

## СПЕЦІАЛЬНА ОСВІТА



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### ADULT FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AS A PART OF NORMATIVE CULTURE OF MODERN SOCIETY

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*The article examines the growing importance of adult foreign language learning as a key component of contemporary social and cultural norms. In today's globalised world, language acquisition transcends mere communication, serving as a vital tool for personal growth and professional success. Proficiency in multiple languages reflects individual ambition and aligns with societal values such as adaptability, cultural empathy, and social mobility. The primary goal of the article is to analyse the sociocultural and psychological factors that influence adult language learning within the framework of modern normative culture, which made knowing foreign language as its part. It explores how acquiring a new language fosters personal development, expands career opportunities, and strengthens social cohesion. The article's originality lies in its holistic approach, integrating perspectives from cultural studies, psychology, and education to offer a comprehensive view of adult language learning within the norms of contemporary culture. The findings reveal that learning a foreign language significantly enhances social mobility, cultural understanding, and personal empowerment. It enables adults to navigate diverse cultural contexts and engage meaningfully with global challenges. However, the study also highlights key obstacles faced by adult learners, including cognitive limitations associated with aging, balancing multiple responsibilities, and societal pressures to achieve fluency quickly. Adult language learning is portrayed as a critical element of lifelong education, fostering adaptability in personal and professional spheres, and brings societal benefits of enhancing language skills among adults, such as increased social capital and the ability to thrive in multicultural environments.*

**Key words:** *adult learners, adult students, teaching/learning foreign languages, normative culture, foreign language.*

**Introduction.** In today's globalised world, the practice of learning foreign languages by adults has become an integral part of modern normative culture. This trend reflects the cultural, social, and economic shifts in society, where multilingualism is increasingly valued as both a skill and a marker of cultural awareness. Learning a foreign language as an adult is a multifaceted process influenced by personal motivations, professional needs, and cultural expectations. However, this pursuit also brings several challenges, such as the cognitive demands of language acquisition at an older age, balancing time commitments, and adapting to new learning strategies. In many societies, acquiring foreign language skills is increasingly seen as a cultural norm, particularly in multicultural and cosmopolitan environments. Language learn-

ing enriches cultural understanding, facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and enhancing empathy by providing insights into different worldviews. According to sociolinguistic research, knowing multiple languages can reduce cultural biases and increase social inclusivity, making language learning a pathway to greater cultural sensitivity. Language proficiency is also viewed as a valuable asset that reflects an individual's adaptability and willingness to engage with different cultures. For instance, in Europe, foreign language learning is heavily promoted, with the European Union advocating for its citizens to learn at least two foreign languages. This advocacy underscores a normative cultural value placed on multilingualism, showing that language learning aligns with broader social goals of unity and understanding.

**Literature review.** Recent studies show that adult language learning has become an essential part of modern normative culture, driven by globalisation and intercultural demands. In “Language, Education, and Globalisation” (2021), Kendall A. King (USA) argues that multilingualism is vital for adults to navigate globalized societies. Language skills are increasingly aligned with social expectations of adaptability and resilience. In “Learning and Using Multiple Languages: Current Findings and Future Directions” (2020), Spanish researchers Pilar Safont Jorda and Laura Portoles Falomir highlight that adult language learning is now motivated by personal and professional growth, as it supports cultural integration and adaptability – key values in contemporary society. Beverley Costa’s “Other Tongues: Psychological Therapies in a Multilingual World” (2021) explores the psychological benefits of multilingualism, linking language learning with resilience and empathy, while Jennifer Jenkins’s “English as a Lingua Franca in the Globalised World” (2022) emphasises English’s role in facilitating global communication and how language acquisition supports cross-cultural engagement. In Asia, Agnes Lam’s “Language and Identity in Multilingual Societies” (2022) discusses language learning as part of personal identity in multicultural societies, supporting both personal and collective social values. Claire Kramsch (France/USA) in “Language and Culture in the Age of Globalisation” (2024) argues that language skills are crucial for social capital, and Tariq Elyas’s “English in the Middle East: Opportunities and Challenges” (2022) illustrates how globalisation has made English proficiency a professional and cultural necessity in the Middle East.

The modern findings show that position adult foreign language learning as an integral part of normative culture, driven by globalisation, economic integration, and social expectations for intercultural competence and lifelong learning. These studies underscore the evolving perception of multilingualism as a vital aspect of personal and professional development in modern society.

**Purpose of Article.** The article aims to explore the motivations, benefits, and challenges associated with adult language learning, positioning it as a vital component of lifelong learning.

The article seeks to examine how language acquisition contributes to individuals’ cultural competence and adaptability in a rapidly changing world. Additionally, it aims to identify the social and cognitive barriers that adult learners face and propose strategies for overcoming these obstacles through community support and innovative teaching methods.

**Research Methods.** Several scientific and research methods were applied to examine this topic comprehensively and the following methods were used:

– *Literature Review method* was employed to gather existing research, providing foundational knowledge on foreign language learning and its role in modern society. This involves analysing recent studies (from 2015 to 2024) on multilingualism, motivation in adult language learning, and the societal impact of language skills. This review helps contextualise the topic within established theories and new research findings;

– *Sociological Survey* among the adult students of language courses of V.N. Karazina National University were conducted to gather data on their motivations, challenges, and perceptions of the importance of learning foreign languages. This method is crucial in understanding how language acquisition aligns with normative cultural expectations in diverse societies;

– *Comparative Analysis method* allows for comparing adult language learning trends across different countries and regions, highlighting similarities and differences in how various cultures view multilingualism. This approach helps identify specific cultural norms that influence adults’ pursuit of language skills;

– *Case Studies method* focuses on specific instances of adult language learning initiatives, such as language policies in workplaces or language learning communities. This method offers insights into how practical applications of language learning reflect broader societal norms;

– *Interviews* with educators and adult learners offer qualitative insights, exploring the personal experiences of language learning and how it impacts social mobility, cultural integration, and personal growth.

Together, these methods build a multidimensional understanding of adult foreign lan-

guage learning as a cultural norm in today's globalised society.

**Results & Discussion.** The term normative culture refers to the set of social norms, values, and practices that guide behaviour within a society. It embodies what is considered “normal” or acceptable in a community, shaping how individuals interact and the expectations they follow [11]. The concept of normative culture emerged from sociological and anthropological studies in the 20th century, particularly in the work of Emile Durkheim and later, Talcott Parsons, who examined how societal norms influence individual behaviour. In today's world, normative culture is dynamic and continuously evolving due to globalisation, technological advancement, and cross-cultural exchange [3]. Modern society sees shifts in normative expectations regarding language, social conduct, and inclusivity, adapting to global influences and increasing cultural diversity. For instance, norms related to communication now frequently include multilingualism and intercultural sensitivity as valued skills. Thus, normative culture today reflects a blend of traditional values and new social adaptations that address the complexities of a globalised world [4].

In the modern job market, multilingualism is frequently a highly sought-after skill. Employers recognise that employees who can communicate in multiple languages are assets in an interconnected global economy. Bilingualism or multilingualism can open up more diverse job opportunities, facilitate international business, and improve career prospects [13]. Consequently, adults are often motivated to learn foreign languages to meet these professional standards and improve their employability. Moreover, in international organisations and companies, language proficiency is not merely encouraged but often required. This expectation contributes to a social norm where language learning is viewed not only as beneficial but as necessary for professional advancement. As globalisation continues to grow, this trend becomes even more pronounced, with individuals expected to meet these new societal standards by acquiring additional languages.

Adult language learning is also associated with intrinsic motivations, such as personal growth, intellectual stimulation, and the desire for self-im-

provement [6]. These motivations reflect a shift in normative culture that values lifelong learning as a means of personal and social enrichment. For many adults, language learning becomes a fulfilling pursuit, embodying the ideals of continuous self-development and adaptability in an ever-changing world. In modern society, lifelong learning is not only a response to career demands but also a valued cultural practice. By learning a new language, adults embody a commitment to ongoing education, resilience, and intellectual curiosity, qualities highly regarded in contemporary culture [14]. This perspective aligns with the normative view that personal development and adaptability are essential traits in today's complex social landscape.

Although self-development and the decision to learn foreign languages are typically matters of personal choice, regulatory documents increasingly mandate foreign language proficiency as a requirement for candidates applying for positions, including those in the public sector. For instance, for roles within the U.S. Department of State, particularly Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) at overseas Language-Designated Positions (LDPs), candidates are required to meet specific foreign language proficiency standards. The Department's Strategic Plan for Foreign-Language Capabilities (2011, updated in the 2016–2020 Workforce Plan) outlines these requirements, including proficiency categories based on language difficulty, such as Arabic and Chinese (GAO, 2017). For positions in the European Commission or EU diplomatic services, candidates are expected to be proficient in at least one additional EU language beyond their native language. The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) standards specify these multilingual requirements, aligning with the EU's commitment to linguistic diversity. In Saudi Arabia in diplomatic and governmental roles involving international relations, such as within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, proficiency in English is frequently mandated. In recent years, documents like Vision 2030 have underscored the importance of English for global diplomacy and economic engagement (Language Connects Foundation, 2024). Many federal roles in Canada, particularly those in public service or international positions,

require bilingual proficiency in English and French as a part of Canada's Directive on Official Languages. This requirement supports equal access to services in both languages and aligns with Canada's bilingual mandate [1; 8; 9].

Private sector positions across different countries now also typically require proficiency in at least one foreign language. Hospitality Managers in hotels and resorts worldwide often demand multilingual abilities to cater to international guests and ensure high-quality customer service. For instance, roles in regions with diverse tourism markets, such as Europe and Southeast Asia, frequently require proficiency in English, French, Mandarin, or other languages relevant to guest demographics. Human Resources Managers in multinational companies, particularly in countries with diverse workforces like Canada and the United States, often prioritise candidates who are bilingual or multilingual. This is essential for communicating with employees from various backgrounds, improving team inclusivity, and managing global talent networks effectively [9]. In European or Latin American positions in international sales, especially in sectors like consumer goods, tech, and finance, typically require foreign language skills. Companies prefer multilingual candidates to facilitate cross-border communications, negotiate with clients, and understand regional markets better. Multilingual customer service representatives are highly sought after in countries with large immigrant populations or international client bases. For instance, in the U.S., Canada, and many European countries, companies in banking, retail, and tech often require foreign language skills to enhance customer support and satisfaction. Tech companies (especially in tech hubs like Germany and China) value language skills of their IT specialists to ensure seamless communication within global projects. These examples as well reflect the increasing importance of multilingualism in private sector roles, aligning with companies' global operations and customer diversity [1; 8; 9].

While starting to study a foreign language in adulthood (at least, after completing the relationships with formal education sphere) a person faces challenges, which modern researchers identify in a variety as following:

– *Cognitive Limitations*: Adults face challenges related to cognitive decline, such as reduced neuroplasticity and slower memory retention, making language learning more difficult compared to younger learners. Pronunciation, accent acquisition, and grammar structures become harder to master due to age-related cognitive changes;

– *Financial Constraints*: Finding spare money for language classes, materials, or tutoring can be a significant barrier for many adults. Language courses, especially those with immersive or personalised elements, are often costly. This limits access to high-quality resources, particularly for individuals balancing financial responsibilities like family or housing expenses;

– *Limited Availability of Appropriate Methods*: Most language learning methods cater to younger learners or use a one-size-fits-all approach, which may not suit adult learners' specific needs. Adults often benefit from methods that acknowledge their cognitive styles and learning preferences, such as visual aids, contextual learning, and practical application. However, these tailored methods are less readily available;

– *Inconsistent Learning Opportunities*: Adults with demanding schedules face difficulties in finding consistent practice time. The need for regular, uninterrupted practice sessions is critical for language retention, yet busy lifestyles often make this challenging, slowing overall progress;

– *Lack of Cultural Origin or Exposure*: For many adults, learning a language without immersion or cultural background can be difficult. For example, learning Mandarin without exposure to Chinese culture or environments limits contextual understanding and fluency development [2; 5; 10; 12].

These factors collectively contribute to the difficulty adults experience in achieving fluency, highlighting the need for innovative, accessible, and affordable language-learning resources tailored specifically to adult learners' cognitive and situational needs.

From a social and cultural perspective, adult foreign language learning is both influenced and challenged by societal expectations, norms, and values related to language and communication. Social pressure and expectations introduce unique

challenges for adult learners as the society often imposes expectations to achieve high levels of proficiency, particularly for career advancement or social status. Adults may feel pressured to reach fluency quickly, leading to stress and discouragement when progress is slower than expected. This pressure can be amplified by professional or social environments where multilingual skills are seen as a symbol of cultural capital.

Adults are often more self-conscious than younger learners about making mistakes in front of others. The societal expectation of perfection in professional or social settings can lead to anxiety, discouraging adults from fully engaging in language practice. Adults learning languages may feel judged or hesitant, particularly in social environments where language skills are seen as an indicator of competence. Age-related stereotypes suggest language learning is “easier when young” can discourage adult learners or lead them to believe they will struggle more than younger counterparts. These societal views can impact self-confidence and reduce adults’ motivation to invest time in learning a new language. Unlike younger learners, who often have institutional support systems (like school language programs), adults frequently lack access to structured learning communities. Language acquisition is heavily influenced by peer interaction and community, yet adults often lack these socially embedded learning structures, which reduces opportunities for regular practice and cultural exchange [7; 9; 12; 13].

Nonetheless, the cultural emphasis on lifelong learning provides resources tailored to adults,

such as flexible workplace and community language programs. This shift reflects society’s appreciation for personal growth and adaptability, encouraging adults to view language learning not just as a skill, but as a means of enhancing social and personal development.

**Conclusions.** Adult language learning today mirrors the values of modern society, where multilingualism is increasingly equated with cultural insight, professional adaptability, and personal growth. Despite cognitive and practical challenges, adult learners often find that the cultural and social advantages – such as improved empathy, enhanced professional skills, and self-development – outweigh these obstacles. As society continues to emphasise lifelong learning and intercultural awareness, adult language acquisition remains a significant component of normative culture, contributing to a more interconnected and culturally sensitive world. While the points mentioned address some of the challenges adult learners face, future research could explore additional dimensions. This includes examining how to overcome social barriers specific to adult learners, analysing policy frameworks, and adjusting educational systems to better support foreign language proficiency, particularly as a skill for career entry. Furthermore, the development of specialised teaching methods for adults – designed to account for their unique cognitive and logistical needs – could greatly improve the effectiveness of language education. These focused approaches would offer a more holistic view of adult language learning, enabling tailored support for this demographic.

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## ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ ДОРΟΣЛИМИ ЯК СКЛАДНИК НОРМАТИВНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ СУЧАСНОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА

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Стаття досліджує зростаючу значущість вивчення іноземних мов дорослими у світі як ключового елементу сучасних соціальних і культурних норм. У контексті глобалізації володіння іноземними мовами стає не лише засобом комунікації, але й важливим інструментом особистісного розвитку та професійного зростання. **Проблематика статті** пов'язана із впливом соціокультурних і психологічних факторів на процес опанування мов дорослими, а також із викликами, які виникають у цьому процесі, включаючи когнітивні обмеження, мультизадачність та соціальний тиск. **Метою статті** є аналіз впливу соціокультурних і психологічних чинників на вивчення іноземних мов дорослими в умовах сучасної нормативної культури. Дослідження зосереджується на тому, як мовне навчання сприяє особистісному розвитку, розширює професійні можливості та зміцнює соціальну згуртованість. **Методологія статті** базується на теоретичних підходах загальної педагогіки та соціальних наук. Використано аналітичні методи гуманітарних досліджень, що дозволяють інтегрувати результати культурологічних, психологічних і освітніх розвідок у єдину концепцію. **Результати дослідження** показують, що опанування іноземної мови позитивно впливає на соціальну мобільність дорослих (підвищується доступ до нових можливостей), їх культурне розуміння (розвивається емпатія та міжкультурний діалог) та особистісну стійкість (формується впевненість і адаптивність). Водночас у дослідженні ідентифіковано бар'єри, які гальмують цей процес (такі як когнітивні обмеження, багатозадачність та тиск досягнення швидких результатів). **Наукова новизна** статті полягає в комплексному підході до проблеми, який інтегрує висновки з культурології, психології та освіти. Робота розглядає мовне навчання дорослих не лише як індивідуальний процес, але й як явище, яке сприяє розвитку соціальної згуртованості та багатомовного суспільства. **Як висновки** дослідження підкреслює, що вивчення іноземних мов є важливим елементом навчання протягом усього життя. Це сприяє розвитку особистісної та професійної стійкості, підвищує соціальний капітал і дозволяє краще орієнтуватися у багатокультурному середовищі. **Результати дослідження можуть бути корисними** для подальших наукових розвідок з проблеми впливу вікових обмежень на процес вивчення мов, аналізу довгострокових ефектів мовного навчання для соціальної інтеграції дорослих, розробки рекомендацій для адаптації методик викладання до потреб дорослих, вивчення впливу міжкультурного аспекту на ефективність вивчення мов дорослими та ін.

**Ключові слова:** дорослі учні, дорослі здобувачі освіти, навчання /вивчення іноземних мов, нормативна культура, іноземна мова.

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