Assessment of Foreign Language Competence of Higher Education Institution Graduates

Nemira Mačianskienė, Virginija Tuomaitė

Abstract. Foreign language competence is one of the general skills necessary for the European knowledge society. It is also an essential criterion for personality maturity subservient to mutual understanding, democratic stability, and communication with the world. Learning of foreign languages is perceived as a part of life-long learning. Therefore, higher education institutions (HEI) should, on the basis of what has been achieved in secondary education in the field of language teaching and learning, aim at further development of foreign language teaching and learning. Moreover, internationalisation of higher education (HE) all over the world, including Lithuania, enhances the provision of more and more programmes taught fully or partly in English as the interest of international students to acquire education abroad has been increasing constantly. Consequently, students of higher education institutions are required to be proficient in English. The authors of the article consider it purposeful to analyse the proficiency in English as a foreign language of higher education graduates. Taking into account the disparity in the language competence of graduates from different HEIs which is a major obstacle for not only their international mobility but also raises difficulties for academic mobility and choice as concerns the graduates’ further studies at the level of Master’s programme in their own country in the context of life-long learning, the study aims at determining language proficiency of the graduates from the first cycle studies at HEIs, applying for the Master’s degree programmes in Lithuania, and comparing the level of graduates’ English language proficiency among different HEIs. The analysis of the research findings revealed insufficient language competence of the higher education graduates as well as remarkably divergent range of language competence among graduates across HEIs. Therefore, the study argues for more attention to foreign language studies at HEIs by introducing specific language related courses and raising requirements for foreign language competence, also for the necessity to have a standardised instrument in Lithuania for HEI graduates’ foreign language competence assessment to ensure efficient movement of students within the country’s HEIs and comparability of their language competences, and to ensure foreign language competence development at the level of post-graduate studies.

Key words: higher education; higher education institutions; higher education graduates; post-graduate studies; foreign language competence; professional, academic and personal mobility, life-long learning.