

# TEACHING LITHUANIAN AS A SECOND/ FOREIGN LANGUAGE: CURRENT PRACTICES

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**Abstract.** Following the restitution of the independence of Lithuania in 1990, one of the key questions of the national language policy in Lithuania was the development and enforcement of a successful language education model. Newly emerging needs have encouraged reform in learning Lithuanian as a second language at all levels. This paper provides a broad overview of teaching, learning and assessment of Lithuanian as a second/foreign language – an important educational element of the language policy in Lithuania. It focuses on general principles and main problems as well as real practices and changes in 1990–2005.

**Keywords:** language policy formation, language education, ethnic minorities, language proficiency levels, state language learning and testing, Lithuanian

## Introduction

Language policy is an important part of a state's domestic policy. It comprises the set of activities carried out by governments, political parties, and social groups in order to maintain or change the functional distribution among languages spoken in a given territory, to establish the scope of collective language rights for language communities, and to ensure the development of languages (Spolsky 2005; Spolsky 1998; Druviete 2000). Language policy and language planning, according to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), is a body of ideas, laws and regulations, rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change. Language education is one of the main elements of a language policy.

Since 1988, when the Lithuanian language regained its status of an official state language, educational authorities, trainers and managers, state language teachers, syllabus designers, and textbook writers have been faced with new educational and language teaching problems and challenges. These have included

developing a new concept for teaching Lithuanian as a second language, revising the content of learning according to the requirements of the changing society, providing new curricula, applying modern teaching methods and means of assessment, as well as developing new courses for teacher training. Since the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990 a comprehensive reform of teaching Lithuanian as a second language has been carried out in schools and adult teaching institutions, and a new system for effective learning, teaching and assessment aimed at both school pupils and adults has been developed to ensure a coherent approach to the process of learning the Lithuanian language.

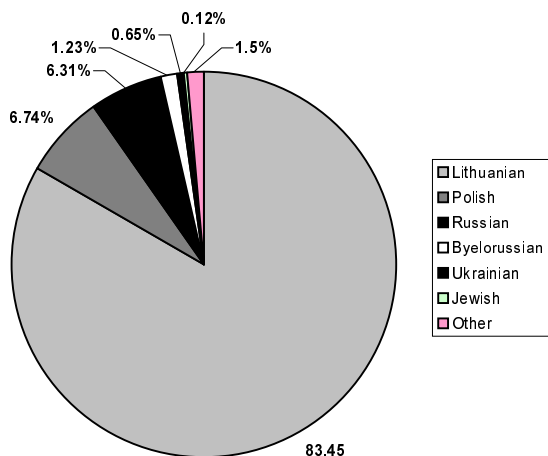
## Learners of Lithuanian as a second/foreign language

Since 1990 the number of students learning Lithuanian has been steadily increasing. All learners of Lithuanian as a second or foreign language fall into two types by their motivation and aims of learning. Type 1 is the citizens of Lithuania who cannot speak Lithuanian, yet need it for successful integration into the changing Lithuanian society. Type 2 is foreigners who use Lithuanian for different purposes such as professional, business, tourist and personal.

Learners of Lithuanian as a second/foreign language form the following groups:

- 1) students of ethnic minority schools,
- 2) adults of ethnic minority groups,
- 3) new immigrants and their children, and
- 4) foreigners from different countries.

Lithuania is most monoethnic of the three Baltic States. It differs in its comparatively lower percentage of Russian-speaking people. The Lithuanian Census of 2001 shows that Lithuania's population consists of 115 different ethnic communities: 83.45% – Lithuanians, 6.74% – Poles, 6.31% – Russians, 3.5% – other (see



**Figure 1.** Population of Lithuania in 2001 (Lithuanian Census 2001)

Figure 1). Most of these people have been able to acquire citizenship upon the restoration of independence in a naturalization process which offered ‘zero option’: this permitted all individuals normally resident in the Republic at that time to become citizens of Lithuania.

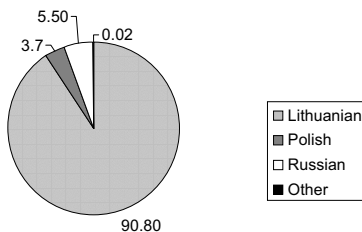
Ethnic minorities make up about 16% of Lithuania’s population, with ethnic diversity having a distinctly regional dimension. While most areas have 90% or more Lithuanians, there are some characterised by a higher ethnic factor. The south-eastern region of Lithuania has a significant multiethnic population (non-Lithuanians – 55%), the most ethnically diverse city is the capital city Vilnius (42%); the second most diverse is the seaport Klaipėda (29%); Visaginas, a town in the vicinity of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, is 85% non-Lithuanian (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1.** Ethnic groups in different areas of Lithuania

	<b>Lithuanians</b>	<b>Poles</b>	<b>Russians</b>	<b>Others</b>
Lithuania	83.5	6.7	6.3	3.5
South-East <sup>2</sup>	45	33	13	9
Vilnius	58	19	14	9
Visaginas	14.9	8.6	52.4	24.1

Education of national minorities residing in the Republic of Lithuania constitutes an important and integral part of its education system. The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Education and the Law on National Minorities guarantee its national minorities the following rights: the right to be supported by the government to develop ethnic culture and education and the right to enjoy schooling in their native languages. Minority schools are opened and funded in administrative areas where the minority concerned has a strong demographic presence. In areas where the number and density of an ethnic minority population is not sufficient to open a school, Sunday schools are organised.

The largest minorities in Lithuania (Russians, Poles, and Byelorussians) can send their children to schools where the language of instruction is Russian, or Polish, or Byelorussian, or to schools with Lithuanian as a language of instruction. Schools with linguistic minorities follow the general curricula for general education approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, which covers such subjects as Native Language and Lithuanian as a State Language; the other subjects taught may contain elements of ethno-cultural content.



**Figure 2.** Students by language of instruction in 2004/2005

<sup>1</sup> For more information see Hogan-Brun 2003; Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė 2004; Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė 2005; Kaubrys, 2002: 215–217.

<sup>2</sup> Data from a survey carried out in 2002 by *Sic Rinkos tyrimai*, an established polling organisation, in Eastern and South-Eastern Lithuania.

**Table 2.** Dynamics of students in schools (data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science)

School year	Number of students	Lithuanian schools	%	Russian schools	%	Polish schools	%
2004/05	536120	489361	91.2	27026	5.0	19507	3.6
2003/04	556325	505089	90.8	304651	5.5	20549	3.7
2002/03	567453	512213	90.3	33698	5.9	21314	3.7
2001/02	579741	520291	89.7	37481	6.5	21710	3.8
2000/01	586294	522569	89.1	41162	7.0	22303	3.8
1995/96	508887	446336	87.7	55237	10.8	17898	3.5
1992/93	497356	415971	83.6	67506	13.6	13881	2.8
1989/90	506093	415877	82.2	79603	15.7	10613	2.1

At present there are over 200 ethnic minority schools in Lithuania. They are located in south-eastern Lithuania, where the density of these communities is high, and in the biggest Lithuanian cities: Vilnius, Klaipėda and Visaginas. Of all educational institutions in Lithuania approximately 9% are minority schools (see Figure 2): 83 Polish, 58 Russian, 26 Russian-Polish<sup>3</sup>, 23 Russian-Lithuanian, 11 Lithuanian-Polish, 10 Lithuanian-Russian-Polish schools, as well as one Belarusian, one Belarusian-Russian, one German, and one Jewish school. Minority languages are the medium of instruction in these schools. Some schools offer a few subjects (Geography, History, Mathematics or other) in Lithuanian. Lithuanian is taught as a compulsory subject in all schools.

During the past 15 years, the number of students in ethnic minority schools has been changing considerably. The number of students attending Russian schools is declining while the number of students in Polish schools and Lithuanian schools is increasing. The data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science for 1989–2005 (see Table 2) shows that the number of pupils in schools with Lithuanian as a language of instruction has increased by 9%, the same indicator for Polish schools is 1.5%, while in Russians schools the number has dropped by 10.5%. These changes in the schools of ethnic minorities might be explained by the changing attitude to Lithuanian as a state language and to their native languages. The prevailing motivation of the Russian minority to integrate into the society and to learn the state language more rapidly encourages the parents of Russian speaking children to send their children to Lithuanian schools. A somewhat different behavior can be observed in the Polish minority. While, in Soviet times, Lithuanian Poles tended to use Russian rather than Polish as their language of communication and send their children to Russian schools, currently they prefer Polish. Therefore, more Poles send their children to the schools of their ethnic minority than to mainstream schools with Lithuanian as the language of instruction (Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė 2004; Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė 2005: 434–436).

Despite the differences in the language behaviour and attitudes of the ethnic minorities, the number of students from ethnic minority families in Lithuanian schools in multilingual areas is constantly increasing. In south-eastern Lithuania, where the proportion of pupils from minority communities is high, there are now

<sup>3</sup> There are mixed schools in small towns or villages with separate classes with different languages of instruction.

numerous schools where non-Lithuanian speakers constitute up to 60–70% of students in a class. Such a situation poses substantial problems both to Lithuanian speaking students and to teachers who are not well prepared to work in a bilingual or multilingual class. Policies are being developed in order to find an acceptable compromise for teachers and students from minority communities as well as for students from Lithuanian families. In 2001 the Ministry of Education and Science introduced an option of bilingual schooling in order to meet the needs of the changing society.

Five bilingual models with somewhat different directions and priorities were proposed for adoption by schools (Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė 2004). More than thirty Russian schools have applied a bilingual education programme. As the experience of these schools demonstrates, bilingual education is one of the most appropriate options for the education of multilingual students.

During the last 15 years, the learning, proficiency and use of Lithuanian as a state language by adults from ethnic minorities has changed as well. Between 1989 and 2000, the population who spoke the titular state language rose from 85% to 94% in Lithuania (Mežs: unpublished). The newly acquired data from the latest surveys in multicultural areas of Lithuania show great changes in the use of Lithuanian and Russian in comparison to the situation of 10–15 years ago. The survey data confirm that Lithuanian as the medium of communication is much more commonly used today than was the case ten years ago, both in the public and semi-public spheres, for communication with officials, salespersons, neighbours, and acquaintances (Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė 2005: 431–433). According to the Survey of 2004, just 1% of the inhabitants of the most multicultural city Vilnius with its 42% of non-Lithuanians state zero knowledge of the Lithuanian language.

Despite the fact that the majority of ethnic minorities have obtained some knowledge of the state language, the number of learners taking courses of Lithuanian as a second language in different institutions of adult education is constantly growing. This demonstrates the growth of motivation of adult learners, as well as their ambition to improve their proficiency in Lithuanian as a state language.

The number of new immigrants in Lithuania is still relatively small. Adults and children from immigrant families attend educational establishments and learn Lithuanian as a state language together with Lithuanian citizens. Children of migrating workers and refugees or other asylum seekers learn Lithuanian as part of the curriculum of the school they attend.

One other group of learners of Lithuanian as a non-native/foreign language is non-Lithuanian citizens doing Lithuanian studies at universities and other educational institutions in Lithuania as well as outside Lithuania. Several Lithuanian universities offer courses to foreigners (short intensive summer and winter courses, one- and two-term courses, evening courses etc.).<sup>4</sup> More than 30 universities in other countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Sweden, U.S.A. etc.) offer teaching Lithuanian as a foreign language.<sup>5</sup> With the enlargement of the European Union, the number of foreigners learning Lithuanian is constantly increasing. For instance, the average number of foreign students at the Department of Lithuanian Studies of Vilnius

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<sup>4</sup> See websites <http://www.lsk.flf.vu.lt/> (27.1.2006); <http://www.vdu.lt> (27.1.2006).

<sup>5</sup> For more information see <http://www.lsk.flf.vu.lt/index.php/pageid/67> (27.1.2006).

University is 200 students every year. There is also a growing tendency to take Lithuanian as an optional subject or as part of student exchange programmes (Savickienė, Kalėdaitė 2005).

## The framework of learning Lithuanian as a second language

The newly emerging needs since 1990 have encouraged a reform in teaching Lithuanian as a second/foreign language. Due to the urgent need to enable large sections of the population to learn and use the state language quickly and effectively, the Communicative Approach to language instruction has been introduced. The pattern of state language education has been changing in line with new priorities in language pedagogy. Previous orientation towards the teaching of language knowledge has been replaced by the development of communicative competence and language skills, with a focus on practical language use and increasing learner motivation.

New curricula, textbooks and other teaching aids, as well as language proficiency assessment systems for both schools and adult teaching institutions have been developed and introduced. New curricula, textbooks, and language tests are produced on the basis of *Specifications of Lithuanian as a Second Language*, which are in compliance with the Council of Europe levels of language proficiency and the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEF 2004). The specifications of learning objectives have been developed for the following three levels: *A2 Waystage* (Lith. *Pusiaukelė*: forthcoming), *B1 Threshold* (Lith. *Slenkstis* 1997), and *B2 Vantage* (Lith. *Aukštuma* 2000). The Basic User *A1 Breakthrough* (Lith. *Lūžis*) is currently under preparation (see Table 3). These specifications were developed and published within the Council of Europe's programme for the promotion of language learning and offers guidance for effective learning of Lithuanian as a second language.

**Table 3.** Levels of Lithuanian as a second language corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference levels

Reference levels of language proficiency	Levels of Lithuanian	
C. Proficient User	C2 Mastery	
	C1 Effective Proficiency	
B. Independent User	B2 Vantage	B2 <i>Aukštuma</i> (2000)
	B1 Threshold	B1 <i>Slenkstis</i> (1997)
A. Basic User	A2 Waystage	A2 <i>Pusiaukelė</i> (forthcoming)
	A1 Breakthrough	A1 <i>Lūžis</i> (under preparation)

The Threshold Level (B1) (*Slenkstis*) is the key element in the series, since it attempts to identify the minimal linguistic means which enables a learner to deal as an independent agent with more predictable situations of daily life, both transactional and interactional. It corresponds to the 2nd Category of the State

Language Competence in Lithuanian for Adults (see also Table 4). A lower level specification, Waystage (A2) (*Pusiaukelė*), is intended as an early learning objective and provides the learner with a broad range of resources at a very elementary level of survival Lithuanian in the most predictable situations. It corresponds to the 1st Category of the State Language Competence in Lithuanian for Adults. Vantage (B2) (*Aukštuma*), the third level, goes beyond the Threshold stage and corresponds to the 3rd Category of the State Language Competence in Lithuanian for Adults.

These three levels of specifications offer all practitioners a three-tiered approach to language teaching for learners from basic to advanced/upper-intermediate stages. The guidelines have been used for the design of new curricula and writing language learning materials. A new series of textbooks of Lithuanian as a state language is currently being developed for all grades of minority schools (at primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary level). Each set of the course consists of a student's book, exercise book, teacher's book and audio recordings. Most of them have already been published and are used in schools (Kutanovienė 2005, Kaladytė 2000, Petrašiūnienė 2000).

In the recent decade, alongside with school textbooks, a number of communicative coursebooks and other learning aids for adult non-native speakers have been produced (Ramonienė, Pribušauskaitė 2003, Ramonienė, Vilkienė 2000, Ramonienė, Vilkienė 1998, Stumbrienė, Kaškelevičienė 2001).

A special textbook for children of migrant workers and children of immigrants and refugees has been prepared with a special focus on sociocultural aspects (Prosniakova, Stumbrienė 2003).

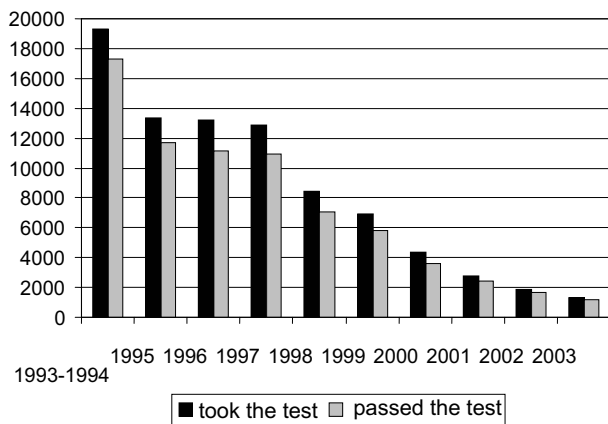
Changes in teaching approaches employed at schools and other educational institutions are also characterised by the use of modern technologies. In 2001 the first relevant CD was released. It contains the basic Lithuanian grammar, a mini-dictionary, and a number of different types of texts accompanied by listening and reading comprehension tasks. Moreover, the CD includes video material to illustrate the texts and helps to develop sociocultural competence as well as over 300 different exercises and tests for self-assessment. This modern teaching aid can be applied both in adult teaching and at schools. The first on-line courses for learning Lithuanian as a second language were developed in 2005, and some new ones are under preparation.<sup>6</sup>

## Testing Lithuanian as a second/foreign language

Language proficiency assessment systems for Lithuanian as a second/foreign language to be used both at schools and adult teaching institutions have been developed and introduced since 1992. A system of adult testing and test models have been created and approved by the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language. Since 1993, 92720 citizens have taken the State Language Tests at various levels, and 80714 have passed it (see Figure 3). A relatively large number of people who finished non-Lithuanian schools before 1991 have been learning the state language and received certificates of proficiency in Lithuanian.

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<sup>6</sup> See websites [www.oneness.vu.lt](http://www.oneness.vu.lt) (26.1.2006), <http://mokymai.tmid.lt> (26.1.2006), [www.euro-languages.net](http://www.euro-languages.net) (26.1.2006).



**Figure 3.** Dynamics of state language testing since 1993

At the secondary level, school examinations in Lithuanian as the State Language have been introduced and students who pass them receive certificates equivalent to those of State Language Competence for adults. In 2001, the examination in the State Language was for the first time administered in a centralised way at the national level. The language proficiency of the candidates is tested in four areas of language activity: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The purpose of this examination is to assess the communicative competence of the learners. The components of the communicative competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, socio-cultural, and social) comprise a number of skills and knowledge, all of which are tested during the examination: knowledge of linguistic means for expressing language functions and general notions; ability to produce language according to the communicative situation and intention; skills of creative use of language structures; spoken and written text comprehension and production, using compensatory strategies; awareness of the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic context in which the language is used. The test of the use of language forms and structures is intended to test the skills of using lexical and grammatical forms and structures and linking the meaning to the form. The procedures and activities, as well as the content and language material of the school-leaving examination tasks are closely related to those of real-life situations. Candidates of non-Lithuanian origin who pass such an examination are able to use Lithuanian in all Lithuanian higher educational establishments, universities, all fields of study: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, or technologies.

School and adult examinations of the Lithuanian language are matched up to the Common European Framework proficiency levels (see Table 4), and they correspond to A2 level (1st Category of the State Language Competence for Adults), B1 level (2nd Category of the State Language Competence for Adults and final non-obligatory examination of the basic school), B2 level (3rd Category of the State Language Competence for Adults and final obligatory examination of the secondary school).

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.pprc.lt/vkm/duomenys/vkm\\_stat.asp](http://www.pprc.lt/vkm/duomenys/vkm_stat.asp).



**Table 4.** The Lithuanian Language Assessment

<b>Ethnic Minorities Schools</b>		<b>Adult learners</b>
	A2 <i>Pusiaukele</i>	1st Category of the State Language Competence
Final examination of the basic school	B1 <i>Slenkstis</i>	2nd Category of the State Language Competence
Final examination of the secondary school	B2 <i>Aukštuma</i>	3rd Category of the State Language Competence

A new idea recently proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science is to introduce a single examination of Lithuanian as a state language both for ethnic minority and mainstream schools in 2008. Guidelines for this reform are currently being prepared. One examination is proposed to be introduced from 2007. However, a number of complex problems have not been addressed, yet; first of all, those related to the differences in the curricula of teaching Lithuanian as a Native Language and Lithuanian as a State Language. This type of reform, which is mainly a political decision, might not be easy to put into practice.

## Conclusions

The 15 years of comprehensive reform of teaching and assessment of Lithuanian as a second/foreign language has produced substantive results. The curricula have been restructured, communicative teaching with a strong learner-orientation has been introduced. Modern teaching materials, textbooks, computer-based learning programmes, on-line courses etc. intended to meet the new learning needs have been developed. The levels of teaching and assessment of Lithuanian as a second/foreign language have been harmonised with the European levels, and a national system of testing and certification is functioning. Under these conditions, the ethnic minorities, school students and adults have been learning Lithuanian effectively.

Students who have passed final school examinations (of which the only obligatory examination is that of Lithuanian as a State Language), in general are prepared to continue their tertiary studies in Lithuanian and to use Lithuanian in all spheres of life.

The system of state language learning and testing for non-Lithuanian speaking adults is regulated at the national level and harmonised with the European standards. The vast majority of adults from the communities of ethnic minorities, who need Lithuanian in their work setting, have already passed the state examinations and received the certificates indicating their language proficiency. Nevertheless, many continue learning Lithuanian to attain a higher level of proficiency.

In the course of the past 15 years, a system of language learning and proficiency testing for Lithuanian as a foreign language has been settled.

The most urgent issue today is the improvement and further development of a bilingual education model. Another important task is further elaboration of

language tests, with particular emphasis on the reform of the school-leaving examination of Lithuanian as a state language both for native and non-native students. Finally, professional development of teachers, test writers, and administrators is of crucial importance to ensure high efficiency of the system of language learning, teaching, and assessment.

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# LEEDU KEELE KUI TEISE KEELE (VÕÖRKEELE) ÕPETAMINE. HETKESEIS

## Meilutė Ramonienė

Artiklis kirjeldatakse Leedu keelepoliitika üht võtmeküsimust – keeleõppepoliitikat ja selle tegelikku rakendust leedu keele kui teise keele (võõrkeele) õpetuses. Artiklis vaadatakse uuesti üle leedu keele kui teise keele (võõrkeele) reform, mis algas pärast Leedu iseseisvuse taastamist. 15 aasta jooksul on tekkinud mitmed sihtgrupid, kes õpivad leedu keelt teise või võõrkeelena: vähemusrahvustest õpilased ja täiskasvanud, uusimmigrandid ja nende lapsed, muude riikide kodanikud. Artiklis kirjeldatakse neid rühmi täpsemalt, lähemalt on uuritud nende keeleõppe eesmäärke ja motivatsiooni. Erilist tähelepanu on pööratud kõige suurematele sihtrühmadele, vene ja poola vähemusrahvustele, nende kooliõppele ja täiskasvanukoolitusele. Vene ja poola rahvusrühmades (vastavalt 6,7% ja 6,3% Leedu rahvastikust) on 15 aasta jooksul täheldatud teataval moel erinevat käitumist ja suhtumist nii riigikeelde kui ka oma emakeelde. Poola kogukonna üha süvenev tava panna lapsi pigem leedu kui vene kooli on põhjustanud ootamatuid probleeme algkoolis, kus mõnel juhul on mitte-leedukeelseid lapsi üle 70%. See on innustanud arendama mitmekeelsetes piirkondades kakskeelset haridusprojekti.

Peale selle iseloomustatakse artiklis leedu keele kui teise keele (võõrkeele) õpet ja hindamist leedu koolides ja täiskasvanuõppes. Hiljuti on välja töötatud õpetamise ja keeleoskuse hindamise nüüdisaegne süsteem, kus leedu keele oskuse tasemed on suhestatud Euroopa keelte vastavate oskustasemetega ja Euroopa keelemapi (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, lüh CEF) põhimõtetega. Ette on valmistatud keeleoskustasemete A2, B1 ja B2 detailised kirjeldused ning keeleõppijate riiklik testimissüsteem on seotud Euroopa (CEF) tasemetega. Koostatud on mitmeid õpikuid ja muid õppematerjale, elektroonilisi õppevahendeid eri tasemetega ja eri õpilasarühmade jaoks.

Artiklis käsitletakse ka muid Leedu aktuaalseid probleeme: kakskeelse õppe-mudeli arendamist, õpetajate ja testijate koolitust ning keeletestide koostamist.

**Võtmesõnad:** keelepoliitika kujunemine, keeleõpe, vähemusrahvused, keeleoskustasemed, riiklik keeleõpe ja -testimine, leedu keel

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