data from 192 learners who studied Latvian at A2 level with Russian as the intermediary language. Of these, 59 individuals learned Latvian through the distance learning model using the Zoom conferencing platform, while 133 individuals learned Latvian in person. From August 2023 to July 2024, these 192 individuals were divided into 13 groups, each consisting of 14-15 persons.

	Total number of learners (persons)	Took the exam (persons)	Passed the exam (persons)	Failed the exam (persons)	Did not take the exam (persons)
L2 remote learning model at A2 level	59	55	44	11	4
L2 in-person learning model at A2 level	133	131	52	79	2

Table 1. Overview of trained individuals and l2 test results at A2 level by training model

Source: NGO “Intellect Park” project report for 2023 - 2024, data stored in the organisation’s repository

Of the 59 people who studied in **remote groups**, 55 took the exam: 44 people (80%) passed the exam, while 11 people (20%) failed and 4 (6,77%) did not take the exam.

In the **in-person groups**, out of 133 people, 131 took the exam: 52 people (39.70%) passed the exam, while 79 people (60,30%) failed and 2 people (1,50%) did not take the exam.

	Number of programme participants who took the exam	Number of people who passed the exam / % (from number of people who took exam)	Number of people who did not pass (from number of people who took exam)	Did not take the exam (from the total number)
Remote model (A2), 59 learners	55	44 / 80%	11 / 20%	4 / 6,77%
In-person model (A2), 133 learners	131	52 / 39,70%	79 / 60,30%	2 / 1,50 %

Table 2. Overview of the examination results for L2 tests at A2 level by training model

Source: NGO “Intellect Park” project reports for 2023–2024, data stored in the organisation’s repository

The results of the state language proficiency tests indicate that the remote training model has proven to be more effective and yielded better results.

Analysing the significant difference in learner achievements between the two L2 training models, several considerations for effective language acquisition should be highlighted, which had a significant impact on the learners’ results.

3.1. Learners' digital competence and computer literacy.

The updated model and methodology for the language proficiency examination by the National Centre for Education in 2023 require digital competence for listening and writing skills assessments, while communicative competence in the digital environment is necessary for the speaking test. This is closely related to the learners' age and their computer literacy from previous professional experience and lifelong learning. Therefore, the study also identified and analysed the learners' age.

In-person training was primarily chosen by learners aged 50+ up to 75 years. The average age of learners in these in-person groups was 67 years. To ensure successful language proficiency testing, which involves digital technologies (such as multiple-choice tasks, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and similar tasks), learners in the in-person learning model were provided with integrated computer skills and Latvian language reinforcement consultations. The number of hours was individually tailored based on need to prevent anxiety related to uncertainty about their computer skills. It is important to note that achieving a level of computer competence where learners do not experience anxiety requires long-term development of skills such as using a cursor, operating a mouse, tracking the mouse movement on the screen, filling in words in blank spaces, selecting the correct answer, entering words in the required form, and using Latvian idiomatic symbols. Although course organisers planned a sufficient number of consultations both individually and in groups, without a focus on long-term and systematic development of digital competence, the learners' attention may shift from language proficiency tasks to dealing with digital skills, which can affect their overall performance in the examination.

In the remote groups, there is a wide age range among learners. The average age of participants in the remote groups is 47 years. There are two types of learners enrolling in remote training: one group consists of advanced technology users who are adept at using conference platforms, such as Zoom, WhatsApp groups, email, and digital learning tools. The other group comprises learners with minimal digital competence but who possess a strong motivation to significantly improve their computer skills during the course to better prepare for the language proficiency test. During the course, this group of learners upgrade their technology - upgrading cameras, microphones, graphics cards, replacing old computers, or purchasing new ones. This group of learners avoids the stress associated with inadequate computer skills during the examination.

During the study, it was observed that individuals opting for the remote education model tend to have more extensive prior educational experience and have previously learned other foreign languages. This indicates that they have developed effective learning skills.

3.2. Differences in communicative models between in-person and remote learning groups.

During the study, the impact of the collaborative models "teacher - learner" and "learner - learner" on the knowledge acquisition process in Latvian as a foreign language training was compared. **In the in-person model**, a stable communicative background and emotional contact develop among learners during the 120-hour and 32-hour language courses. The cohesion is fostered through group work, shared celebrations, and the formation of informal relationships outside the classroom. However, it was occasionally observed that the learners' mutual collaboration extended also onto the educational process, manifesting as interruptions in a peer's speaking act and preemptive responses, which prevented the learner, who was asked a question, from arriving at the correct answer independently. Consequently, the teacher did not obtain an objective understanding of the learner's knowledge. Learners sometimes divert the teacher from the lesson's topic by engaging in discussions about the "mythologisation" of the examination process, arguing collectively and constructing various secondary reasons for slow language acquisition (such as recounting tales of how other learners have handled language exams or unexpected situations).

In the remote learning model, learners do not have the opportunity to interrupt each other. The teacher can accurately monitor the sequence of learners' responses by managing microphone connections and disconnections. Learners respect each other's pace of knowledge acquisition and reproduction. Participants join classes from various cities across Latvia, get to know each other, and establish professional communication. Being in different locations for knowledge acquisition and collaborating

in the Zoom environment requires each individual to concentrate more during the sessions. Time is not spent on informal digressions, and learners do not interrupt each other.

Analysing the factors that enabled remote group participants to achieve high performance, another advantage of remote training should be highlighted. After each class, the learners received recordings of the lessons, and many noted that they watched them at least once more, and sometimes 2-3 times, to review the new material and analyse their own performance.

Another factor influencing the specificity of communication models is gender. Among the 133 learners in the in-person groups: women – 111 individuals (83.4%); men – 22 individuals (16.6%). Among the 59 remote learners: women – 34 individuals (57.6%); men – 25 individuals (43.3%).

The professional atmosphere during classes, the learner's prior skills in studying and organising knowledge, and digital literacy are crucial factors determining the effective acquisition of foreign language skills, leading to good academic achievements. In the remote learning model, these prerequisites are more pronounced.

3.3. Differences in language skill acquisition

In the distance learning groups at A2 level, 59 learners were trained across 4 groups, with 55 learners taking the exam. The results were as follows: 9 learners failed the writing skill test; 5 learners failed the reading skill test; 4 learners failed the listening skill test; and 1 learner failed the speaking skill test. Among the learners who did not pass the exam, 4 learners failed 1 language skill; 3 learners failed 2 language skills; and 3 learners failed 3 language skills. Only 1 learner failed all language skills.

	Writing skills failed	Reading skills failed	Listening skills failed	Speaking skills failed
Number of people	9	5	4	1
Number in %	15.25%	8.47%	6.77%	1.69%

Table 3. Overview of failed L2 tests at A2 level by language skills

Source: NGO “Intellect Park” project reports for 2023-2024, data stored in the association's repository

In the in-person groups at A2 level, 133 learners were trained across 9 groups. Out of the 79 learners who did not pass the test, 34 failed 1 language skill; 28 failed 2 language skills; and 13 failed 3 language skills. Three learners failed all language skills.

Skill failed in A2 language proficiency test	Writing skill	Reading skill	Listening skill	Speaking skill
Number of people	55	35	25	17
% of in-person A2 learners (131 individuals) who took the test	41.98%	26.71%	19.08%	12.97%

Table 4. Overview of the proportion of individuals who failed the Latvian as a foreign language test in in-person training groups, by skill

Source: NGO “Intellect Park” project reports for 2023-2024, data stored in the association's repository

In both remote and in-person training groups, the number of individuals who failed the test is symmetrical across language skills. The largest number of individuals who did not pass the test failed only one language skill, which consequently led to their failure to pass the entire exam.

	In the remote model, out of 55 examinees	In the in-person model, out of 131 examinees
1 language skill failed	4 persons; 6.77%	34 persons; 25.56%
2 language skills failed	3 persons; 5.08%	28 persons; 21.05%
3 language skills failed	3 persons; 5.08%	13 persons; 9.77%
All language skills failed	1 person; 1.69%	3 persons; 2.25%

Table 5. Comparison of the proportion of individuals who failed the Latvian as a foreign language examination between in-person and remote training groups.

Source: NGO “Intellect Park” project reports for 2023-2024, data stored in the association’s repository

Most learners struggled with writing skills. Since this skill posed the greatest difficulty in both learning models, its acquisition in handwriting cannot be considered particularly problematic in the remote learning model. The challenges stem from the extensive vocabulary and grammar knowledge required for mastering this skill. While both training models provide equivalent conditions for acquiring all language skills, ensuring the acquisition of writing skills is most difficult in the remote model, as the examination involves evaluating a handwritten text. To address this, educators, in collaboration with methodology experts, develop various technology-enabled solutions. During the classes, the effective use of sending handwritten text to the instructor via a group WhatsApp chat and correcting this text through various interactive methods is applied. For example, the instructor prints out the text, corrects it, and sends an image of the corrected text to the learner with instructions to create a prototype of the revised task; the corrected text is commented on - the instructor marks the mistakes, and the learner makes revisions and resends it for review to the instructor and/or group members; the instructor uses the screen share option to demonstrate the text on the screen in printed or handwritten format to the group.

In reading tasks, a diverse vocabulary and grammatical forms, including both regular and irregular forms, are utilised.

In listening exercises, as reported by course participants after taking the examination, texts are read at a fast pace, and often the sound amplifiers are not loud enough, which complicates the comprehension process. Answers to listening tasks are recorded on the computer, and for those who are not confident in using computers, this examination and the reading comprehension test may require double the focus.

The speaking test is the most successfully completed as significant attention is devoted to its preparation in the course programme, and it does not require additional computer skills.

The National Centre for Education regularly updates the test tasks, not only in terms of content but also format (task formulation, visual design, page layout). This complicates preparation for the examination and creates heightened stress situations during the test.

4. DISCUSSION

The study data and its analysis clearly indicate the effectiveness of the remote method compared to in-person training. Even with the same educator working with the same teaching materials for an equivalent number of hours in both remote and in-person groups, and implementing all three modules outlined in the programme, the learners’ results in the two training models differed significantly. Delving into other factors that affected the results of in-person learners, it is necessary to point out the age of the learners. The new immigration regulations in Latvia (from 2022) stipulate that most individuals required to pass

A2 level Latvian language proficiency test to extend their residence permit are aged 50+. These are individuals who entered Latvia or were born in Latvia during the Soviet occupation decades and have acquired Russian or Belarusian citizenship. Another portion of these individuals includes retired Soviet military personnel or their family members.

Most of these individuals had taken the Latvian language proficiency test at A1 level many years ago, predominantly used Russian in communication, and obtained information from Russian-language media. Prior to the war in Ukraine instigated by Russia, Russian-language media were widely represented in Latvia, particularly in regions with a high proportion of Russian-speaking residents. This representation significantly influenced the opportunities for systematic language practice among other speakers, thus affecting the language environment. "The language use environment is one of the most crucial aspects for learning a foreign language. Of course, [...], living in Latvia, one can also learn Spanish or Chinese. It's a matter of different levels of the population. There are those who learn Latvian to work in places with high demands. These people study systematically and use Latvian consistently. And there are those who can organise their daily lives and even their professional activities without knowledge of the state language. The largest cluster among these groups is retirees" (Burima, 2024).

Individuals in the age group of 50-75 years need to update their learning skills, which many have not practised for an extended period. At this age, their memory has deteriorated, there is a lack of internal motivation to learn a new language, but there is very strong external motivation (in fact, pressure) - the legislative norms that specify a deadline by which the A2 state language proficiency test must be passed to renew their residence permit in Latvia.

To improve the performance of in-person L2 groups where the average age of learners is 50+, it is essential to focus not only on didactic and methodological aspects but also to give considerable attention to the analysis of motivational factors, cognitive aspects (such as memory, anxiety, and the intensity of "language barrier" manifestations). Since the exam is partially digital, substantial attention should be paid to enhancing digital literacy and effective management of all three modules. It should be evaluated whether the language club and individual consultations should be organised either concurrently with language classes, as the course nears completion, or after the course has concluded.

Consultations should be planned individually or in small groups and should be supported by a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach, integrating the development of Latvian language skills into computer literacy training (or vice versa, depending on each learner's needs). Great attention should be given to the symmetrical development of all skills in accordance with the exam prototype. Each group's performance and feedback should be analysed, including surveys that encompass questions about the benefits and shortcomings of the programme, and recommendations for improving programme effectiveness. An effective method for reducing the "language barrier" is to involve native speakers in "Language Club" sessions and share the experiences of those who have successfully passed the exam. This includes discussing strategies that helped them achieve a sufficient level of knowledge for the language assessment and the language use strategies they employed during the exam.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the state language proficiency tests indicate that learners who studied in the remote training model achieved higher scores. For learners aged 50+, previous experience in acquiring new knowledge and computer skills play a decisive role in language acquisition. The professional atmosphere during classes, the learner's pre-established ability to study and systematise their knowledge, and computer proficiency are crucial factors in effective foreign language acquisition. In the remote training model, these prerequisites are more intensely manifested.

To introduce effective training in a remote model, systematic methodological support for educators on technology-enabled approaches to L2 learning and the exchange of best practice examples must be ensured, highlighting the challenges, benefits, and risks of the remote model.

By addressing the issues of L2 learning management, methodology, and learner motivation in the remote education model comprehensively, high effectiveness can be achieved, as evidenced by the learners' growth and achievements.

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