

This thesis deals with the issue of teaching continuing beginners in adult EFL classes. It focuses on the description of factors that may influence the learning stagnation among these learners, and it attempts to ascertain the extent to which these factors take effect. Consequently, the thesis aims to characterize Czech continuing beginners as an independent group of learners and to provide scientific evidence which could clarify the assumptions, underlying the continuing-beginner concept. Lastly, but importantly, the thesis also intends to instigate further research in the field.

The subject was investigated from the perspective of available pedagogical, andragogical and psychological literature. Accordingly, four major factors, which may be at the root of continuing-beginner phenomenon, were identified: a mismatch between learning and teaching styles, insufficient study motivation, hindrances to learning and learning disabilities. These four areas were further focused on in a questionnaire survey, using rating scales to determine the importance of the individual areas. The study worked with three hypotheses. Firstly, continuing beginners were expected to report difficulties in at least two of the established areas. Secondly, it was presupposed that the rate of learning disabilities would be somewhat higher with continuing beginners than with other beginner groups. Lastly, continuing beginner learners were thought to have extrinsic motivation more developed than intrinsic motivation. However, none of the hypotheses has been statistically verified, using the ANOVA test.

Czech continuing beginners were found to be only slightly different from other beginner learners. The study motivation of continuing beginners was primarily instrumental and competence in nature, but unlike the motivation of other beginners, it lacked specifically set goals. Also, contrary to regular beginner groups, continuing beginners reported a greater incidence of hindrances to learning, the most influential one being a lack of time for preparation at home (74 % of respondents), tiredness (52 %) and fear of embarrassing oneself in the eyes of others (48 %). Continuing beginners also showed a relatively lower level of development of various learning styles. Nevertheless, learning-style preferences were similar among all beginner learners (read/write – visual – auditory – kinaesthetic). The study also identified two potential problems, stemming from the relationship between teachers and students. It was, firstly, a frequent use of auditory style by the teachers despite its low preferences among the students. Further, it was the use of group work, which displayed a discrepancy in teacher – student preferences in 39 % of cases.

The major finding is that no statistically significant differences between continuing beginners and other beginner learners have been established. As the study revealed, one of the chief constraints of continuing beginners is the insufficient practice of the target language, which could partly be compensated for by the teachers changing the form of homework assignments. The outcomes presented in the thesis allow a better understanding of the continuing-beginner phenomenon and its possible pedagogical implications.