

BOOK REVIEW

Szabó, F. (2021). *Idegennyelv-oktatás és hátrányos helyzet: a nyelvérték és nyelvtanulási sikeresség összefüggései egy Kelet-Magyarországi hátrányos helyzetű régió 11–12 éves korú tanulóinál*. [Language learning in low socio-economic situation: Correlations between language aptitude and success in foreign language learning in the case of 11–12-year-old students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Eastern Hungary]. Partium Kiadó.

Reviewed by *Gabriella Hegedűs, Katalin Godó**



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What kind of connection can be revealed between the social situation of the individual and their success in language learning; and what is the direction of this connection? Is the level of language acquisition typical for the individual student predestined by their disadvantaged situation? These questions can be answered in the work of Fruzsina Szabó, lecturer at the University of Debrecen. The monograph published under the title *Foreign Language Education and Disadvantaged Situation* fills a gap by mapping students' foreign language learning while examining their socio-demographic characteristics. In doing so, the author guides the reader to a less investigated area, drawing attention to an extremely complex issue, the examination of which had no precedents in the recent past. Only in the early 2000s was there a precedent for it, yet not even then in such a complex way, to examine language learning by grasping certain aspects of it. As language aptitude has not yet been researched in connection with the disadvantaged situation and socio-economic status in Hungary, this is a novel and gap-filling work. The author has a nuanced approach to the topic, and supports her research in several ways.

The work took its final form in 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic closures. It is not a traditional book, as it is the comprehensive result of many years of work, characterized by a high degree of scientific sophistication. This is reflected in the quantity and quality of the literature used; the author provides international sources in her list of references, as well as a wealth of information in the theoretical part. It is an outstanding piece on a national level in relation to disadvantaged background and language learning. The work is the published version of the author's dissertation. Moreover, the author also helped the research group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences with her research.

Being a former language teacher, the author grasps the researched topic with extreme sensitivity, yet manages to keep the objectivity of the researcher. She trained to be an English-German language teacher at university, and currently teaches courses on English language pedagogy at the Institute of English-American Studies at the University of Debrecen. She is also

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an assessor at the ORIGO Language Examination Centre, further contributing to her credibility in her subject and research field.

It is also worth looking at the symbolism of the cover of the book: it shows children who are young and not photographed in a location-specific manner. The most important message of the publication is that, on the one hand, it is about children, and on the other hand, playfulness is present in it, which can also represent an ideal learning environment.

The work consists of 9 chapters, both theoretical and empirical parts. In the latter, we can see that the author works with a mixed method, as both quantitative and qualitative research is incorporated into her work. In terms of the subjects of the book, it focuses on 11–12-year-old students from the disadvantaged region of Eastern Hungary, where the author also conducted interviews with teachers. The topic is brought to the reader's eyes in a comprehensive way by involving various actors in education, considering not only the performance of the students but also the perspectives and insights of the teachers. The author's qualitative analysis, in which she carried out youth language aptitude tests, draws attention to various extremely interesting phenomena, in addition to her quantitative research, which utilizes a number of authentic measuring instruments, being already very thoroughly and precisely structured. The reader can easily navigate the individual chapters despite the length of the work (246 pages) thanks to the tables, figures and the appropriate logical structure.

Today, one of the main pillars of public education is foreign language learning, which is unavoidable for those who enter the arena of public education institutions. Already at primary school age, at least one foreign language appears in the timetable as a compulsory subject (typically English and German). Additionally, it acts as both the entry and exit condition for obtaining a degree, although changes to this regulation are not excluded from this year and during the pandemic. The author discusses the problem of low choice options. A large amount of useful, valuable information can be accessed by both the average lay reader and the academic, who is more familiar with the subject. It is an extremely complex, unique work on the subject, in the appendices the reader can access all measuring instruments. This also further helps the understanding of the research, the importance of which is undeniable. It is a remarkable monograph in its choice of topics and structure.

The work is recommended to all teachers, but especially language teachers concerned with English and German, and even those who teach the target group: disadvantaged students. In addition to being a tool for those already in the field, it can also be useful for teachers in training (university students). Besides, it can be an exciting work for parents who want to learn more about the topic, as well as for those interested in research on language pedagogy, mentors, teachers of language examination centers who want to obtain information about language abilities, and for all those who would like to increase their knowledge in the field of educational science.

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