

Civilization of the DACHL Countries Researching the Implementation of the D-A-CH-L Concept in Teaching German as a Foreign Language in R. Macedonia

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Abstract- Learners of the German language, irrespective of whether they learn the language in a German speaking country or in their native country, have one common goal – to be able to communicate in German in the German speaking countries as well as in the rest of the countries in the world. The German speaking countries do not include only Germany, but also some other European countries. What all these countries have in common is the usage of the German language, i.e. variants of the German language. Apart from the language which is the major precondition for successful communication, one should also consider the various civilization information of the German speaking countries, i.e. the D-A-CH-L countries (D for Germany (Deutschland), A for Austria, CH for Switzerland (Schweiz), and L for Liechtenstein). Hence, the inclusion of the D-A-CH-L concept in the process of teaching the German language as a foreign language presents itself as a necessity.

This paper analyses the application of the D-A-CH-L concept in teaching German in primary and secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia. Firstly, a survey has been conducted in randomly selected schools. Then, an analysis of the results is presented which is accompanied by comments and conclusions based on the research.

Index Terms- German as a foreign language, the German speaking countries, D-A-CH-L concept, D-A-CH-L countries

I. INTRODUCTION

A civilization, in Lesli Bodi's terms, "in a world which has already become indivisible" should strive to enable understanding of the cultural differences of the social systems without reversing to ethno-inclusive linguistic nationalism and racism of the late 19th century and the dictatorships of the first half of the 20th century".¹

Germany, Austria and Switzerland are all parts of the German speaking countries. What these three states share is their common interest to use the German language as a means for presenting their national identity and promoting international understanding.

The number of opportunities for cooperation, which could be initiated due to common interests, is indeed immense. These include, for instance, international support for the German language by organizing common scientific and cultural events. Moreover, the cooperation between the German speaking

countries also entails specific contribution to each of those countries.²

We agree with Krumm's contentions which include points which could easily be supplemented. The process of teaching German should not solely rely on the linguistic system as it should be made versatile and it should include information on: what distinguishes those who speak German from all the others; then, how those who speak German differentiate among themselves; the versatility of the language itself; the differences in the communicative modes of behavior as well as the differences in the conditions under which the German language and the communicative modes of behavior develop. In order to be able to understand this versatility, the sensibility for cultural differentiation and facts mediation, must be supplemented.³

Our inability to deal with versatility inevitably leads to discrimination, which implies that it is necessary to acquire an appropriate approach to versatility. The learning process could be successful merely when the subject and civilization tasks are correctly comprehended and carried out.

"The learner of the German language overcomes linguistic barriers, and civilization assists him in entering the German linguistic space, whereas the learners who study German in the German speaking countries have already put this concrete barrier behind them."⁴

According to the thesis number 8 of ABCD⁵, the civilization as an integral part of teaching German necessitates that the teachers of German as a foreign language implement data on all German speaking regions by bringing forth their own experience and presenting their students with varied material, and, thus, providing them with sound education.

Undeniably, the course book has a critical position in the teaching process for both students and teachers and its significance remains undisputed.⁶

There are visible attempts in the newer course books to incorporate civilization as "a broadened term"⁷ by presenting information on geography, economics, politics, culture, history, education, literature, everyday life and society. In this context, both the motivation and location play crucial roles – the motivation in terms of why the learner studies the language, whereas the location in terms of whether the teaching process

² Rainer, 1992: 4-12

³ Krumm, 1998: 523-544

⁴ Krumm, 1998: 523-544

⁵ Fremdsprache Deutsch 3/1990, S. 60

⁶ Krumm, 1994: 23-29

⁷ Krumm, 1994: 23

¹ Bodi, 1995: 33

occurs in a German speaking country or in some other foreign country. All these elements lead us to the assumption that the D-A-CH-L concept has been implemented in the process of teaching German.

In order to provide an overview of the process of teaching German as a foreign language in Macedonia, the table below depicts the school system and the process of teaching German according to the current syllabi. In accordance with the 2007 education reforms, the first foreign language taught is the English language and students start learning it in the first grade, whereas the second language is being introduced in the sixth grade.⁸

grade	1st foreign language/ no. of classes per week	2nd foreign language
9th	3	2
8th	3	2
7th	3	2
6th	3	2
5th	3	/
4th	3	/
3rd	3	/
2nd	2	/
1st	2	/

Table 1

In secondary schools and in high schools, German as a foreign language is an elective subject. Upon the introduction of the school reform, students study the two languages they studied in primary school, whereas in the new linguistic high schools they study 3 foreign languages (they continue studying the previous two foreign languages and they elect a third foreign language).

According to the statistic data, the German language as a foreign language is on the third position in the Republic of Macedonia. The webpage of the Bureau of Education⁹ along with the national education program present a table depicting the number of students who studied German in the 2003/2004 school year. According to these statistic data, 14 856 students studied German as a second foreign language and 964 students studied it as a first foreign language in the secondary schools and high schools in the Republic of Macedonia.

Analysis of the opinion of teachers of German concerning the role and significance of teaching civilization

In order to ascertain what students of German as a foreign language know about civilization and what teachers of German as a foreign language think about the role and the significance of teaching civilization, a study was carried out by conducting a questionnaire. The teachers' questionnaire was carried out in January, 2014.

a) The teachers' questionnaire

Sixteen teachers of German as a foreign language, two male and fourteen female teachers, responded to the questionnaire. In order to take preventative measures against receiving a small number of filled-in questionnaires which is one of the disadvantages of written surveys, the number of dispatched questionnaires was three times bigger than the number of questionnaires actually needed for this study. The questionnaire respected the respondents' privacy by requesting no personal data. In the teaching process in Macedonia the aim of this study was, in fact, twofold. On the one hand, it served the purpose of confirming our analysis based on theoretical grounds, i.e. it set out to either support the data and opinions formed on the theory or to relativize them. On the other hand, the second aim was to determine the significance attached to civilization in the teaching process by the respondents.

The introduction of educational and practical perspectives seems mandatory in the context of course books analysis by virtue of the fact that the interaction between teachers and students and students' interest are crucial factors in creating the teaching process.

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http://www.bro.gov.mk/docs/nastavniplanovi/nastaven_plan_devetgodishno_2014-2015.pdf

The results of the analysis of the teachers' questionnaire

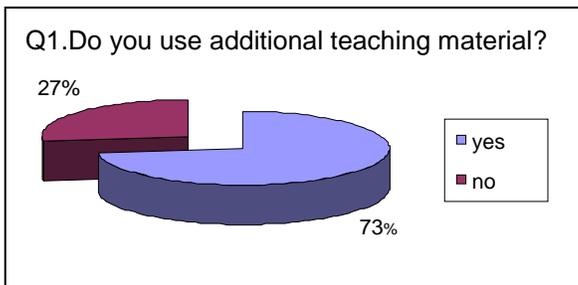


Chart 1 Primary school teachers

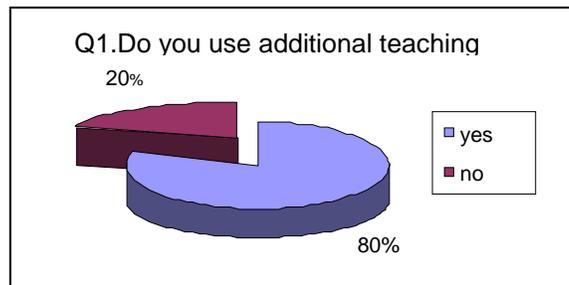


Chart 2 Secondary school teachers

Eleven of the interviewed teachers teach German in primary schools, whereas five of them teach German in secondary schools. As it was expected, all of the teachers of German who teach in primary schools use the same course book which has been approved by the Bureau of Education at the Ministry of Education and Culture. The same was the case with the teachers of German in secondary schools and high schools as they also all use the course book approved by the Bureau of Education at the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, as it is presented on the graphs below, it is quite satisfactory that 73% of the interviewed teachers who teach German in primary schools and 80% of the teachers who teach German in secondary schools and high schools use additional teaching material.

- The civilization contributes to the culture of a particular country, whereas the language teaching process contributes to familiarize oneself with that culture. Civilization is an integral part of the language teaching process.
- Culture and civilization are of great help when it comes to achieving successful communication among nations.

Question no.1

All interviewed teachers agree that teaching German is civilization, and civilization is teaching German. What follows is some of their statements pertaining to this issue:

- Culture and civilization are crucial in teaching a language.
- Every language teaching process is connected to the culture of the country, i.e. the culture of the people (e.g. lifestyle, food, typical expressions, mentality etc.).
- The culture is acquired via the language. The same is the case when one is interested in a particular culture – this person has to learn the language first.

Question no. 2: In your opinion, what is the starting point when civilization should be introduced in the process of teaching German?

The importance of incorporating civilization in the teaching process has been especially highlighted by the primary education teachers, which is a good precondition for incorporating civilization in the process of teaching German at the beginner levels.

In fact, 14% of the interviewed teachers claim that civilization should be incorporated at a specific linguistic level or that civilization should be included depending on the students' interest. As to the question which examines whether the implementation of civilization is dependent on some other factors, none of the interviewed stated his/her opinion.

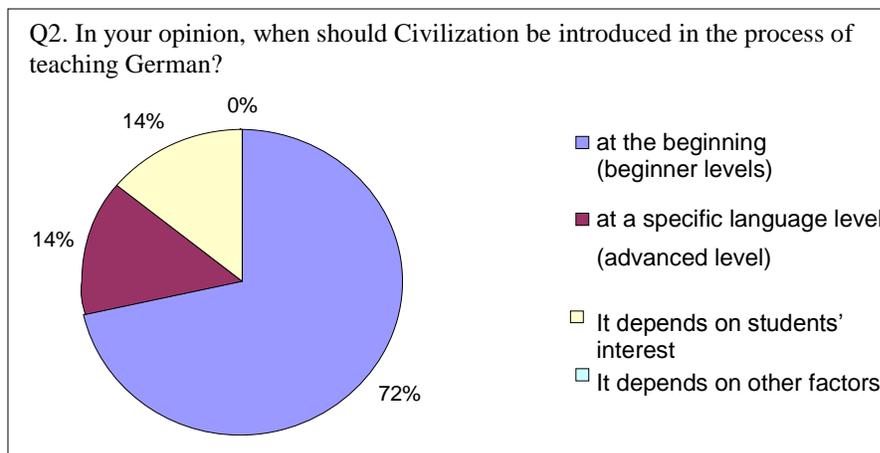


Chart 3 Primary school teachers of German

Only one teacher did not provide an answer to this question. As far as this question is concerned the opinions of both sets of teachers (primary and secondary) differentiate substantially. Namely, 60% of the interviewed secondary and high school teachers feel that civilization should be included at a specific

linguistic level (advanced), whereas 40% believe that that should be done from the very beginning, i.e. at the beginners level. None of the interviewed teachers claims that this is conditioned by students' interest or some other factors.

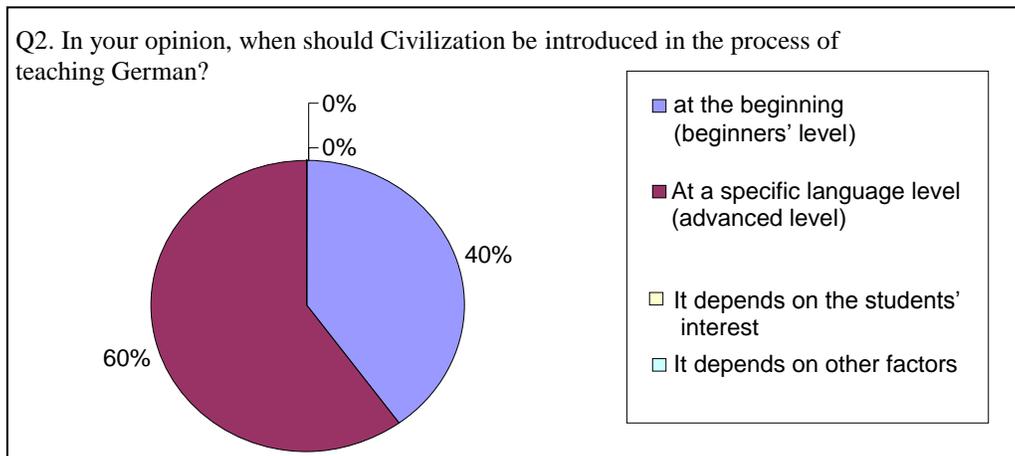


Chart 4 Secondary and high school teachers of German

Question no.4 In the process of teaching German, for which of the German speaking countries you also teach civilizational values?

This question presupposed several possible answers. Some of the interviewed primary school teachers of German marked in their answers civilizational values pertaining to Germany (42%), Austria (35%) and Switzerland (23%). Liechtenstein was not

mentioned at all. This result demonstrates the intensity with which the civilization of these countries is being incorporated in the teaching process. Obviously, Germany is allocated the first position in that respect, Austria comes the second, followed by Switzerland, and, finally, Liechtenstein which is not included at all.

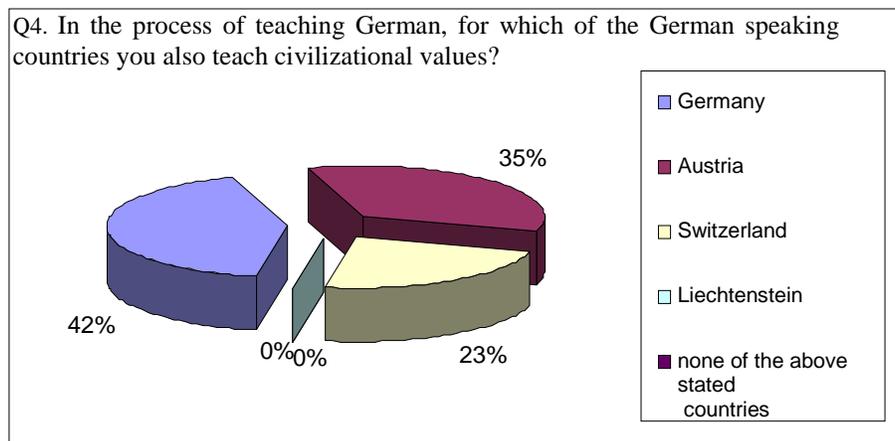


Chart 5 Primary school teachers of German

The interviewed teachers who teach German in secondary school and high school have also marked Germany (42%), Austria (33%) and Switzerland (25%). They did not mention

Liechtenstein (0%) at all. These results are indicative of the intensity with which they incorporate civilization in their teaching process.

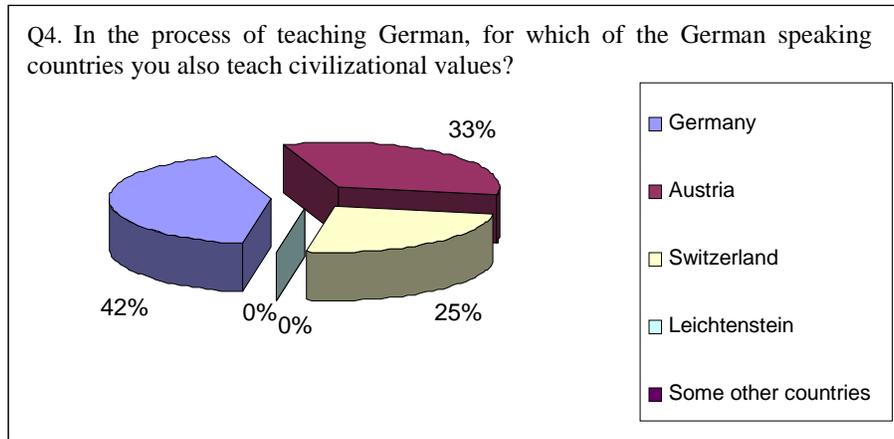


Chart 6 Secondary and high school teachers of German

Question no. 5 Where do you place the focus on civilization in your teaching German?

Primary school teachers' answers to this question also disclose that the primary position belongs to Germany (59%), then, Austria comes the second (20%), followed by Switzerland (7%) and Liechtenstein (7%). Only four teachers (7%) claim that

they place the focus equally to all four civilizations. These results obviously do not correspond with the implementation of the D-A-CH-L concept as the answers to this question, once more, emphasize the predominant position of Germany in comparison to the other three countries and their civilizations.

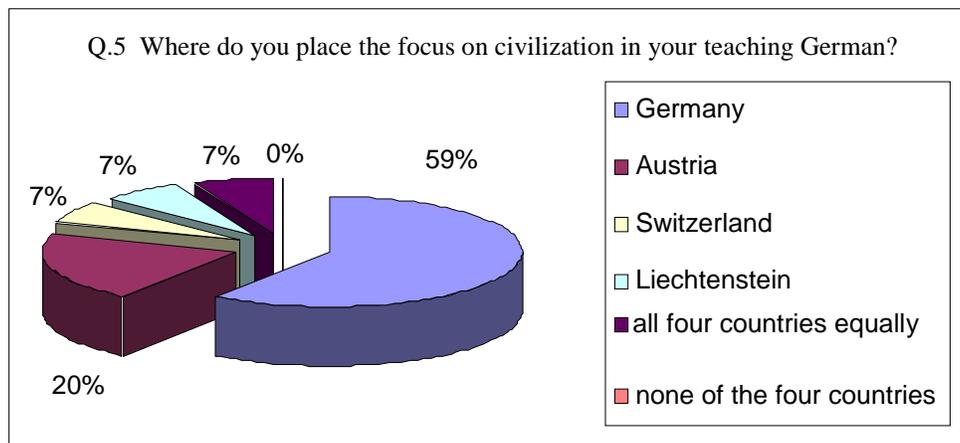


Chart 7 Primary school teachers of German

As to the same question, the interviewed secondary and high school teachers of German claim that again the main focus is put on Germany (46%), which is closely followed by Austria (36%). The third position belongs to Switzerland (18%) and, finally,

Liechtenstein was not mentioned at all (0%). None of the interviewed teachers chose the four countries. This result is not compatible with the implementation of the D-A-CH-L concept since these answers again put the stress on Germany's predominant position.

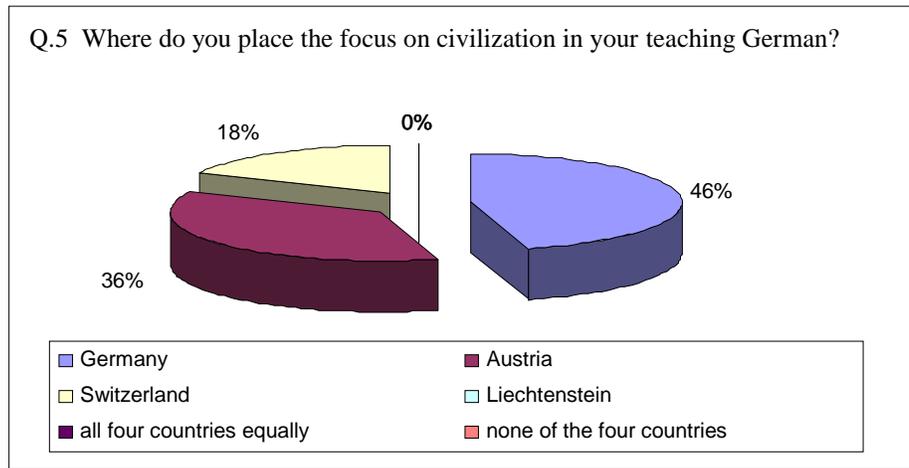


Chart 8 Secondary and high school teachers of German

The omission of civilization information about some of the German speaking countries could be spotted in most of the teachers' answers. Namely, the result is quiet satisfactory solely as far as the German civilization is concerned, and partly satisfactory in the case of the Austrian civilization. Hence, it can be concluded that these findings are not compatible with the ABCD theses and with the D-A-CH-L concept.

The question no.7 in the questionnaire directed the teachers to assess and state the extent to which their students were interested in the civilization of the German speaking countries, also provided them with the opportunity to choose among multiple possible answers. In that respect, the primary school teachers stated that 6 of their students were highly interested in Germany, 2 students were highly interested in Austria, 1 student was highly interested in Switzerland and none of them has shown any interest in Liechtenstein.

Furthermore, 5 students have shown moderate interest in Germany and Austria, 3students demonstrated the same thing for Switzerland and 1 for Liechtenstein. A very modest interest has been shown by 2 students for Austria, 5 students for Switzerland and 4 for Liechtenstein. No interest has been shown by 4 students for Liechtenstein.

The same question was addressed to the secondary school teachers and high school teachers as well. They were also provided with the option to choose from multiple possible answers.

Their answers reveal that 4 of their students were highly interested in Germany. One student was moderately interested in Germany, 5 students were moderately interested in Austria, 1 student was moderately interested in Switzerland and no one was interested in Liechtenstein. A very modest interest in Switzerland has been shown by 3 students. Three students have shown no interest in Liechtenstein at all.

II. RESUME

Some texts and contents which deal with, for instance, other cultures or historically distant periods of time, are virtually incomprehensible if there is lack of knowledge about the world we live in and its history, or if there is lack of geographical background, for instance. It is very important to not only reflect

on the reality relationship in the text itself, but also to take into consideration the relationship between the truthfulness presented in the text and the recipient's truthfulness. The science of comprehending a text and its interpretation in the international communication must be at the same time the science of relationships and obstacles which present themselves between nations/cultures/social groups/individuals which take part in them.¹⁰

This research shows that both primary and secondary school teachers share the opinion that civilization plays a crucial role in the process of teaching German. Moreover, their answers also reveal that civilization information which refers to the German speaking countries is rather scarce. Solely the German civilization displayed satisfactory and nearly satisfactory results in the primary school teachers and secondary school teachers' answers, respectively. The incidence of the Austrian civilization is partial and, consequently, is not compatible with the D-A-CH-L concept.

Moreover, students' enthusiasm to learn more on the German speaking countries is a positive indicator. However, one could infer that all of the German speaking countries do not receive an equal treatment in the process of teaching German. In other words, the good mental image of Germany, the poor mental image of Austria, and almost the non-existent mental image of Switzerland and the completely non-existent mental image of Liechtenstein in students' heads is not in compliance with the D-A-CH-L concept at all.

In the introductory part, we have already highlighted several factors and, consequently, an assumption, which indicate the importance of obligatory implementation of the D-A-CH-L concept in the process of teaching German. However, the result of this research refutes the assumption and one could conclude that the D-A-CH-L concept is not sufficiently respected in the process of teaching German.

Thus, the necessity for a quality improvement of the teaching process and materials presents itself quiet manifestly. The

¹⁰ Picht, 1980: 270-288

contribution¹¹ to the solution to this problem could be made by observing the incidence of the D-A-CH-L concept in 4 areas:

1. the syllabi of the German language as a foreign language;
2. the course books and the additional teaching materials;
3. the classes of German;
4. the studies of German and the seminars for teachers' continuous professional development.

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¹¹ Ilieva, 2012: 221

