

KOMPARATĪVISTIKAS
ALMANAHS

JOURNAL OF
COMPARATIVE STUDIES

DAUGAVPILS UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC PRESS "SAULE"
2023

Kačāne I., Hasan A. M. (red.) *Komparatīvistikas almanahs Nr. 16(45)*. Daugavpils: Daugavpils Universitātes Akadēmiskais apgāds "Saule", 2023, 174 lpp. [https://doi.org/10.59893/jcs.16\(45\)](https://doi.org/10.59893/jcs.16(45))

Kačāne I., Hasan A. M. (eds.) *Journal of Comparative Studies No 16(45)*. Daugavpils: Daugavpils University Academic Press "Saule", 2023, 174 p. [https://doi.org/10.59893/jcs.16\(45\)](https://doi.org/10.59893/jcs.16(45))

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The publication of the Journal has been approved at Daugavpils University Science Council meeting on December 4, 2023, Minutes No 11.

Lay-out: RA Drukātava

All papers in the Journal are anonymously peer-reviewed.

ISSN 2255-9388 (print)
ISSN 2592-8279 (online)

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DAUGAVPILS UNIVERSITY



INSTITUTE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

JOURNAL OF
COMPARATIVE STUDIES

NO 16 (45)

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EDUCATION DIVIDE: CIVIC LEARNING AND INTENDED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUTH IN ESTONIA, LATVIA, AND LITHUANIA

BEATRIZ MATAFORA

Beatriz Matafora, M.A., researcher
Educational Research and Schooling
University Duisburg-Essen, Germany
e-mail: Beatriz.matafora@uni-due.de
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8453-3773>

KRISTĪNE KAMPMANE

Kristīne Kampmane, M.A., researcher
Institute of Educational Research
Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology and Arts
University of Latvia, Latvia
e-mail: kristine.kampmane@lu.lv
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3142-2268>

ANASTASSIA ANTON

Anastassia Anton, student
Faculty of Education, Psychology and Sociology
Technical University of Dortmund, Germany
e-mail: anastassia.anton@tu-dortmund.de

Beatriz Matafora is a researcher and lecturer at the University Duisburg-Essen where she works on the project “International Civic and Citizenship Study 2022”. She is pursuing her Ph.D. on the topic of national and European identity and has published two articles with comparative analyses of the project data, focusing on the transnational identities of children with immigration backgrounds. She has been personally involved and highly interested in post-Soviet democracies for 15 years and has travelled to the Baltic countries to delve deeper in her research. Her research interests comprise migration, transnational identities, and democratic education.

Kristīne Kampmane is a researcher and a lecturer at the University of Latvia in the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology, and Arts. Her main research interests are related to elementary and primary students’ self-concept and non-cognitive skills as the drivers for further life choices in education. She is working closely with teachers and studying students’ attitudes towards school subjects at schools in Latvia, especially reading, science, and mathematics. Her studies show that there is a difference in student attitudes and achievement between native students and students who are speaking at home in a language different from the language in the curriculum. She is involved in large-scale comparative studies like the IEA PIRLS and the IEA ICCS, as well as in the OECD TALIS Core Survey.

Anastassia Anton is studying educational theory and rehabilitation sciences at the Technical University of Dortmund. The dichotomy of Russian and Estonian cultures in which she grew up has shaped her field of research. As an Estonian from a Russian-speaking family living in Germany, she is interested in the topics of national identity, immigration, and integration. Along with her studies, she works with Ukrainian refugees, where she faces the practical issues of integration, xenophobia, and a balance between preserving home culture and language and encountering external culture.

ABSTRACT

Civic education serves as a vital tool for shaping national identity and a deeper understanding of civic duties. It assumes unparalleled importance in the contexts of the Baltic states and amidst the current geopolitical landscape, particularly the Russian war in Ukraine. The substantial Russian-speaking minority in these countries adds complexity, highlighting the need to examine their access to civic education at school.

Past studies have demonstrated the correlation between civic education, civic activities at school, and increased political participation among youth. Building on prior research that highlighted low levels of political participation among the Russian-speaking minority in the Baltic countries, this paper uses the data collected during the spring of 2022 as part of the International Civic and Citizenship Study to perform a comparative analysis of civic education in the Baltic States. Specifically, we investigate civic learning opportunities, participation in civic activities, and the intended political participation of 8th-grade students attending school programs predominantly taught in the national language or in the Russian language across the Baltic countries.

The results reveal subtle yet significant disparities between both groups, with the most pronounced differences observed in Latvia and the smallest in Estonia. Contrary to initial hypotheses, the language of testing did not emerge as the strongest predictor of intended electoral participation. Instead, active participation in civic activities at school exhibited the highest contribution to explaining the variance in students' intentions to participate in elections.

The findings carry implications for adapting school curricula and teacher training programs, emphasizing the necessity of incorporating more civic activities within primarily Russian-taught school programs. Additionally, the results underscore the importance of ensuring equitable civic learning opportunities for all ethnic groups, particularly in the face of the planned closures of primarily Russian-taught programs in Latvia and Estonia. Improving the quality of formal civic education and increasing the frequency of civic activities at school can enhance youth's future political participation, irrespective of their ethnic or linguistic background.

Keywords: civic education, political participation, Baltic states, citizenship education, social sciences, schooling, large-scale assessment

INTRODUCTION

Civic education and engagement are components of positive youth development, fostering not only academic engagement but also nurturing a sense of social responsibility and community connection among adolescents (Ludden 2011). Civic learning within schools plays a crucial role in shaping active civic participation and democratic engagement. A strong foundation in civic knowledge enhances both the quality and quantity of civic participation (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Informal civic education significantly increases the likelihood of voting in early adulthood (Hart et al. 2007), whereas the absence of a formal curriculum for civic learning in school reduces the likelihood of voting (Keating and Janmaat 2016). Educational opportunities centred on civic and political matters, along with actionable methods, have been proven to be highly effective in cultivating a strong dedication to civic participation (Kahne and Sporte 2008). Schools providing diverse opportunities, including student governance and extracurricular activities, enhance students' willingness to engage in civic action (Reichert and Print 2018).

In the unique context of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, civic education holds unparalleled significance, especially amidst the ongoing war in Ukraine. Against this backdrop, civic education emerges as a potent tool in shaping patriotism and national identity, particularly vital during times of war (Ivanec 2023). Recent studies in Ukraine illuminate the transformative impact of civic education, fostering pride, dedication to the country, and a deeper understanding of civic duties among students and teachers alike (Ivanec 2023). Moreover, research across various post-Soviet states underscores the effectiveness of civic education programs in reshaping perceptions about democracy among young citizens. Through these programs, participants exhibit increased belief in democratic values, positive attitudes toward democratic governance, and enhanced political efficacy (Pospieszna et al. 2023). In the wake of the shifting political dynamics in post-Soviet states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, upholding democratic principles faces challenges. During times of instability, the focus often veers away from democratic discourse and pluralism in citizenship education, being overshadowed by conformity, loyalty, and patriotism. To surmount these challenges, it becomes important to nurture civic identities grounded in values that extend beyond mere national allegiance (Verbytska 2019). In this context, civic education not only imparts knowledge but

becomes a cornerstone in shaping resilient democratic societies, transcending boundaries and fostering a sense of collective responsibility and engagement among the youth.

In this study, our primary goal is to provide a comparative analysis of civic learning opportunities, civic engagement at school, and the intended political participation of 8th grade students in the Baltic countries, specifically Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, using data gathered from the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) 2022. In the Baltic States, ICCS 2022 was conducted in both the country's national language and Russian. This bilingual approach accommodated students enrolled in programs taught primarily in Russian, serving those with Russian or other post-Soviet states ethnic backgrounds. In Lithuania, ICCS 2022 was also conducted in Polish at Polish minority schools. This allows us to compare the experiences of students in these countries and further understand the impact of different school programmes divided by language of instruction on their civic development. This comparison is crucial, especially in the light of potential changes, such as the planned cessation of offering education in Russian in Latvia and Estonia. We use t-tests to explore significant differences between students primarily instructed in the national language and those mainly taught in Russian. This comparison pertains to their perceptions of civic learning opportunities, participation in school civic activities, and intended electoral participation.

In summary, this study holds broader implications that extend beyond the realm of comparative education. For policy makers, we hope to offer insights into civic education disparities faced by students in Baltic countries. Understanding these challenges is important for crafting policies that promote equal opportunities. Furthermore, for future teachers entering these diverse classrooms, our research offers practical insights. By incorporating the findings into teacher training programs, educators can be better prepared to address the varying levels of civic learning opportunities among students. This approach aims at recognizing and bridging the gaps in civic education experiences, fostering a more equitable learning environment for every student.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Young people learn about civic responsibility from a variety of experiences that they have at home, at school, in the classroom, and in the larger community (Schulz, Ainley, et al. 2018). School often marks the initial transition for children from the private

spheres of family and local community into the broader public sphere, where cooperation across differences becomes essential (Parker 2002). Parker (2002) contends that due to this fusion of real-world experiences, schools stand as ideal settings for civic education.

Against this backdrop, the upcoming chapters delve into the definition and forms of formal civic education and civic activities within educational institutions. These chapters illuminate pathways for imparting civic knowledge and values, drawing on extensive empirical studies to provide nuanced insights into the effect these can have on young people's political opinions and engagement.

Additionally, this study delves into the intricate landscape of electoral participation among young individuals, specifically focusing on the Baltic states. Here, democratic participation among ethnic minorities encounters unique challenges.

The paradigm for our empirical analysis is built on civic education, civic activities at schools, and electoral participation. To understand the complex relationship between language, education, and civic participation among young people in the Baltic countries, these variables are being compared across two different groups of students who participated in ICCS 2022: those who answered the questionnaire in the national language and those who answered it in Russian. Therefore, the understanding of these three concepts becomes crucial for the further analysis.

FORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

The primary goal of formal civic education is the acquisition of political knowledge, such as educating pupils on how the government operates (Dassonneville et al. 2012). It is an education that helps an individual become a useful citizen (Fitzpatrick 2006).

Civic education can take two fundamental approaches within the school curriculum: it can either be established as an independent subject or integrated into another subject, often falling under the umbrella of social sciences (Morris and Cogan 2004). The distinction between these approaches carries significant consequences. Defining civics as a standalone subject provides it with a designated time slot on the timetable, necessitates a specific cohort of teachers who are specialized and trained for this purpose, entails the creation of tailored textbooks for student use and enables direct formal assessment. This structured approach ensures equal access and maintains a uniform

standard of provision (Morris and Cogan 2004). Conversely, integrating civic education into other subjects introduces a level of flexibility and variation in instructional methods and content delivery (Morris and Cogan 2004). This integration accommodates diverse learning styles and educational contexts, fostering adaptability in the teaching process. Understanding these diverse teaching methods is crucial in examining the contextual influences on civic education, which can be perceived as both antecedents and processes. Antecedents are the historical context that influences civic and citizenship education (for instance, through historical policies that influence how education is delivered) (Schulz, Ainley, et al. 2018). In the Baltic countries, the legacy of the Soviet past left a significant imprint on civic education. After the political changes in the region following the fall of the Soviet Union, civic education was recognized as needing substantial reform. Under the previous regime, it had served as a tool for indoctrination, shaping the beliefs of the younger generation according to the prevailing ideologies (Malak-Minkiewicz 2007). Post-socialist states, including the Baltic nations, embarked on a process of reconceptualization of civic education. The precursor to ICCS, the CIVED Study conducted in 1999, revealed an important insight: students from both “new” and “old” democracies shared a similar political ethos. This indicates the rapid impact of these changes in civic education (Malak-Minkiewicz 2007). Additionally, contemporary processes profoundly shape civic and citizenship education. For instance, the level of civic involvement and awareness among students directly affects how this subject is taught in schools. Moreover, students’ ability to grasp civic-related issues is influenced by factors such as socioeconomic background and the language predominantly used at home (Schulz, Ainley, et al. 2018). In the Baltic context, marked by language disparities, our research gains significance as we examine the impact of different educational programs based on language of instruction. Our study aims to analyse how these programs influence the access and quality of civic education for distinct student groups.

The positive effects of formal civic education have been confirmed by different empirical studies. Studies show that civic learning opportunities play a large role in predicting students’ commitment to civic participation, such as being involved in improving their community (Kahne and Sporte 2008). Research conducted with Belgian students highlighted the correlation between classroom civic education and heightened political

interest levels (Dassonneville et al. 2012). Moreover, analyses of surveys in the USA demonstrated a substantial increase in the likelihood of voting and political engagement among citizens who completed social studies or civics courses during their junior high or high school years. Extracurricular activities did not have the same impact on promoting voting and electoral engagement as classroom civics instruction (Owen 2013).

CIVIC ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL

The scope of civic learning extends far beyond the confines of formal civic education. While structured subjects or classes undeniably impart civic knowledge, an equally important dimension exists within the informal curriculum of schools. As Reichert and Print (2018) observe, these experiences, although not formally outlined in curricula, offer platforms for civic engagement. Such informal civic learning, which encompasses planned yet non-formalized activities within schools, and even extends to extracurricular pursuits, is also highly important for civic education.

One way to civically engage at school is by participating in a school council. Functioning as an elected body of pupils, the school council bears the responsibility of representing their respective classes (Veitch 2009). It is widely acknowledged that most schools in Western democracies, as well as other nations, have some type of student representation in governing the school (Saha and Print 2010). School councils serve as dynamic platforms, embodying democratic principles by empowering students to actively participate in decision-making processes. The opportunity to learn about democracy through involvement in democratic school activities is a significant learning opportunity (Saha and Print 2010). Through these councils, children learn the significance of their perspectives, thus nurturing a sense of responsibility and active citizenship.

In general, student participation in school decision-making processes has been proven to correlate with students' engagement in school decisions and the development of civic attitudes and behaviours (Ibid.). The concept of "pupil voice", as articulated by various scholars, encompasses a broad spectrum of methods through which students are encouraged to express their views and preferences (Whitty and Wisby 2007). Moreover, national standards, such as the NHSS criteria in Great Britain, emphasize

the imperative for schools to integrate student perspectives across all aspects of school life (Ibid.).

Student engagement in civic activities within schools is an important aspect of their overall civic development, and this has been shown in previous studies. The ICCS 2016 data from various participating countries indicates that a significant percentage of students, approximately 77 percent, actively participated in voting for class or school parliament representatives. Moreover, 41% of students reported engaging in decisions about school governance and 42% reported running for positions within student government (Schulz, Ainley, et al. 2018). Involvement in these particular activities has proven to be influential in fostering essential skills and attitudes that facilitate future electoral participation (Deimel et al. 2022). Longitudinal studies have shown that school-based political activities have a lasting positive impact on young people's civic engagement, both during their time in school and well into adulthood (Keating and Janmaat 2016). Participation in school elections not only correlates with feeling prepared for adult voting but also enhances political knowledge and engagement in peaceful activism (Saha and Print 2010). These results emphasize the significance of fostering active citizenship through substantial engagement within the school setting.

INTENDED ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The act of participating in elections is a fundamental way for citizens to engage in the political process, contributing significantly to the formation of the government. To make informed choices, understanding electoral processes, political party platforms, and ideologies is crucial (Turashvili 2016). This knowledge can be acquired through civic education courses or active engagement in civic activities within schools.

In recent times, concerns about “political apathy” among the general population, especially the youth, have become prominent in media and political discourse (Sloam 2007). Youth apathy in an electoral democracy refers to a situation where young people exhibit disinterest or indifference towards voter registration and participation in general elections (Chauke 2020).

The involvement of young individuals in electoral and political processes holds importance for the development of modern democratic societies. Firstly, it ensures inclusivity in decision-making processes, allowing diverse voices to contribute to governance. Secondly, youth participation enables the

expression of their needs and opinions, thus ensuring the effective implementation of long-term policies (Turashvili 2016).

The observed decline in political participation in recent years has been attributed to the displacement of high-voting older generations by low-voting younger ones (Franklin et al. 2004; Lyons and Alexander 2000). This shift highlights the changing dynamics of political engagement among different age groups, necessitating a closer examination of youth electoral participation to understand the underlying factors influencing their involvement in democratic processes.

The Baltic countries, particularly Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, have witnessed a decline in political participation over the years, with notable decreases in voter turnout percentages (Ehin 2007). At the same time, the Baltic countries are also home to one of the largest minority communities in post-communist Europe with the lowest levels of political participation: the Russian-speaking minority (Galbreath and McEvoy 2010). This diminished participation can partly be attributed to the fact that a significant portion of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia and Estonia are stateless individuals, rendering them ineligible for electoral involvement. Unlike Lithuania, which extended citizenship to all Soviet-era migrants, Latvia and Estonia adopted a more complex approach, leaving many Russian speakers without citizenship (Galbreath and McEvoy 2010). Notably, studies reveal a stark contrast between Russian speakers in Lithuania, where over half identify with the national political community, and those in Latvia and Estonia, who feel marginalized and politically disempowered (Ehin 2007). This situation has led to a sense of alienation within the Russian-speaking minority, fostering distrust between this community and both the Estonian and Latvian governments, as well as a considerable segment of the majority population (Agarin 2013).

This context sets the stage for our analysis of intended political participation among youth in the Baltics, particularly focusing on students who responded to the questionnaire in the national language versus those who answered in Russian, aiming to investigate if these historical disparities persist in 2022.

SCHOOL SYSTEM AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Following this theoretical overview, the subsequent chapters delve deeper into the specific contexts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Each chapter offers comprehensive information on how the school

system in each of these countries is divided by language of instruction and a brief overview of how the teaching of civic education is anchored in each curriculum. Information on recent and planned changes is also provided.

ESTONIA

During the 50-year occupation, Estonia underwent a significant demographic transformation, marked by large-scale immigration that turned the once mono-ethnic state into a multicultural society (Kunitsõn et al. 2022). After Estonia regained its independence in 1991, Estonian became the official state language again, but 34.8% of the total population in Estonia claimed Russian as their first language (Vihalemm and Hogan-Brun 2013), so schools where Russian was the main language have remained, creating a bilingual educational system. However, state-funded universities swiftly transitioned to exclusive instruction in Estonian. As a result, the primary language of teaching in state-funded higher education institutions is now predominantly Estonian, with a few private universities offering courses in Russian (Lindemann and Saar 2012). The curricula for Estonian- and Russian-language schools were unified, and the number of hours devoted to Estonian language in Russian schools increased significantly. All schools in Estonia adhere to the same national curricula, with local governments having the authority to determine the language of instruction. Preschool and basic schools, under local government discretion, may operate in any language, typically offering a choice between Estonian, Russian, or Estonian language immersion schools (“keelekümblus”). The latter involves simultaneous teaching in both languages across all subjects. In upper secondary school, students can opt for full Estonian language instruction or choose to study a minimum of 60% of courses, including civic subjects, in Estonian (Kunitsõn et al. 2022).

However, despite the unified national curriculum and the use of Ministry of Education-approved textbooks in all schools, distinctions in curriculum and teaching practices exist between schools teaching primarily in Russian and schools teaching primarily in Estonian (Toots and Oja 2021). Despite the good scores reached by Estonian education in recent PISA studies, students attending schools primarily teaching in Russian lag behind those attending schools primarily teaching in Estonian by an average of one school year (the difference is 42 points) (OECD 2020). Over the past decade, upper secondary schools in Estonia

have primarily used Estonian as the language of instruction, yet a notable portion of students (23% in 2021) fail to attain the targeted B2 language proficiency level. The main reason for this is that previous levels of study do not provide a good enough starting point to reach the targets set for upper secondary education, and even at a very high level, three years of upper secondary education are not enough to bridge the gap (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research 2022). Additionally, the likelihood of second-generation Russians transitioning to higher education is diminished in comparison to Estonians. Even after adjusting for demographic factors, significant ethnic differences persist, particularly within the same gender and city of residence (Lindemann and Saar 2012). For these reasons, it is planned that all schools in Estonia will be converted to Estonian as of January 2024. The transition to Estonian-language learning concerns 31571 students and 2245 teachers who do not meet the language requirements (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research 2022).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, civic education in Estonia underwent a significant transformation, particularly in traditional subjects like history and Soviet-style civics. The prevailing sentiment among teachers by 1988 was that civic education, previously used for Soviet indoctrination, needed a fundamental conceptual change (Valdmaa 2002). The decline of Soviet rule facilitated the evolution of social subjects, granting teachers increased freedom to focus on relevant content. Initiatives such as the unofficial social studies programs in 1992–1993 and the formal inclusion of the civics course in the 1996 national curriculum marked pivotal steps in reshaping civic education (Kunitsõn et al. 2022). Since then, civic education has become a compulsory subject at all levels of general education, solidifying its place in the national curriculum adopted in 1996. The current curriculum, finalized in 2010 with minor adjustments in 2014, mandates civics as a compulsory course in both basic and upper secondary national curricula. Upper secondary schools specifically require two mandatory courses: “Governance of democratic society and citizen participation” and “Economy and world politics” (Kunitsõn et al. 2022). In terms of teacher training, Estonia relies on two public universities, the University of Tartu and Tallinn University, for providing education on civic and citizenship education (CCE). However, due to limited job prospects for teachers solely specializing in CCE, there isn’t a dedicated teacher program in social studies. Instead, relevant competencies for teaching civic education can be acquired

through a minor within the history teachers' study program (Toots and Oja 2021).

LATVIA

During the late 80s and early 90s in Latvia, there was a main paradigm shift in the education system. Education in the Soviet Union was based on norms and authority, whereas education ought to be based on humanistic pedagogy (Zids 2019). As Kangro (2018) suggests, one can distinguish three main stages in education paradigm shift in Latvia:

- 1) The stage of democratization of education: getting rid of Soviet ideology (from the mid-80s until 1990)
- 2) The stage of education policy creation, renewal and change (from 1990 till 2004)
- 3) The stage of inclusion of EU laws and policies into the education system (from 2004 on)

Considering changes in the education that have took place recently, one can add two more stages: The stage of transforming the educational process from teacher-led learning to students'-led learning was implemented with the project "Skola 2030" (School 2030) and the stage of cutting the Russian language as one of the two primary languages of education (year 2022–2023).

To help readers grasp the significance of the final stage, a detailed discussion is imperative. Before World War II, Latvia boasted a diverse educational landscape, comprising schools catering to various nationalities, including German, Russian, Hebrew, Polish, Lithuanian, and others. However, after World War II and during the Soviet Union's occupation of Latvia, the educational scenario underwent a drastic transformation. The Soviet government established two primary types of schools: those exclusively instructing in Latvian or Russian and dual-stream schools where both Russian and Latvian language streams coexisted within the same premises. Notably, students attending Russian-language schools or streams encountered distinct curricula, textbooks, and shorter study durations for secondary education in comparison to their counterparts in Latvian-language schools or streams (Matisāne 2010). Together with these "new" schools and new curricula, the government created a policy of two-stream schools where inside the same building there were both students in the Russian language stream and students in the Latvian language stream (Zids 2019). Not only the differences in curricula but also the national and cultural differences between

these students attending dual-stream schools, provoked different conflicts between students, and the main purpose of those schools, which was the integration of all nationalities and the creation of friendly Soviet society, failed. Recognizing the challenges posed by this approach, the Soviet Union government in Latvia made a decision in 1988: the gradual separation of dual-stream schools. This process led to the establishment of schools exclusively teaching in either Russian or Latvian language. This transformation persisted until the end of 1995 (Misāne 2010). Following Latvia's independence in 1991, efforts to renew schools for various minority communities were initiated. However, the deeply entrenched division between Latvian and Russian as the primary languages of instruction persisted, even in schools serving other minority groups such as Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, and the Roma community (Protassova 2002).

This period marked the initiation of educational policy reforms, focusing on shifting the educational paradigm and establishing Latvian as the primary language of instruction. In 1996, a significant step was taken to introduce Latvian as a second language in all minority schools where education was conducted in Russian. This decision was formalized into law in 1998. Notably, it was only from the 2007/2008 school year onward that Latvian became a compulsory language in all primary and secondary educational institutions, including minority schools. According to the law, from the first grade, one subject was taught in Latvian, increasing to 60% of all subjects in secondary school. Other subjects could be taught in the minority language (mainly Russian) or bilingually (Izglītības likums 1998). This transition was conceived as a gradual process aimed at ensuring that eventually, 100% of all subjects, starting from the first grade, would be taught exclusively in Latvian across all state and municipally funded schools. The shift reached a significant milestone in the 2019/2020 school year when obtaining a secondary education in any language other than Latvian in state or municipal schools became impossible. While the transition for other grades experienced some delays, the urgency escalated with the outbreak of Russia's war with Ukraine. Consequently, a decision was made, and starting from the 2023/2024 school year, a three-year plan was set in motion to ensure that in all state or municipally founded schools, students would exclusively study all subjects in the state language. Under the new regulations, the language and culture of minorities

are incorporated as additional elective subjects or within specialized interest education programs (Ibid.).

Latvia's civic education underwent a significant transformation, transitioning from teacher-led to student-led learning methods, and revising the curriculum starting from the 2019/2020 school year. This shift integrated civic subjects into various disciplines from the 1st school year onward, with full implementation by the 2022/2023 school year. Primary education is divided into three phases: grades 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9, with civic content seamlessly integrated into social studies. The curriculum covers diverse topics, including political systems, elections, minority rights, environmental concerns, and media literacy. The initial years focus on the individual and local community, expanding in later grades to historical contexts, social groups, and economic principles. The final year emphasizes sustainability, human rights, constitutional frameworks, democracy, and civic participation, fostering a comprehensive understanding of civic responsibilities (Skola2030).

LITHUANIA

In Lithuania, the status of the Lithuanian language as the state language was officially recognized on November 18th 1988 (Kalėdienė 2011). The language policies of the country, including the usage of Russian, Polish, and other languages, are governed by the Law on Ethnic Minorities of the Republic of Lithuania (Ibid.). A 1989 study revealed that approximately 37.8% of Russians in Lithuania were proficient in Lithuanian, a significantly higher percentage compared to their counterparts in Estonia and Latvia, suggesting a higher level of integration within Lithuanian society (Best 2013). Additionally, Lithuania's approach to granting citizenship to all individuals residing within its territory, regardless of their ethnic background, led to over 90% of non-Lithuanian individuals obtaining Lithuanian citizenship (Glāvan and Andrievschi-Bartkiene 2012).

The right to education in one's native language is protected by the Lithuanian law of education, and this right is fully upheld. Statistics from the 2010–2011 school years indicated the presence of 122 schools where children from ethnic minorities could receive primary, basic, and secondary education in their mother tongue (Ibid.).

A unique aspect of Lithuania's ethnic makeup is the significant Polish minority, constituting nearly 6% of the total

population in 2019. The presence of this minority can be traced back to historical factors, including border changes and assimilation processes. The Polish language holds historical significance, having been integral to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth established in 1569 (Janušauskiene 2021).

Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuanian authorities have not enforced Lithuanian as the exclusive language of instruction in schools. Although minority languages lack official status, they are used as mediums of instruction in minority educational institutions, particularly in Polish, Russian, and Belarusian schools. Teachers in these establishments are provided opportunities for relevant training and qualifications at universities. State minority schools are established in regions with significant ethnic minority populations. These schools, both single-language and mixed, offer classes in Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish, adhering to the Lithuanian language curriculum, including subjects like Lithuanian language, history, geography, nature science, and civic education (Bulajeva and Hogan-Brun 2008; Glāvan and Andrievschi-Bartkiene 2012).

Furthermore, higher education institutions in Lithuania prepare linguists and teachers specializing in ethnic minority languages. However, students from ethnic minorities pursuing other professions at the tertiary level primarily receive their education in the state language (Gečienė 2016). This multifaceted linguistic landscape reflects Lithuania's inclusive approach, where the coexistence of multiple languages is maintained within the educational framework.

Civic education in Lithuania underwent significant developments following the restoration of independence in 1990. The post-independence era aimed to give students a profound understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a free nation. In preparation for its accession to the European Union in 2004, Lithuania revamped its civic education program. This new initiative emphasized incorporating contents related to universal democratic principles and exchanging the concept of patriotism for a focus on national history and identity (Dukynaitė et al. 2021). Civic education is an integral component of the pre-primary, primary, and basic education curricula in Lithuania. In primary school, it is integrated into the subject "world knowledge". In lower secondary school (grades 5-8), civic education is interwoven into moral education, history, geography, and "Nature and human being". In grades 9-10, it takes the form of "Basics of civic education" and "Socio-civic activities" (Ibid.). Compulsory social-

civic activities encompass at least 10 hours per school year, although individual schools have the flexibility to allocate additional time. Additionally, since 2018, students in grades 9-10 have the option to choose a National Security and Defense module (Dukynaitė et al. 2021). Teachers qualified in history, sociology, law, political science, geography, or economics can instruct citizenship education without specific additional training. However, teachers focusing on citizenship fundamentals and those incorporating citizenship education into their teaching are encouraged to participate in supplementary training opportunities (Ibid.).

METHODOLOGY

Building upon the theoretical framework, our study advances several hypotheses to explore the relationship between the language of instruction, civic engagement, and intended electoral participation among young individuals in the Baltic states. We formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Students primarily instructed in the national language will demonstrate significantly higher reports of civic learning, participation in civic activities, and expected electoral participation compared to students primarily instructed in Russian, indicating the influence of language on educational outcomes.

H2: The language of instruction, specifically the primary language of instruction, will serve as a robust predictor for students' intended electoral participation, surpassing the influence of other factors such as civic learning opportunities and school-based activities.

Following, our working sample and the statistical procedures used to evaluate these hypotheses are described.

SAMPLE

The analysed data was obtained through ICCS 2022, a representative survey that was carried out with eighth grade students in 24 different educational systems in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The survey was carried out during spring and summer 2022 in the Northern Hemisphere. A student questionnaire with questions about various aspects of their political, cultural, and educational experiences and attitudes was used in this study.

In Estonia, 2671 students participated in the survey. Approximately 25% of the respondents (n=682) completed the survey in the Russian language. An overwhelming majority, more than 97% of respondents, reported being born in Estonia. Around a quarter of the participants stated that they spoke more than one language at home. Notably, among those who completed the questionnaire in Russian, nearly 98% confirmed that they primarily used a language other than Estonian in their daily home life. In contrast, among those who responded in Estonian, approximately 5% indicated that they often used a language other than Estonian at home.

In Latvia, the survey included 2868 participating students. Approximately a quarter of the respondents (n=684) completed the questionnaire in Russian. 95.6% of the students stated that they were born in Latvia. Nearly half of the participants (n=1395) reported speaking more than one language at home. Among the respondents who answered the survey in Latvian, 14% indicated using a language other than Latvian primarily in their daily home life. Within the group of students who answered the questionnaire in Russian, 95% confirmed using a language other than Latvian as their primary language at home.

In Lithuania, a total of 3551 students participated in ICCS 2022. Among them, approximately 12% (n=420) responded in Russian, indicating their affiliation with Russian minority schools in the country. Additionally, there are Polish minority schools in Lithuania, and 13% of the respondents (n=464) completed the questionnaire in Polish. The majority of students, around 75%, completed the survey in Lithuanian. Notably, nearly 96% of the participants were born in Lithuania. A significant portion, approximately 42%, reported speaking more than one language at home. Among students who answered in Lithuanian, 5% mentioned using another language besides Lithuanian predominantly at home. Conversely, a substantial majority of students (94%) who completed the questionnaire in Russian stated that Russian was their primary language at home.

By analysing the answers from each class, we observed that only one class had one half of the students answering the questionnaire in Russian and the other half in the national language. Contrastingly, the remaining participating classes universally adhered to a specific language of testing for all students. This consistent trend strongly suggests uniformity in the educational curriculum across these classes. The utilization of a singular language of testing serves as a reliable indicator, implying

that students within these classes are likely enrolled in cohesive educational programs conducted predominantly in one language.

INSTRUMENTS

To compare civic learning, civic engagement, and intended electoral participation between groups who completed the survey in their country's national language and those who answered in Russian, we examined the following scales:

- civic learning opportunities: the ICCS 2022 student survey contained a question about civic education that asked students to rate how much ("to a large extent", "to a moderate extent", "to a small extent", "not at all") they had learned about each of the following at their school: "how citizens can vote in local or national election"; "how laws are introduced and changed in [country of test]"; "how to protect the environment (e.g., through energy-saving or recycling)"; "how to contribute to solving problems in the [local community]"; "how citizen rights are protected in [country of test]"; and "political issues and events in other countries";
- participation in school-related civic activities: students were asked to report on their participation in the following civic-related school activities: "voting for class representative or school parliament/council"; "taking part in decision-making about how the school is run"; and "becoming a candidate for class representative or school parliament/council"; for each activity, they could choose one option between the following: "yes, I have done this within the last twelve months", "yes, I have done this but more than a year ago", or "no, I have never done this"
- expected electoral participation: using a set of criteria that reflected expected electoral participation as adults ("vote in local elections", "vote in national elections", and "get information about candidates before voting in an election") students in the ICCS 2022 rated their expectations to do it on a 4-point Likert scale consisting of the following options: "I would certainly do this", "I would probably do this", "I would probably not do this", and "I would certainly not do this".

All scale values are based on Rasch analyses, and the detailed process of scale building for the ICCS study is documented in the technical report (Schulz, Carstens, et al. 2018).

METHOD

To answer the first research question, t-tests with independent samples were conducted in order to assess if there are significant differences in reports about civic learning, participation in civic activities at school, and intended electoral participation between students who responded in their national language and those who answered in Russian.

Furthermore, linear regression was used to assess the ability of three control measures (reports about civic learning, participation in civic activities at school and language of testing) to predict expected electoral participation.

We dichotomized the variable language of testing into two distinct categories: 0 for Russian and 1 for the national language. Additionally, students in Lithuania who answered the questionnaire in Polish were not considered in the analysis. This exclusion was grounded in the unique historical and sociocultural context of the Polish-speaking minority, which differs significantly from that of the Russian-speaking minority.

Both analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29.

RESULTS

T-TESTS

The outcomes of the independent samples t-tests are presented in Table 1 divided by country. The classification of Cohen's *d* was done according to Cohen (1992), differentiating between small, moderate, and large effects (.20, .50, and .80, respectively).

For the civic learning scale, a t-test was conducted between students who responded the survey in Estonian and students who responded the survey in Russian. The mean score for responses in Estonian ($M = 45.6$, $SD = 9.7$) was slightly higher than that of responses in Russian ($M = 44.7$, $SD = 10$), $t(682) = 2.2$, $p = 0.2$. However, no significant difference between both groups could be observed. In terms of civic activities, responses in Estonian ($M = 46.2$, $SD = 10.7$) exhibited significantly higher scores compared to their counterparts in Russian ($M = 44.6$, $SD = 10.7$), $t(682) = 3.4$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size was, however, quite small, with Cohen's *d* at 0.15. Regarding intended electoral participation, Estonian-language respondents ($M = 45.5$, $SD = 9.3$) demonstrated higher

scores than Russian-language respondents ($M = 43.6$, $SD = 9.8$), $t(682) = 4.4$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size for this comparison was 0.20, indicating a small difference.

Results in Latvia were marked by higher effect sizes than in Estonia. Students who answered the survey in Latvian ($M = 46.0$, $SD = 9.3$) had significantly higher scores for reported civic learning opportunities at school compared to students who answered the survey in Russian ($M = 40.5$, $SD = 11.1$), $t(684) = 11.5$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size was moderate, with Cohen's d at 0.54. For civic activities, responses in Latvian ($M = 46.9$, $SD = 10.3$) had significantly higher scores than responses in Russian ($M = 42.0$, $SD = 10.4$), $t(684) = 10.1$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size for this comparison was 0.49, indicating a moderate difference. In terms of intended electoral participation, Latvian-language respondents ($M = 45.6$, $SD = 10.2$) showed higher scores than Russian-language respondents ($M = 40.6$, $SD = 9.9$), $t(684) = 10.3$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size was considerable, with Cohen's d at 0.48.

Significant differences between both student groups were also observed in Lithuania. Students who answered the survey in Lithuanian ($M = 46.1$, $SD = 9.7$) had significantly higher scores compared to those who completed the survey in Russian ($M = 42.3$, $SD = 11$), $t(420) = 7$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size was small, with Cohen's d at 0.38. For civic activities, responses in Lithuanian ($M = 49.2$, $SD = 9.2$) demonstrated significantly higher scores than responses in Russian ($M = 46.1$, $SD = 10.5$), $t(464) = 11$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size for this comparison was 0.37, indicating a small difference. Regarding intended electoral participation, Lithuanian-language respondents ($M = 49.6$, $SD = 9.1$) exhibited higher scores than Russian-language respondents ($M = 43.9$, $SD = 9.7$), $t(464) = 6$, $p = 0.001$. The effect size was substantial, with Cohen's d at 0.62, suggesting a moderate difference between the groups. After t-tests, linear regression was conducted for students of each country. In Estonia, the total variance of expected electoral participation explained by the model consisting of language of test, reports of civic learning opportunities and participation in civic school activities was 7%, $F(3, 2621) = 68.657$, $p < .0001$. Language of test had the lowest beta value (beta = .066, $p < .001$), whereas participation in civic activities at school displayed the highest beta value and therefore the highest contribution to explaining the variance of expected electoral participation (beta = .190, $p < .001$).

The proposed model explained a higher percentage of the variation in electoral participation in Latvia, 12%, $F(3, 2661) = 122.18$, $p < .0001$. As in Estonia, language of test had the lowest beta value for the Latvian sample ($\beta = .123$, $p < .001$), whereas participation in civic school activities presented the highest beta value ($\beta = .197$, $p < .001$).

Table 1. Results of t-test analysis

| Estonia Scales | Language of testing | | | | t | p | Cohens d |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|------|----------------------|------|------|------|----------|
| | Responses in Estonian | | Responses in Russian | | | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Civic learning | 45.6 | 9.7 | 44.7 | 10 | 2.2 | 0.2 | .10 |
| Civic activities | 46.2 | 10.7 | 44.6 | 10.7 | 3.4 | .001 | .15 |
| Electoral Participation | 45.5 | 9.3 | 43.6 | 9.8 | 4.4 | .001 | .20 |
| Latvia Scales | Responses in Latvian | | Responses in Russian | | t | p | Cohens d |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| | Civic learning | 46.0 | 9.3 | 40.5 | | | |
| Civic activities | 46.9 | 10.3 | 42.0 | 10.4 | 10.1 | .001 | .49 |
| Electoral Participation | 45.6 | 10.2 | 40.6 | 9.9 | 10.3 | .001 | .48 |
| Lithuania Scales | Responses in Lithuanian | | Responses in Russian | | t | p | Cohens d |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| | Civic learning | 46.1 | 9.7 | 42.3 | | | |
| Civic activities | 49.2 | 9.2 | 46.1 | 10.5 | 11 | .001 | .37 |
| Electoral Participation | 49.6 | 9.1 | 43.9 | 9.7 | 6 | .001 | .62 |

In Lithuania, a different situation is observed than in the other two countries. The model explained 10% of the variance of the independent variable, $F(3, 2993) = 119.33$, however, civic learning opportunities accounted for the lowest beta value ($\beta = .118$, $p < .001$). The highest beta value was once again participation in civic activities at school ($\beta = .194$, $p < .001$).

Results confirm Hypothesis 1 that there are indeed significant differences between students who responded in the national language and those who answered in Russian. However, Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed, as language choice proved not to be the strongest predictor for intended electoral participation; instead, it was active participation in school-based civic activities that emerged as the primary influential factor.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of responses from 14-year-old students in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania regarding civic learning, participation in civic activities, and intended electoral participation in adult age revealed nuanced differences between those who responded in the national language and those who answered in Russian. These disparities, although statistically significant, are relatively small to moderate in magnitude. Notably, the variations are most pronounced in Latvia. In contrast, the differences are comparatively smaller in Estonia.

Certainly, the observed differences between students' reports hint at potential disparities in school curricula between programs taught in Russian and the national language, especially in Latvia. This raises a crucial question that warrants further research: why do students who responded in Russian in Latvia report significantly fewer opportunities to engage with civic education and participate in school-based civic activities compared to their peers predominantly taught in Latvian? A similar inquiry arises in Lithuania. This disparity not only underscores the importance of exploring the underlying reasons but also emphasizes the need for educational reforms to ensure equitable access to civic learning experiences for students regardless of the language of instruction. Addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering inclusive civic education initiatives within the Baltic educational landscape.

An important conclusion spans across all three Baltic nations: participation in school-based civic activities such as voting for class representative emerges as the most important predictor of intending to vote in national or local elections at adult age. This

factor consistently exhibits the most substantial contribution to explaining the variance in students' intentions to partake in elections. These findings are aligned with previous research, which highlighted the significant influence of engaging in civic activities at school on expected electoral participation, a phenomenon reaffirmed by our results (Deimel et al. 2022; Keating and Janmaat 2016; Reichert and Print 2018). Considering the above-mentioned results, it is possible that the differences in intended electoral participation between both student groups are not solely due to the language of instruction but rather because of the lack of civic activities in school programs primarily taught in Russian.

In light of the impending cessation of Russian-language programs in Latvia and Estonia, the findings from ICCS 2022 carry significant weight. This assessment potentially represents one of the final possibilities for comprehensive evaluations of the disparities between students in distinct language-taught programs across the Baltic states. These results hold value for shaping future teacher training initiatives and school curricula. Emphasizing civic education and active engagement in these curricula becomes imperative to bridge the existing gap between students attending different language programs. Moreover, for the students presently enrolled in programs where Russian is the main language of instruction, bridging this gap is crucial. Out-of-school activities, such as workshops, campaigns, and local initiatives, are essential to demonstrate to these young citizens that they have the agency to participate actively, including voting, and to comprehend the functioning of the government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The completion of this article was made possible through the generous funding provided by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Educational Research of the University Duisburg-Essen for a research trip to the Baltic countries in September/October 2023. Their support significantly contributed to gaining a deeper understanding of the educational systems in these countries, enhancing the quality and context of this paper.

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