Continuing Beginner Learners in Adult EFL Classes

Věční začátečníci v kurzech anglického jazyka pro dospělé

Diploma Thesis

Author: Bc. et Bc. Šárka Mihulková
Approbation: English – Music
Supervisor: PaedDr. Marie Hofmannová
Submission: Prague 2014

TITLE: **Continuing Beginner Learners in Adult EFL Classes**

AUTHOR: Bc. et Bc. Šárka Mihulková

SUPERVISOR: PaedDr. Marie Hofmannová

DEPARTMENT: Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague

SUMMARY: The diploma thesis focuses on continuing beginner learners in adult EFL classes. As the subject has not yet been elaborately discussed in literature, the thesis attempts to determine the fundamentals of the issue, to describe the factors that may have an influence on its origin and development, and to disclose the characteristics typical of such a group of students. The thesis is subdivided into a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part compiles findings from available research and literature, namely methodological, andragogical and psychological literature. On these bases, it defines the factors that affect foreign language learning. The practical part uses a questionnaire survey to discover how the factors discussed influence continuing beginner learners. The aim of the thesis is to provide characteristics of continuing beginners as a specific group of learners and to instigate further research related to the subject.

KEYWORDS: adult education; English as a foreign language (EFL); continuing beginners; factors influencing the learning process; learning styles; teaching styles; learning motivation; blocks to learning; learning disabilities; language fossilization

NÁZEV PRÁCE: **Věční začátečníci v kurzech anglického jazyka pro dospělé**

AUTOR: Bc. et Bc. Šárka Mihulková

ŠKOLITEL: PaedDr. Marie Hofmannová

KATEDRA: Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury, PedF UK v Praze

ANOTACE: Diplomová práce se zabývá problematikou věčného začátečnictví v kurzech anglického jazyka pro dospělé. Protože se jedná o téma, které není doposud v odborné literatuře podrobně zpracováno, snaží se práce stanovit podstatu problému, uvést faktory, které mohou ovlivňovat jeho vznik a vývoj, a zjistit charakteristiky, jež jsou typické pro tuto skupinu studentů. Práce je rozdělena na část teoretickou a praktickou. Teoretická část sbírá poznatky o problému z dostupných výzkumů a literatury, tj. literatury pedagogické, andragogické a psychologické. Na jejich základě definuje faktory, které ovlivňují učení cizího jazyka. Část praktická vychází z dotazníkového šetření, pomocí něhož zjišťuje, nakolik vytyčené faktory ovlivňují skupinu věčných začátečníků. Cílem práce je charakterizovat specifika věčných začátečníků jakožto vydělitelné skupiny studentů a poskytnout podněty pro další výzkum v této oblasti.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA: výuka dospělých; angličtina jako cizí jazyk; věční začátečníci; faktory ovlivňující proces učení; učební styly; výukové styly; motivace k učení; překážky v učení; poruchy učení; jazyková fosilizace

Abstract

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, andragogcial 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.

Abstrakt

Tato práce řeší otázky výuky věčných začátečníků v kurzech anglického jazyka pro dospělé. Zaměřuje se na popis faktorů, jež mohou mít vliv na stagnaci procesu učení u této skupiny žáků, a snaží se zjistit, do jaké míry se u ní projevují. Cílem této práce je uvést na základě těchto zjištění popis českých věčných začátečníků jakožto svébytné skupiny studentů a podat výzkumné podklady, jež by pomohly objasnit podstatu pojmu „věčný začátečník". V neposlední řadě si pak práce klade za cíl poskytnout podněty pro další výzkum v této oblasti.

Zvolená problematika byla uchopena z pohledu dostupné literatury pedagogické, andragogické a psychologické. Na jejím základě byly vytyčeny čtyři hlavní faktory, jež mohou stát u zrodu věčného začátečnictví: nesoulad mezi užívanými styly učení a výuky, nedostatečná motivace ke studiu, překážky v učení a specifické poruchy učení. Na tyto čtyři oblasti bylo potom zaměřeno dotazníkové šetření, ve kterém byla prostřednictvím škálovacích otázek zjišťována míra závažnosti jednotlivých oblastí. Výzkum pracoval se třemi hypotézami, a to předně s tou, že u věčných začátečníků se objeví potíže alespoň ve dvou z vytýčených oblastí. Dále bylo předpokládáno, že výskyt specifických poruch učení bude u věčných začátečníků vyšší než v běžné populaci a že tito žáci budou mít rozvinutější vnější motivaci než vnitřní. Ani jedna z hypotéz se však na základě statistického testování (ANOVA) nepotvrdila.

Čeští věční začátečníci byli shledáni mírně odlišnými od ostatních začátečnických skupin. Jejich motivace ke studiu byla především instrumentální a výkonové povahy, avšak na rozdíl od běžných začátečníků postrádala jednoznačně specifikované cíle. Oproti ostatním studentům také vykazovali poněkud silnější přítomnost bloků v učení, přičemž nejsilnější překážkou byl nedostatek času na domácí přípravu (74 % dotázaných), únava (52 %) a strach, že se ztrapní v očích ostatních (48 %). Věční začátečníci také většinou vykazovali poněkud nižší úroveň rozvinutosti učebních stylů, preference jejich využití však byly obdobné ve všech skupinách (čtení/psaní – vizuální – auditivní – kinestetický). Byly rovněž identifikovány dva potenciální problémy ve vztahu učitel – žák. Jednak časté užívání auditivního stylu ze strany učitelů navzdory jeho nižším preferencím u žáků a jednak užívání skupinové práce. S ohledem na skupinovou práci bylo zjištěno, že panuje rozpor v preferencích mezi učiteli a žáky v 39 % případů.

Hlavním zjištěním je, že se nepodařilo prokázat existenci statisticky významných rozdílů mezi věčnými začátečníky a ostatními začátečnickými skupinami. U věčných začátečníků jedny z hlavních potíží, jak se ukázalo, spočívají v nedostatečném procvičování cílového jazyka, což by bylo možné částečně kompenzovat ze strany učitele úpravou formy zadávání domácích úkolů. Výsledky této práce umožňují lépe pochopit, co se skrývá pod pojmem „věčný začátečník" a jaké to může mít pedagogické implikace.

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except as acknowledged in the text. I confirm that the printed and the electronic version of the thesis are identical and I give my consent for my thesis to be stored in the Theses database. The thesis has not been previously used to earn any other degree.

Prague, 10th April 2014

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Šárka Mihulková

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This diploma thesis focuses on issues related to teaching continuing beginners (in Czech *věční začátečníci*), i.e. beginner students who seem to make virtually no progress in their learning even after several years of study. Teaching continuing beginners is a subject evoking multiple connotations among EFL teachers – those of dread, contempt, resignation, but also challenge and determination to break this vicious circle and to change the situation. Certainly many an English teacher had to face this problem, either teaching a course directly targeted at this group of learners, or having students with these characteristics in a regular beginner course. Though the topic is rather troubling and demanding to deal with, surprisingly there seems to be little literature available on this subject.

The topic itself is bordering on EFL methodology, andragogy and psychology. There are many books available specializing in these areas. So it is possible for teachers to complement their class observations by collecting information from literature of these areas separately, which gradually enables them to build the background picture of what may be happening with the students. Then, trial-and-error, the teachers can attempt to tailor their teaching to the students' specific needs. Ideally, if the teacher's inferences are correct, their knowledge sufficient and their methodological procedure well-selected, the students' learning process enhances and little by little starts to progress. If anything in the process fails, the students' situation remains the same, which gradually results in the teachers' pessimism or ignorance of the problem. Unfortunately, there is no help for a teacher in assessing the students' condition; but literature concentrating directly on the subject could substantially alleviate teachers' situation. Therefore, this thesis collects information relevant to the topic of continuing beginners and composes an account of whatever seems useful to know for a teacher dealing with a continuing beginner class.

As continuing beginners are usually recognized according to their classroom performance, there is yet insufficient insight into the actual causes of the continuing beginners phenomenon. This thesis investigates possible influences on the state continuing

beginners find themselves in and tries to determine the features which distinguish continuing beginners from other students.

Technically, the thesis is divided into two parts: theoretical and practical. The theoretical part defines different types of beginner students and identifies five factors which seem to affect the learning process substantially. These factors are referred to on a general level so that even uninformed readers could understand the basic principles. Only then are they specified in terms of EFL teaching/ learning with respect to recent scientific studies run in the field. It is presumed that these factors, functioning as variables influencing the learning outcomes, contribute to the stagnation of continuing beginners' learning.

The practical part is based on a questionnaire survey. It focuses on Czech EFL continuing beginners as a specific group of learners, having their distinctive characteristics. It works with three hypotheses relating to continuing beginners' preferences in the areas focused on in the theoretical part. Namely, it attempts to testify if continuing beginners:

1. show negative tendencies in at least two of the following categories: correspondence between teaching and learning styles, motivation, hindrances to learning, learning disabilities;
2. will have developed extrinsic motivation more strongly than intrinsic motivation;
3. report a higher rate of learning disabilities than in regular population.

Subsequently, it gives a comprehensive characterisation of continuing beginners based on the survey data and outlines potential andragogical implications.

This thesis constitutes just a tip of the iceberg. Its main aim is to raise consciousness of the issue, to evoke interest in the subject and to encourage further research, which would provide legitimate methodological support for EFL teachers facing the problem. This thesis by no means offers methodological instruction of how to teach continuing beginner classes, nor does it present an exhaustive list of factors affecting students' learning. It is rather a compendium or an information brochure, giving its readers a chance to know the breadth and complexity underlying the phenomenon of continuing beginner learners. Thus, it may be especially advantageous for beginner teachers or any practicing teachers who find themselves baffled by their continuing beginner students.

1 Theoretical Background

This chapter aims to define the key terms used throughout the thesis and to give account of the theoretical bases that underlie adult education. It will mainly focus on the characteristics and typology of beginner learners, on various styles of learning and on the influences that affect learning and classroom interaction, with special emphasis on impediments to learning. As many of the issues discussed are generally valid in adult education, the matter will be addressed from a general viewpoint and specified with regard to ESL/EFL where relevant.

1.1 Key Terms Definitions

"A definition is the enclosing a wilderness of idea within a wall of words."

Samuel Butler

To begin with, this chapter presents alphabetically ordered definitions of terms as used and understood in the thesis.

adult learner	= a learner who takes part in non-compulsory education, seen as the opposite of children or youth learners attending compulsory, institutionalized education
	According to Rogers, adult learners mostly share the following characteristic features:
	• They define themselves as adults.
	• They are in the middle of a process of growth; they are developing in different directions and at a different pace.
	• They bring with them a package of experience and values, though they may be varying degrees of willingness to use it to help the learning process.
	• They come to education with intentions.
	• They bring expectations about the learning process and they have beliefs about what they can and cannot do in the way of learning.
	• They have competing interests.
	• They already have their own patterns of learning.
	Rogers (71; 82)

andragogy	= a discipline focusing on the aspects of adult education and learning (Beneš 11; translated by ŠM)
continuing beginner	= a student whose learning progress stagnates at beginner level
EFL[1]	= English as a foreign language
ESL[1]	= English as a second language
false beginner	= a student who starts learning a foreign language but has already some knowledge of it
language skills	= productive skills (speaking, writing) and receptive skills (listening, reading)
language subskills	= grammar + vocabulary + pronunciation
learner	= a person attending an EFL/ESL course
learning style	= an individual's preferred mode of processing information and learning, realized by the selection of learning strategies
learning strategy	= "the way in which students choose to deal with specific learning tasks" (Coffield et al. 2004)
mother tongue	= L_1 = the native language, i.e. Czech within the boundaries of this thesis
student	used interchangeably with 'learner'
target language	= L_2 = a non-native language a student is learning, i.e. English throughout the thesis

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[1] The main distinction between FL and SL lies in the environment in (and for) which the target language is learnt. Littlewood (1984) writes: "… A second language has social functions within the community where it is learnt (e.g. as lingua franca or as the language of another social group), whereas a foreign language is learnt primarily for contact outside one's own community." (2). Olenka Bilash (2009) adds that these two also differ in the exposure to the target language. While in a SL situation the student is exposed to the language in various situations outside the classroom, in a FL situation the student is exposed to the target language almost exclusively in the classroom. That is the reason why SL is usually associated with emigrants learning the language of their target country.

1.2 Beginner Learners

The following chapter touches upon the term *beginner* in the context of ESL/EFL. It attempts to show that the seemingly straightforward term is not so easily tangible and that it functions rather as an umbrella term covering multiple notions about learners at a certain level of English proficiency.

1.2.1 Who are beginners?

Being a beginner generally connotes being in an initial stage of learning or doing something. Some of the renowned English explanatory dictionaries give the subsequent definitions:

- "A beginner is someone who has just started learning to do something and cannot do it very well yet." (Collins-Cobuild Dictionary)
- "A beginner is a person who is beginning something or doing something for the first time." (Merriam–Webster Dictionary)
- "A beginner is someone who has just started to do or learn something." (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English)
- "A beginner is a person just starting to learn a skill or take part in an activity." (Oxford English Dictionary)

All of the definitions mention the recent start of the person's doing, which if transferred to EFL/ESL context would mean the start of English learning. This is, however, rather misleading as beginners in ESL/EFL learning do not necessarily need to be new to learning English. The upcoming paragraphs will try to cast some light on the types and characteristic features of ESL/EFL beginners.

The first group of beginners is that which fulfils the premise of being new to learning English as a foreign language. This group is also referred to as **absolute beginners**. These students have no or very little knowledge of English and they have to be taught the basic rules and vocabulary to be able to perform in simple communicative situations (Jones). It would be a mistake, though, to consider such groups to be homogenous in nature.

The students may actually differ in their knowledge and skills as well as in their socio-cultural background and may have very diverse aspirations in their English learning. Jones, therefore, further distinguishes between beginners with and without the knowledge of Roman alphabet, and between monolingual and multilingual beginners. Apparently, many more distinctions among absolute beginners could be made, categorizing them from different perspectives.

For the purposes of this thesis, which is concerned with adult beginners, the differences between **young and adult beginners** will be pointed out. The main distinction is not the students' age (the age limits of adulthood being culturally specific) but their inner characteristics. Young learners are associated with changing interests, growing talents, the lack of maturity in judging others and themselves and with flight from their responsibilities (Rogers 43). Jones also mentions them being less motivated and attentive and consequently more likely to cause disciplinary problems. On the other hand, he also characterizes them as having "greater language awareness" and being able to grasp new language with more ease. Both Jones and Rogers agree that young learners have less-defined expectations as to their teacher, their learning styles and the anticipated results of their learning, and that they are in the process of forming their perspectives. Adult students are, on the contrary, viewed as fully developed, having mature judgements about themselves as well as others and being autonomous in their learning (Rogers 43). Nevertheless, Rogers highlights that this does not make adults any more homogenous as learners and that "the most important characteristic of any group of adult student participants is that they will be very diverse" (70). All adult students bring substantially different knowledge, experience and expectations about their learning and its outcomes. While some of them may be striving for autonomy in their learning, others may be willing to accept a dependant role in the learning process (Rogers 82). Many adult students also have competing interests, which may interfere with their learning. Jones stresses that adult students are generally more likely to have less language awareness and to be struggling with new language introduced. Though all these may be perceived as setbacks, they need not inevitably be ones. Unlike young learners, adults have the power to apply much of what they learn in their daily lives straight away and their awareness of need and purpose of their learning may help them pursue their learning goals more assiduously. Jones

directly attributes greater motivation and attentiveness to adult learners and also considers them to be more likely to build rapport with the teacher.

The hitherto discussed characteristics are observable qualities of virtually any adult students, rather than the defining criteria for beginner learners. Beginners in terms of language learning can naturally be characterized in a more clear-cut way by the level of their linguistic competence. The commonly used guideline as to what a foreign-language learner should be able to accomplish at a particular stage of foreign-language learning is given by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (=CEFR, 2001).

CEFR does not use 'beginner' in its terminology but it distinguishes six levels of language proficiency, out of which the two lowest levels, also sheltered under the term 'basic user', correspond to the term 'beginner' as used in this thesis. It is possible to make such a generalization because the boundaries between the levels are rather vague. The lowest described level, labelled A1 (Breakthrough), is followed by A2 level (Waystage). However, a branching approach is often adopted in order to make the reference system more flexible to students' actual performance. Each of the levels can, therefore, be subdivided into more finely differentiated stages (such as A1.1, A1.2… as well as A2.1 or even A2.1.1 and A2.1.2). CEFR itself stresses that "establishing cut-off points between levels is always a subjective procedure" and that it is institution dependent since "some institutions prefer broad levels, while others prefer narrow ones" (CEFR 32). Consequently, the boundaries between A1 and A2 get blurred and students at these level find themselves somewhere in the transition from a non-user to an independent foreign-language user. Some other terminologies use the terms 'beginner', 'elementary' and 'pre-intermediate' to refer to A level students. 'Beginner' is used restrictedly in the meaning of absolute beginner, 'elementary' roughly corresponds to false beginners and 'pre-intermediate' refers to the transition to becoming an independent user.

Resuming the original question, what are the language characteristics of beginners (in the broader sense of the word)? CEFR describes them from two perspectives: global, which provides basic orientation-points, and personal, which gives a more detailed account of learners' activities, competences and strategies and can be also used as guidelines for students' self-assessment. The CEFR global characteristics are as follows (for a more detailed description see CEFR 26 – 29):

Basic User	**A1**	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce himself/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

(CEFR 24)

While level A1 is considered to be the point at which students are able to engage in simple interactions, such as asking and answering simple questions about themselves and their whereabouts, and to manage basic communication relating to very familiar topics or cases of urgent need, level A2 goes further in developing the social functions of language (CEFR 33). A2 students should be able to cope with brief social exchanges, to initiate and respond appropriately to greetings, invitations, requests, offers, personal questions etc. Moreover, they should be able to make simple everyday life transactions, including shopping, travelling, asking for basic information and asking the way (CEFR 34). To summarize, a basic foreign language user should gradually master simplified ways of communication that would suffice in most everyday situations.

In this chapter, the term 'beginner' has been defined from a general and from a linguistic point of view and has been characterised through the competencies it is associated with. To achieve these communicative competencies seems to be the goal of many students who take up English as a foreign language. Yet for some students it is a very long-term and almost unreachable goal. In the subsequent chapter, such students will be explored in greater detail.

1.2.2 Who are false beginners?

The previous chapter has introduced the term 'absolute beginner', labelling a student who is new to language learning. It has also been suggested that being new to language learning does not necessarily define a beginner as their linguistic competences do. The students who are not new to learning a particular language, but whose linguistic

competencies are at a beginner's level are called **false beginners**. Many definitions of false beginners stress two aspects, i.e. possessing some knowledge of a language and resuming one's language studies. For example, Macmillan's dictionary states that a false beginner is "someone who starts to study a language from the beginning again, although they already have a slight knowledge of it" while Collins-Cobuild and Oxford dictionaries formulate the definition conversely as "someone who has some knowledge of a language but has just started to study it from the beginning". Jones concretizes these definitions and adds that false beginners are "students that have previously studied or been exposed to English, but have learned or remembered very little." This definition reveals how varied the background of false beginners may be. Apparently, there exist numerous kinds of students who are classified as false beginners, ranging from students who picked up some chunks of language after exposure to the language, across self-study students to students who had already been involved in formal language education but from various reasons failed to achieve higher than beginner's standard.

From an educational point of view, there are some disparities between absolute and false beginners. Jones remarks that when teaching subskills, false beginners need a review to clarify basic language points rather than elaborate teacher presentations. In accordance with this he notes that eliciting plays a much more important role in false-beginner teaching than in absolute-beginner one. As regards false beginners' language skills, Tomoko Nakamura, who investigated language skill loss and maintenance among Japanese ESL students, reports that false beginners exceed absolute beginners in loud reading whereas their main problem seems to be in decoding English words. Therefore, their comprehension is approximately on the same level as absolute beginners'. Moreover, false beginners seem to have a slightly different approach to the teaching-learning process than absolute beginners. Frantzen and Sieloff Magnan carried out a study on class dynamic between absolute and false beginners and discovered that false beginners are less anxious in processing and producing the language and that they have higher expectations about their grades, when compared to absolute beginners. On the other hand, significantly fewer false beginners than absolute beginners in the study planned to continue studying the language, which may suggest that false-beginner learners are either less motivated or have lower aspirations for their learning.

Neither from the definitions nor from the characteristics stated above is it clear how long a student can be called a false beginner. Czech uses a special term, "věčný začátečník", to label students who stay at the beginner level for a longer period of time (e.g. several years) or who repeatedly start and cease learning a language. These students fulfil the definition of false beginners in that they have certain knowledge of the language and that they re-start their learning from the beginning all over again, and yet they are specific in that their progress and skill maintenance is very slow, if observable at all. There seem to be no publications or studies in English that would expound the phenomenon or introduce English terminology. Despite this, language schools and similar institutions do encounter this type of learners and try to coin their own English term, usually based on translation of the non-English term into English. Here are some of the suggested terms that have been come across:

eternal beginners (SpeakUp Language Centre, Poprad, Slovakia; Jeanette Hoffmann in her article "Writers, texts and writing acts: Gendered user images in word processing software" in relation to women learning IT),

forever beginners (Inside English, a language school in Karlovy Vary, the Czech Republic),

continuing beginners (language courses at Brain Gym, Canberra, Australia; yoga classes at Salt Spring Centre, Salt Spring Island, Canada; Levine Music School, Washington, USA).

It is apparent that the issue is not solely restricted to language teaching but befalls other areas of education as well. Considering the three terms above, the first two seem rather artificial and do not sound authentic, as for instance the second one uses an adverb to pre-modify a noun, which is not common in English. Moreover, both these terms carry a rather negative connotation, implying that the students have no chance to proceed to a higher level of proficiency. In contrast, the third term, continuing beginners, sets the students into the continuum side by side with other students and stresses the process of learning and improvement. On the other hand, it fails to capture the long-term nature. Thus it may be useful to reconsider the options and possibly introduce a completely new term, which would embrace both the positive and the negative aspects.

1.2.3 Language Fossilization

It has been suggested that some beginners seem to be unable to overcome the initial difficulties of learning a language, and stagnate. Educational psychology uses the term **plateau** to designate the phenomenon that while learning a new skill, a learner "in spite of efforts and practice, makes no perceptible progress" (Collins et al. 157). Other authors (Selinker, Gass, Han, Long, Onken, Hyltenstam, Thornbury et al.) adopted the term **fossilization** to refer to "the re-emergence of structures that were thought to be eradicated". Fossilization is characterized by a permanent re-occurrence of structures that are deviant from the target-language norm, regardless the exposure to the target language (Gass & Selinker 12). Thornbury relates it to learners' goals in saying that "language development that has fossilized has stopped at a point well short of the target" (116). However, as ZhaoHong Han argues, it is only meaningful to talk about fossilization when three conditions are fulfilled: students must be exposed to target-language input, they must be adequately motivated to learn and they must be provided with sufficient opportunities to practice the target language (225).

According to Han, it is possible to distinguish between **local** and **global fossilization.** Some other authors even talk about fossilized errors and fossilized competence / learners, respectively. While local fossilization is limited to only certain areas of language, global fossilization is characterized by "cessation of learning or stability due to the learner's inability to change the interlanguage[2] system" (Han 21). It is obvious that students unable to get past beginners' level could be characterized as fossilized learners, i.e. suffering from global fossilization.

Nevertheless, fossilization does not necessarily have to signal that the process of learning has been corrupted. Han in his book *Fossilization in Adult Second Language Acquisition* talks about **stabilization** and **fossilization** to label the different kinds of language stagnation, or plateau. He actually distinguishes three cases of stabilization, out of which but the last one is synonymous to fossilization. The cases recognized are "a temporary stage of 'getting stuck'", "interlanguage restructuring[3]" and "long-term cessation of interlanguage development" (Han 102). Although the first two cases may

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[2] = an emerging linguistic system that a foreign-language learner develops trying to approximate the target language, preserving some of the features of the mother tongue
[3] = a process of integrating new knowledge into old

exhibit plateau for a rather extensive period of time (as Han alleges, even as long as four years), they are still a natural part of the learning process. In the third case, stabilization "constitutes a prelude to fossilization" (Han 102), which means that fossilization can be perceived as permanent stabilization. Han also describes various shapes that fossilization can take, including non-variant appearance of interlanguage, backsliding[4] and stabilized inter/intra contextual variations of interlanguage (102). However, Han stresses that it should be remembered that fossilization combines two factors: cognitive processes and student's performance; and therefore, fossilization cannot be judged solely by performance.

As regards the causes of fossilization, more scientific research needs to be conducted. Han remarks that multiple explanations have already been presented, but still more empirical studies must be carried out in order to separate empirical evidence from speculations (219). Having compiled research of numerous authors, some of the suggested causal variables Han mentions are: dearth of instruction, lack of corrective feedback, age, absence of written input, false automatization, end of sensitivity to language data and negative language transfer (219). The tension between the viewpoints on the causes of language fossilization is apparent. For example, Thornbury states that lack of negative feedback and focus on form may be of vital importance for the development of language fossilization (116 – 117), whereas Krashen condemns corrective feedback for its shattering effects and highlights that "acquisition comes from comprehensible input, not from error correction" (92).

It lies out of the scope of this thesis to search for empirical evidence as to which of these suggestions would prove true. Nonetheless, it will further examine how certain variables influence the learning process and it will attempt to provide characteristics of Czech students whose language appears to have fossilized at beginner level.

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[4] = "variational reappearance over time of interlanguage features that appear to have been eradicated" (Han 102)

1.3 Learning & Teaching Styles

"Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself."

Chinese Proverb

The learning process is not the same for all students. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the ways of how different students learn and presents some of the most renowned approaches to learning styles. It further describes the implications of various learning styles on second language learning and draws the connections between learning and teaching styles.

1.3.1 Approaches to Learning Styles

When discussing the characteristics of adult students, Rogers selects seven distinctive features, which he claims to be relevant to the majority of adult students regardless their situation or stage of development. Among these, he stresses that adults

1. never arrive at class as *tabula rasa*, but bring along a package of experience and values;

2. always undertake education with certain intentions and expectations about the learning process;

3. already have their own set of patterns of learning.

(Rogers 70)

These patterns of learning are generally referred to as 'learning styles' and relate to the sum of strategies that help the students learn most quickly and most effectively. They start to develop in childhood, but adults further refine them in the process of lifelong learning, which everyone undergoes, whether recognizing it as learning in the educational sense of the word or not. As Rogers points out, each individual has their own way of learning and builds up their own set of learning strategies, which are dependent on their particular aptitudes and experience (70). Rogers notably highlights that "languages particularly throw up differences of approach in this respect. Some learners need a book and practise sounds from written words, finding it hard to react to spoken words, while others respond easily to oral tuition…" (70). Moreover, these strategies are not constant, but reflect the changes in one's experience (Kimbrough Johnson 24).

There are numerous ways in which learning styles can be assessed. According to Coffield, there are more than seventy models of learning styles, often with conflicting assumptions and competing ideas about learning. Kimbrough Johnson presents three groups of learning style models in her dissertation: instructional preference models, information-processing models, and personality models (25). These refer to social, cognitive and emotional aspects of learning, respectively. Kimbrough Johnson presents rather a comprehensive overview of different concepts (see Kimbrough Johnson 26 – 57), many of which, however, exceed the borders of this thesis and will not be mentioned.

Probably the most famous framework of learning styles was designed by David Kolb, an American social psychologist and theoretician of education who introduced a classification known as 'learning style inventory'. This framework counts among information-processing models according to Kimbrough Johnson's typology. Kolb assumes that a learning style preference is a product of two separate choices that people make in order to create knowledge (Kimbrough Johnson 22). Firstly, when they approach a task, they choose between reflective observation and active experimentation; and secondly, when they respond to the experience, they either prefer abstract conceptualisation or concrete experience (Kimbrough Johnson 22 – 23). Building on this paradigm, Kolb identifies four styles of learning (Kolb & Kolb 11 – 12): *accommodating* (active experimentation + concrete experience), *assimilating* (reflective observation + abstract conceptualisation), *converging* (active experimentation + abstract conceptualisation) and *diverging* (reflective observation + concrete experience). An overall model of learning that relies on all the learning styles is known as 'Kolb's Learning Cycle'.[5]

To illustrate what instructional preference models are concerned with, the theory of seven perceptual learning styles by David Gilley (1975) can be taken as an example. Perceptual learning styles are "the means by which learners extract information from their surroundings" using the five senses (Gilley). Individuals are understood to have specific "pathways", i.e. perceptual modes. These enable the retained facts to enter the short-term memory, and if exposed to this information repeatedly, also the long-term memory. The seven perceptual modes are *print* (seeing printed or written materials), *aural*

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[5] For more details about Kolb's theories and more specific information about his learning styles see Kolb & Kolb (2005).

(listening), *interactive* (interaction with others), *visual* (seeing graphic representations such as pictures or graphs), *haptic* (touch), *kinaesthetic* (body movement), and *olfactory* (smell and taste). Other instructional preference models deal with the styles of classroom participation, such as Grasha's and Reichmann's 'learning style scales', as well as with contextual and cultural influences on learning, as in Renzuli and Smith's 'learning style inventory' (Kimbrough & Johnson 26). To summarize, they basically attempt to depict how learning is related to perception and experience of external environment.

Lastly, personality models focus on what individuals emotionally experience in learning situations and how they react to it. For instance, Meyers and Briggs assess personality types using four bi-dimensional axes: *extraversion* x *introversion*, *sensing* x *intuition*, *thinking* x *feeling*, *judging* x *perceiving*; and describe sixteen distinctive personality types based on the interactions among the four dichotomies. Myers and Briggs claim that one's personality type significantly affects one's preferences in learning and that understanding one's personality type can enhance the learning process (Myers and Briggs Foundation).

It is obvious that learning styles are very complex and can be touched upon from different perspectives. They are also learner-specific, and duly, any group of adult learners is bound to have a varied spectrum of learning styles (Rogers 70). In addition, it should be borne in mind that any student can readily make use of more learning styles and that it is not possible to pigeonhole students into fixed categories. As Evans and Sadler-Smith remark, "a preference for one type of processing may not automatically exclude another" (78). They document this on an example of individuals who develop analytical learning strategies to counter-balance their inherent preference of intuition; so technically, they are both analytic and intuitive at the same time (78). This also points to the fact that varied teaching is important in order to enable students to develop other learning styles than those they would naturally prefer, and thus enrich their learning-style inventory.

1.3.2   Learning Styles, Learning Strategies and EFL/ESL Learning

The previous chapter has introduced the notion of different learners having different learning styles and has illustrated multiple approaches to the description and analysis of these styles. This chapter will further investigate the connections between learning styles and second language learning.

It has been pointed out that learners perceive and process information in diverse ways, which implies that acquiring a skill or mastering a particular subject matter can be easier for one student than another. Learning a foreign language requires the cultivation of both productive and receptive skills and refining the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; that is much cognitive and metacognitive work as well as extensive practice and experimentation. Thornbury summarizes it as "putting one's mind and tongue round the language" (97). To do this, learners need to employ various **learning strategies**, i.e. "conscious steps or behaviours used to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information" (Hamida 11). Similarly to learning styles, learning strategies have been classified from numerous perspectives. Rebecca L. Oxford gives a complex taxonomy of learning strategies. She distinguishes between **direct and indirect strategies**; direct strategies being those that involve direct use of the target language and indirect those that do not (Ehrman & Oxford 312). As direct, she labels **memory strategies** (serving to store information in memory and to retrieve it), **cognitive strategies** (organizing the language for production and perception) and **compensation strategies** (used for bridging the gaps in language knowledge). Indirect strategies are **metacognitive strategies** (employed for evaluating and re-organizing one's learning), **affective strategies** (handling attitudes and emotions) and **social strategies** (engaged in learning with other people). Appropriate choice of learning strategies makes learning "easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" and it may help students to become "autonomous, life-long learners" (Hamida 11 – 12).

The strategies that a language learner adopts are greatly dependent on their learning style. In addition, there are some other factors that affect the choice of a particular learning strategy. Olenka Bilash calls attention to the fact that the choice of certain learning strategies can be influenced by personality traits, such as outgoingness. Moreover, the differences among students' learning styles seem to correspond to one's cultural background. As Reid puts it in his article "The Learning Style Preference of ESL Students", there seem to be "different modes of thinking characteristic for different cultures" (88). These should be taken into account in curriculum design and in the development of teaching materials since disrespecting students' learning-style characteristics may make the students exert too much effort to adjust to new learning situations at the expense of learning (Reid 88). Reid observes that even at university level

many of the ESL methods and materials were developed with native speakers' learning needs in mind and notes that "in many cases, neither students nor teachers are aware that difficulty in learning class material, high frustration levels, and even failure may not rest solely in the material itself" (91).

Many studies have already been run to disclose relationships between learning styles, learning strategies and English as a second/ foreign language. Reid conducted a research among 1,234 American ESL university students to determine how perceptual learning styles and ESL learning preferences correlate. Regarding the respondents' cultural background, his study determined differences in perceptual styles of native and non-native speakers. While native English speakers reported preferences of auditory styles, other nationalities (mostly Asian) showed stronger preferences of visual and tactile styles. Both native and non-native speakers highly estimated kinaesthetic learning, with Japanese students most significantly differing in their preferences. Moreover, Reid's study detected connections between preferred perceptual styles and social characteristics. For instance, the research indicated that "the older the student, the higher the preference means for visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile learning" (95). Also, the longer the respondents had lived in an English-speaking environment, the greater was their preference for auditory learning and simultaneously, undergraduates displayed considerable inclination towards auditory learning in comparison to graduates, showing more interest in visual and tactile learning. These findings may be suggesting that the repertoire of preferred perceptual styles extends with gaining more learning experience. After extensive exposure to foreign language, the widely favoured kinaesthetic style of learning is complemented by auditory and visual styles and students adopt an approach based on more perceptual modalities. However, Reid calls for further research to justify these implications.

Two years after Reid, the issue of perceptual learning styles was examined by Laura Rossi-Le. She found correlations between learners' native language and cultural background and perceptual learning styles, too; and she asserted that the most widely preferred perceptual styles regardless students' nationality were tactile and kinaesthetic (79). Furthermore, Rossi-Le investigated the relationships between perceptual styles preferences and language learning strategies. Her study has revealed a complex system of interactions acting among the learners' background characteristics, perceptual style

preference and language learning strategies. Most importantly, she reports a strong correspondence between visual learning style and visualisation strategies.

Recently, a related research was done by Mei-Ling Chen and Li-Mei Hung in 2012. They investigated the influences of personality type (as classified by Myers and Briggs) on perceptual learning style and learning strategies preferences among Taiwanese ESL students. Their results (1507) indicated two important relationships: firstly between the sensing / intuitive personality and language learning strategies, secondly between the introverted / extroverted personality and language learning strategies. Concerning the former, intuitive personalities proved to use memory and compensation strategies more frequently than sensing personalities. With respect to the latter, extroverts tended to use more often compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, memory, affective, and social strategies when compared to introverted students. It would be tempting to generalize that more out-going students make more frequent use of various learning strategies, but these results contradict some previous findings. For example, Ehrman and Oxford reported that it was introverts who used metacognitive strategies more commonly while extroverts preferred affective and social strategies. The issue surely requires more investigation before any definite conclusions can be drawn.

Ehrman and Oxford also reveal powerful relationships between Myers and Briggs' psychological types and learning strategies. They report the learning strategies to be almost in complementary distribution for each contrastive personality type pair. For instance, thinkers evaluated cognitive and metacognitive strategies as comfortable/liked, whereas feelers rated these negatively and preferred social strategies (317). It is but the personality type which appears to be of crucial importance for choosing a particular learning strategy since the study has disclosed no significant correlations between social characteristics (such as age and sex) and learning strategies.

It is apparent that there are many correlative tendencies between adopted language learning strategies and students' learning styles and personality types. But in what way do these tendencies affect the teaching-learning process that takes place in language classes? The answer to this question was offered by Obdulia Castro and Veronica Peck, who had focused on the relationship between learning styles and language learning difficulties in their research. Firstly, they have come to the conclusion that for language learning the ability to rely on more learning styles proves to be highly advantageous, unlike being

specialized in one learning style, which "interferes with the learner's ability to process information both analytically and globally" (Castro & Peck 408). Secondly, accommodators and divergers (in Kolb's learning-styles classification) appear to be more successful in learning languages than convergers and assimilators. However, they stress that any deficiency can be overcome in modified classes.

Some connections have also been made between language learning strategies and classroom anxiety, which is regarded as unfavourable phenomenon that slows down the learning process. Mohammadi et al. who conducted a survey among Iranian EFL students report that "there is a meaningful negative relationship between the degree of language learning strategies and the level of anxiety" (643), namely between cognitive, compensation and social strategies and the level of anxiety. Affective, memory, and metacognitive have not shown any significant correlation with anxiety levels. Generally, learners with a relatively higher extent of language learning strategies use reported less anxiety than those who had a relatively lower extent of language learning strategies use. From these findings it can be inferred that if the use of certain learning strategies is supported, it could lead to improvement of the atmosphere in class and language learning. In other words, if teachers can adjust the strategies to their students' needs, their learning as well as their level of language anxiety can be positively enhanced.

1.3.3   Teaching Styles

A lot has been said about the approaches students hold towards learning. However, learning in the sense of institutionalized education is never a one-sided process – it always requires a teacher. Not only do individual teachers have their own learning styles and strategies, but they also develop teaching styles and strategies. As with learning styles, each teacher is prone to have preferred, habitual styles of teaching but can deliberately work on broadening their repertoire.

Expectedly, there are also multiple classifications of teaching styles. Some educationalists, such as Peacock, assess them within the same categories as Gilley does perceptual learning styles (auditory, visual etc.). Other authors focus on the class-management related aspects of teaching, for example Analoui distinguishes between hard, soft, run-down, effective and so-so teachers (18). Rogers uses the term autocratic, laissez-faire and democratic teacher within the same scope of interest (193) and he presents an

overview of more terminology used by other authors in this field. Naturally, teaching styles can also be evaluated in terms of teachers' personality and their preferred manner of teaching, and thus, it can be discriminated between egocentric and altruistic teachers, highly organized and disorganized teachers etc. (Rogers 194).

What is important to consider is the relations between teaching and learning styles. The effectiveness of the learning process is always determined both by the students and the teacher. Rogers accentuates that all styles and strategies are "equally valid and the teachers, regardless their own preferred learning style, should not push their students into adopting any of them" (70). On the other hand, some theorists (Reid, Hamida, Gregorc, Peacock et al.) believe that "in order to get effective learning, the students' learning styles should match the teaching styles" (Hamida 8). It is even deemed that the mismatch between learning and teaching styles can cause frustration, demotivation and to the utmost learning failure (Peacock 1). So how should this dilemma be dealt with?

Firstly, the teachers should make themselves familiar with their students' preferred learning styles, which will provide them with "important information about how to address the needs of their students" (Castro & Peck 408). Secondly, the students themselves should be aware of their preferred learning styles, as this helps them recognize their strengths and weaknesses and allows them to be more active participants in their learning (Castro & Peck; Peacock). There are numerous ways of assessing oneself, from taking an online test to compiling a portfolio of one's work for later analysis (Pierson). Thirdly, the teachers should help their students to develop more varied learning styles. This enables the teacher to use a wider variety of teaching strategies as well as it is beneficial for students as foreign language learners (Grasha; Castro & Peck; see page 25 – 26). Nonetheless, the teachers should approach this with great sensitivity and consideration for the students (Zhou 76). And finally, the teachers should teach in a balanced way "in order to accommodate different learning styles" (Peacock 18) and let each student exercise their own learning style (Rogers 71). They should always bear in mind that their learning group consists of unique individuals and that assuming individual approach, especially in language teaching, is a necessity.

This chapter has examined various ways in which students learn. It has introduced the concept of learning and teaching styles and it has investigated how learning styles and language learning correlate. Most importantly, employing more learning styles seems to be

crucial for success in foreign language learning, rather than developing a highly specialized learning style. Most ESL students appear to prefer kinaesthetic, auditory and visual learning styles. The preference of learning style then influences the choice of concrete learning strategies, the strongest correlation being between visual learning styles and favouring visual learning strategies. Social variables, such as gender, age or occupation, do not seem to have significant impact on the choice of learning strategies. For the most effective learning to take place learning styles and teaching styles should match, and therefore, the more varied language teaching, the more likelihood of appealing to all individual students.

However, a developed system of learning styles and them being in unison with the teacher's teaching styles are not the only factors that would guarantee success in foreign language learning. Another factor, which directs students in learning, is their motivation, which will be further expanded on in the next chapter.

1.4   Motivation

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign
them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Motivation is often viewed as a force which makes an individual act in a certain way, which within a learning situation is understood as something that encourages the student to learn. Many authors consider motivation to play a significant role in the teaching-learning process, essentially contributing to the success of teaching and learning (Beneš E., Beneš M., Choděra, Harmer, Knowles, Petty, Rogers etc.). With regard to adult learner, Rogers remarks that it would be wrong to think that they are ever unmotivated to learn (95). "All adults are motivated to learn their learning in their own way" (Rogers 95), yet it may mean that they are not motivated to learn exactly what the teacher intends to teach them. Therefore, the following chapter is going to elucidate what components to learning motivation there are and what motivates adults to study English as a second/foreign language.

1.4.1   Kinds of Motivation

There are many theories how to explain motivation, corresponding to various psychological approaches (humanistic, behavioural, cognitive etc.). Rogers divides them into three comprehensive categories: **motivation as an impulse**, based on the learners' inner needs or drives, **learned motivation**, shaped by external conditions, and **goal-driven motivation**, purposefully related to goals set by the students (95 – 99). Other authors create different categories, based on different criteria. For example Beneš and Harmer mention **extrinsic and intrinsic motivation** (Beneš 43–44, translation by ŠM; Harmer 3); *extrinsic* relating to external factors with language learning perceived only as a means of achieving a goal and *intrinsic* concerned with the actions in class and language itself as the goal. Beneš then identifies *existential*, *elementary* (related to human needs, rewards and punishments) and *social* motivation (43–44, translation by ŠM), whereas Harmer, adopting Gardner's and Lambert's perspective, writes about **integrative motivation** (embracing the culture of the target language speakers) and **instrumental motivation** (regarding language as an instrument to achieve something) (4). Integrative motivation is then

a preface to **assimilative motivation**, which is based on students' desire to assimilate into the target culture.

A general, comprehensive overview of learning motivation is presented by Doc. PhDr. Isabella Pavelková, CSc., a Czech educational psychologist and lecturer at Charles University in Prague, who leads courses for student teachers about motivation to learning. In her lectures, she combines more psychological approaches to motivation and primarily distinguishes between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic motivation**, according to where the incentives of the motivation initiate. Intrinsic motivation is constituted by **cognitive motivation** (translation by ŠM), which is related to the student's interest in the subject and their inner needs to understand it. Extrinsic motivation involves more subtypes: **social motivation**, which relates to interpersonal relationships, **competence motivation** (translation by ŠM), interwoven with one's desire for competence and achievement, and **instrumental motivation**, connected with future goals which a learner strives to reach. From the perspective of instrumental motivation, language is perceived as a tool to achieve other educational goals (as in Content and Language Integrated Learning) or non-educational goals (such work-related goals). Social and competence motivations include both positive and negative variants, such as the need of affiliation and the fear of rejection, or the need of success and the need to avoid failure.

When educating children and youths, competence and cognitive motivation seem to be the most influential. This gradually changes in adulthood. According to Milan Beneš, more than 80 % of adults enter the process of education in order to cope with certain situations in their life (85), i.e. because they have instrumental motivation. The subsequent chapter is going to focus on the motivation of adult ESL students.

1.4.2 Motivation and EFL/ESL

A lot has been written about motivation in ESL (Gardner, Antonínová, Kelly, Rivers and others). It is not within the scope of this thesis to touch upon all the theories so this chapter will introduce some of the findings which may interest adult ESL beginner instructors.

It is important to realize that (as with the diversity of learning styles) it is highly unlikely to find a group of EFL/ESL learners who would share the same motivational

background. Dörnyei remarks that "even generally motivated students are not equally keen on every subject matter" and that the learners set their goals with regard to their "ideal second-language self" and "ought-to second language self". In reality, students always oscillate between their real selves and ideal/ought-to selves.

Harmer believes that it is possible to trace certain motivation characteristics that are typical of students of a particular age and level. He attributes a greater level of extrinsic motivation to beginner adult students, which gradually decreases at intermediate and advanced levels. Therefore, he considers beginner students to be easier to teach, while motivating more advanced students presents a greater challenge for the teacher. At any level, adequate students' aspirations and teacher support and encouragement seem to play an important role in sustaining the level of motivation. Other researchers have raised their voices to warn about the harmful effects of inadequate learners' expectations as well. It has been discovered that false expectations raised by setting one's goal as mastering the foreign language may lead to students' overall "dissatisfaction with language learning" (Ryan 149). For that reason, it is imperative for the teachers to help the students set manageable goals in order to prevent discouragement from learning.

As regards the prevailing types of motivation, instrumental and integrative motivations seem to be the strongest in adult ESL/EFL learning. Their importance is contextually based. Especially among immigrants, integrative and assimilative motivations rank higher than instrumental. For instance, Igoudin's study found that the surveyed group of ESL immigrant students chose to engage in language learning in order to get integrated into the dominant language culture and community (1). With regard to Dörnyei's perspective, the students' motivation often "originated in the disjuncture between the learner's current and desired identities" (Igoudin 1). However, integrative motivation appears to be strong enough even with non-immigrant students. Igoudin also reports the results of a study by Brilliant, Lvovich and Markson (1995) which showed that within a sample of unemployed EFL students who unanimously ranked instrumental motivation as number one, 85 % of the students still expressed the desire to get to know the culture of English-speaking countries and to make social contacts with its members (integrative motivation). Kelly obtained similar outcomes from a study of Japanese graduates: reasons for studying English related to travelling and using English for international communication (integrative motivation) even outranked the reasons connected to school and work (instrumental motivation).

Interestingly, the level of students' motivation does not seem to correspond to their self-esteem and confidence in their language-learning abilities (Matthews-Aydinli). Rather, the appreciation of the importance of English (be it for integrative or instrumental purposes) makes students motivated to learn (Lee 71). To summarize, it is crucial to take into account the integrative and instrumental nature of motivation in EFL/ESL and to employ strategies to refresh it accordingly. When the initial beginner's motivation starts to fade out, the appreciation of the language itself and its importance may help to renew it.

1.5   Hindrances to Learning

"The road to success is always under construction."

Lily Tomlin

The previous chapter has looked into what makes adult students motivated to learn English. This chapter is going to investigate what may demotivate students from learning and what blocks they may face when learning. It appears that some of these blocks may be fomented by conscious learning, though others may origin in pre-existing knowledge or psychological factors (Rogers 236).

Identifying the nature of a block is not always easy. As Rogers points out, teachers can only "assess what appears to be happening", using their own experience, because the learners may be unable or unwilling to explain what is really happening (236). Generally, there are several possible reasons for the failure of learning. They will be discussed here with reference to Rogers (237 – 253).

1.5.1   Physical and Situational Changes

Physical changes are not a very common reason for unsuccessful learning because they refer to irreversible changes in one's body or health. Nevertheless, such problems as failing eyesight or deterioration of hearing may constitute a severe barrier to learning.

Situational changes are much more frequent. They appear occasionally and usually only temporarily. As a situational change, any external and contextual factors may be labelled, for instance tiredness, poor health, hunger or students' pre-occupations (237). Moreover, some situational factors may be determined by the learning programme itself, including its settings, schedule, classroom equipment etc.

Physical and situational changes are not that problematic for teachers because they can be easily identified and (often) remedied. The following chapter will, therefore, explore the inner, psychological and more troublesome impediments to learning.

1.5.2   Personality Blocks

Personality-related blocks to learning stem from psychological and emotional factors (238). They are persistent in that they affect even well-motivated learners in

learning-supporting conditions. Rogers divides them into two separate categories: those related to **pre-existing knowledge** and those related to learners' **self-perception factors** (238).

Adult students, having experienced a lot in their lives, always bring some pre-existing knowledge, prejudice or habits into the teaching-learning process, despite the fact that they may claim to know nothing about the particular subject. Pre-existing knowledge is usually deeply rooted within their life perspectives and has involved some emotional engagement, so challenging this knowledge may make the students feel threatened. Natural reaction to a threat is using either withdrawal mechanisms, or ego-defence mechanisms (240).

Withdrawal mechanisms may include physical withdrawal, i.e. dropping out of the course, or psychological techniques that enable the students to keep their pre-existing knowledge. Among these are *compartmentalism* (creating distinct patterns of knowledge that are drawn upon under different circumstances), *authoritism* (relying on the knowledge presented by a greater authority) and *reality-evasion* (namely day-dreaming and lack of attention) (240 – 241). Ego-defence mechanisms are devices that people use to maintain their psychological equilibrium. The most commonly employed are *fantasy* (escaping the reality in imagination), *compensation* (turning to alternative activities), *identification* (vicariously joining another member of the group), *projection* (projecting one's own traits into others), *rationalisation* (finding arguments to justify one's beliefs or actions), *repression* (selective forgetting), *sublimation* (diverging one's frustrated energies into another activity), *displacement* (venting one's frustration on someone else) and others (249 – 250).

No matter how persistent the students are in protecting their pre-existing knowledge or habits, sometimes it is necessary for the new knowledge to embroil with the older one, not just to "be left on top of the existing patterns" (241). Therefore, they need to undergo the process of **unlearning**. Direct contradiction of the pre-existing knowledge, nor authoritative explanations are effective in the process, only the examination of how the incorrect pattern was acquired and reinforced may bring the students to change and understanding (243).

Other blocks to learning, designated as self-perception factors, originate in "emotional manifestations of negative self-concepts" (243). One of the most frequent

among these factors is **anxiety**. Rogers sees it as constituted of two elements: a fear of requirements, which are externally imposed on the learner, and worries about the self. Some authors (e.g. Mohammadi et al.) even link anxiety to the use of certain learning strategies (see page 26). Students suffering from anxiety often perceive themselves to be the "cause of their failure" (244), frequently claiming not to have enough educational skills to complete the task in question. However, anxiety does not always inhibit learning. It is closely linked to motivation; Pavelková even directly involves the anxiety factors, such as fear of failure, into her motivation classification (for more see page 30). The truth is that to a certain extent anxiety facilitates students' effort and learning, especially in application and reception tasks (Rogers 244). Only if the levels of anxiety rise too high, learning is gradually inhibited. Anxiety can be lessened through cultivating the atmosphere in class, establishing rapport with the students and managing the learning situation in achievable steps (Rogers 245).

Other emotional blocks to learning may have social aspects, for example the *fear of failing* in the eyes of others or *reluctance to join in the methods of learning* (247). Interestingly, Reid reports a non-negligible conflict between students' and teachers' attitude to group work. While many language teachers like to make use of group work, the ESL students in Reid survey gave group work a minor or even negative preference. Also Pavelková stresses that group activities may be extremely emotionally demanding, especially for introverted individuals, and that teachers should not overuse them. Misguided applications of learning-styles concepts or any other kind of pigeon-holing students into narrow categories can be similarly dangerous (Evans & Sadler Smith).

Further, Rogers mentions *narrow self-horizon* as an emotional block to learning. Students with a narrow self-horizon tend to underestimate themselves as well as the sources which could possibly help them in their learning. Some other students may have an excessive need for balance and *fear disorder*, whereas some others may *fear to seem to influence others*. Emotional blockages are very varied and not easily disclosed and classified, but their existence should never be neglected.

1.6 Learning Disabilities

"I choose not to place 'DIS', in my ability."

Robert M. Hensel

Physical, situational and personality blockages are unfortunately not the only impediments to the process of learning. Some people may be suffering from **learning disabilities**, which prevent them from learning in a way that works for other students. Disturbingly, it is estimated that learning disabilities occur approximately in 10 % of the population (Hatt & Nichols). In the Czech Republic learning disabilities are currently often discussed in relation to primary-school children and it is not uncommon to have a special curriculum for those pupils who have a formal diagnosis of being learning-disabled. Learning disabilities are innate and endure into adulthood, though their effects may be weakened through the use of compensation strategies. Yet they are scarcely mentioned regarding adult education, especially within the borders of Czech educational environment. Therefore, this chapter will attempt to compensate for the insufficiency and explain how learning disabilities may interfere with adult EFL/ESL education.

1.6.1 What are learning disabilities?

To begin with, it is necessary to explain how learning disabilities differ from other hindrances to learning. They are not just "a strong preference of learning styles, a dispreference or natural ability of 'not being good at something'" (Pearl 3). Nor are they related to external conditions, IQ or personality factors. As Pearl asserts, learning disabilities seem to come from "a permanent biological structure of the central nervous system" (3), creating "a gap in neural wiring that is more substantial than neural plasticity can correct" (3). The understanding of learning disabilities is slightly different in sundry educational institutions, but the essential elements remain the same: discrepancy between the actual and general ability and etiology, excluding physical, emotional, intellectual and environmental causes. Here are some definitions for comparison:

- "A learning disability is a neurological condition that interferes with an individual's ability to store, process, or produce information." (Learning Disabilities Association, 2014)"
- "'Learning Disabilities' refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders

result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning, in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are specific, not global impairments and as such are distinct from intellectual disabilities." (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2001)

- "'Learning disabilities' is a comprehensive term for a heterogeneous group of disorders that are manifested through difficulties in gaining and implementing skills, such as speaking, understanding speech, reading, writing, mathematical reasoning and counting. These disorders are intrinsic to the disabled individual and they presuppose dysfunctions of the central neural system." (Zdeněk Matějček, 1993; translation by ŠM)

Apparently, learning disabilities affect a specific area of learning so they cannot be explained in terms of general mental disorder or intellectual retardation (Hatt & Nichols 99), though they may appear along with such disorders (Matějček). Clinically, learning disabilities are assessed on the scale from *mild*, for which the learner is able to compensate naturally, to *medium*, which make it more difficult to find countermeasures for, to *severe* (Hatt & Nichols; Pearl). Learning disabilities may also appear in clusters (Hatt & Nichols; Matějček), which makes their manifestations more acute.

As regards the areas of learning which can be afflicted by learning disabilities, Hatt & Nichols give the following list (14 – 19):

1. **visual learning disabilities**, i.e. disabilities relating to problems in processing data acquired through visual perception;
2. **auditory learning disabilities**, relating to the processing of information perceived through the auditory channel;
3. **motor learning disabilities**, connected to various motor body functions, such neuromuscular and sensory-motor processes;
4. **conceptual learning disabilities**, pertaining to problems with understanding abstract concepts, complexities and consequences;
5. **organizational disabilities**, including problems with time-management, task-sequencing etc.

Czech educational psychologists (Matějček, Vágnerová, Zelinková etc.) use a more detailed classification of learning disabilities, more interwoven with school subjects. They distinguish between:

1. **dyslexia**, related to reading;
2. **dysgraphia**, concerning writing;
3. **dysorthography**, connected with orthography and application of grammar rules;

4. **dysmusia**, affecting the acquirement of music skills;

5. **dyscalculia**, impairing abstract and symbolic operations;

6. **dyspinxia**, afflicting drawing, especially in connection with the mental operations needed to transfer 3D reality into 2D and to capture one's fantasies on paper;

7. **dyspraxia**, influencing motor skills.

(Hovorková & Stanjurová)

These types of disorders cover visual, auditory, motor and conceptual disabilities in English terminology. Moreover, Czech terminology differentiates between learning disabilities[6] (the above mentioned) and behavioural disorders[7], which would cover organizational disabilities as well as hyper-activity, aggression etc.

Whatever typology of learning disabilities one may wish to adopt, it remains a fact that learning disabilities can impair the development of other learning skills if not (timely) recognized and worked with. The disorders may result in "a significant discrepancy between academic achievement and assessed intellectual ability" (Hatt & Nichols 98) but if handled with caution and sensitivity, they need not even prevent the achievement of academic success. "Whatever challenges someone with learning disabilities may face, it is important to understand that a person with learning disabilities can be highly successful academically, socially and functionally" (Pearl). Despite this, learning disabilities are often perceived with negative connotations and many (especially adult) students might feel embarrassed because of their weakness (Schwarz 3), which may incidentally lead to the development of other blocks to learning, as described in Chapter 1.5.

The next chapter will closer examine the influences of learning disabilities on EFL/ESL learning.

1.6.2 Learning Disabilities and EFL/ESL

It has been explained that learning disabilities have their cause in neural system and affect certain processes needed for learning. This happens regardless the subject matter the learner is studying. In other words, there is nothing like "foreign-language disability" and a foreign language learner is affected in similar ways as a native language learner

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[6] in Czech: specifické poruchy učení
[7] in Czech: specifické poruchy chování

(Schwarz 2). Generally speaking, it means that if learners show certain difficulties in the native language, it is highly probable that they will encounter the same difficulties in the foreign language. Nonetheless, Schwarz reports that there is increasing scientific evidence of the fact that learning disabilities may manifest themselves slightly differently in different languages, with respect to language typology, grammatical and orthographic rules etc. (2).

The learning disabilities that seem to have the most significant influence on learning (foreign) languages are logically those that affect reception, production and mental processing of the language; that is namely visual, auditory and conceptual learning disabilities.

Visual learning disabilities may lead to difficulties in the recognition of individual letters or words, including their reversal (Hatt & Nichols report that a common sign of a visual learning disability is the inability to distinguish clearly between such pairs as 41 and 14). Furthermore, students with visual learning disabilities may find it problematic to understand written instruction, to follow a line on a page or even to find certain phenomena in a text as they may have problems with figure-ground discrimination (Hatt & Nichols 15). Figure-ground discrimination may show itself even at a more general level, for instance as having problems to find an exercise in the textbook or find the correct column to write one's signature in.

Auditory learning disabilities may seriously affect learners' perception as well as production. Learners with auditory learning disabilities have difficulties with understanding oral instructions, with distinguishing between similarly sounding words or identifying individual words within a flow of speech. In addition, they may be unable to remember things that have only been said, they may tend to mispronounce common words and make mistakes in word order (Hatt & Nichols 16). Simon also reports that auditory discrimination has an impact on phonological coding and difficulties arising in relation to it. He suggests that the deficits may lie in "encoding speech sound information in long-term memory, using phonological codes in working memory and retrieving phonological information from long-term memory" as well as in "producing complex phonological sequences" and in "the sensitivity to the speech sound structure of the language" (all 169).

Finally, conceptual disabilities may bring along obstacles in dealing with complex syntactic matters, decoding the meaning of figuratively-used language or even discerning the signs of non-verbal communication (Hatt & Nichols 18 – 19).

Considering the factors that make English precarious in comparison to other languages, the loose relationship between its spelling and pronunciation and the number of synonyms seem to play the most important role. In addition to the fact that adults are in general considered to have restricted abilities to learn pronunciation, it is especially the learners whose mother tongue has a fairly regular relationship between spelling and pronunciation who seem to struggle the most, since English spelling (and consequently reading) requires considerably more visual attention (Schwarz 2). This claim is supported by Campbell who in a study of learning-disability indicators determined that 62 % of respondents reported difficulties reading. The most common problems were confusing words with similar spelling and the length of time taken to read (8). The high number of synonyms makes learning English difficult in two ways: not only does it demand sensitivity for style appropriateness, but it also entails fewer repetitions of words and consequently gives less space for the practice of familiar patterns than languages with smaller overall vocabulary (Schwarz 3). Moreover, learning any foreign language may cause that the learners need to master different compensatory strategies than they are used to employing in their mother tongue (Schwarz 3).

When teaching learning-disabled students in an EFL/ESL class, their learning disabilities should be taken into account in every learning situation (Schwarz 2). Nevertheless, this is sometimes impossible to fulfil as the students themselves may not be aware of the fact that they suffer from a learning disability or may not be willing to admit so. Schwarz and Burt even suggest that some learners may "show learning disabilities in their second language, yet not in their first" (2) because they are capable of masking it with the help of compensatory strategies. Some hints that may be pointing to the fact that a learner has a learning disability are, for instance, uneven achievement, poor memory, difficulty in grasping abstract concepts, missing the point in discussions, trouble following verbal/ written instruction, slow or confused appearance, taking a long time in answering simple questions, making irrelevant comments in conversations and other (Hatt & Nichols 19 – 20). However, some students may display a few of these signs without necessarily having a learning disability.

Generally, it is advisable to use diverse teaching strategies to address multiple perceptual modalities. Pearl observes that although repetition is extremely beneficial for students with learning disabilities, if the repetition is coming through the wrong modality, it may lead to frustration (4). Therefore, the use of varied strategies is the most secure way to ensure that the chance to succeed is given to everyone in the class. Schwarz and Terrill give the following universal pieces of advice for giving instruction in adult EFL/ESL classes:

- Be highly structured and predictable.
- Teach small amounts of material at one time in sequential steps.
- Include opportunities to use several senses and learning strategies.
- Provide multisensory reviews.
- Recognize and build on learners' strengths and prior knowledge.
- Simplify language but not content.
- Emphasize content words and make concepts accessible through the use of pictures, charts, maps, etc.
- Reinforce main ideas and concepts through rephrasing rather than through verbatim repetition.
- Be aware that learners often can take in information, but may experience difficulty retrieving it and sorting it appropriately.

   (Schwarz & Terrill)

Apart from making use of multisensory approach, the main tenets are the structuring of knowledge, breaking the tasks into smaller but more easily accomplishable steps and repetition of knowledge over time, which are actually the fundamentals in any good EFL/ESL class.

1.7 Final Remarks

This chapter has defined beginners in terms of ESL/EFL and has given account of various influences on the learning process: learning and teaching styles and strategies, motivational factors, external and internal hindrances to learning and learning disabilities. Learning can be substantially enhanced if

- learning and teaching styles correspond;
- multiple perceptual modalities are addressed during the classes;
- individual approach to students is adopted;
- students motivation for participation in a course is understood, encouraged and made use of;
- situational blocks to learning are dealt with and personality blocks are not underestimated;
- the existence of learning disabilities is taken into account.

On the contrary, learning may be inhibited if

- learning and teaching styles do not match;
- teachers force their students to use learning styles they are not comfortable with;
- students' motivation is not encouraged;
- students' needs and expectations are neglected;
- external conditions are unfriendly to learning;
- students' personality blocks are underestimated or made fun of;
- learning disabilities are regarded as non-existent.

As continuing beginners show signs that their learning has been essentially afflicted and may have ceased, the consecutive part of the thesis will attempt to research the factors that may be influencing this phenomenon and consequently to characterize continuing beginners as a group of learners.

2 Practical Part

The practical part of the thesis focuses on Czech continuing beginners as a specific group of adult EFL learners. It uses a questionnaire survey to identify their characteristics in the area of learning styles, motivation, possible hindrances to learning and learning disabilities.

2.1 Purpose of the Survey

Continuing beginners are a group of foreign language beginners who appear to have got "stuck" at the beginners' level. Under no circumstances are they uncommon (at least within the scope of Czech EFL courses) and yet, as far as the author of this thesis is concerned, there is no pedagogical literature devoted to the issue in spite of the fact that teaching continuing beginners is extremely demanding and would require further methodological support. Moreover, the term itself has not been explicitly defined and only implicitly understood.

For that reason, the practical part of this thesis will try to supply for the insufficiency and clarify what characteristics are shared by continuing beginners. As regards methodological support, the author of this thesis is not yet a fully qualified teacher and therefore, deems it incompetent to present any solutions. Nevertheless, some recommendations will be made with reference to the theoretical part of the thesis.

2.2 Hypotheses

The theoretical part of the thesis has identified five main variables that seem to have substantial effect on students' learning. They are:

- learning styles (and strategies),
- teaching styles (and strategies),
- motivation,
- external and internal hindrances to the learning process, and
- learning disabilities.

These variables seem to influence students' learning in the following way:

- the more correspondence between teaching and learning styles, the more effective the learning;

- the higher motivation levels, the more effective the learning;

- the more hindrances to learning present, the less effective the learning;

- the more learning disabilities or the more severe a learning disability, the more demanding the learning.

The learning process of continuing beginners apparently stagnating, it can be assumed that there will be a negative interference between two or more of the above mentioned factors. Moreover, it seems apparent that continuing beginners who are much slower or even unsuccessful in their learning when compared to other students might have a different motivational drive for their learning. The lack of observable achievement could be indicating that their cognitive and competence motivations will not be the strongest ones, but rather social or instrumental motivation might be the case. Also, it can be expected that learning disabilities, which seem to be neglected in adult EFL education, may play an important role in developing a continuing beginner status. Consequently, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

H_1: Continuing beginners will show negative results in two or more of these categories: correspondence between teaching and learning styles, motivation, hindrances to learning, learning disabilities.

H_2: Continuing beginners will have developed extrinsic motivation more strongly than intrinsic motivation.

H_3: Continuing beginners will report a higher rate of learning disabilities than in regular population (10 %).

2.3 Methodology

A written survey was carried out to question the respondents and was distributed in both electronic form and hard copies. The language of the survey was Czech as presumably no EFL beginner students would understand it in English. Both the Czech version and its English counterpart, intended for those readers of this thesis who are not adept at Czech, are available in the Appendices.

2.3.1   Participants

The participants in the survey were adult beginner students of EFL programmes in the Czech Republic. Because of the existing vagueness around the term continuing beginners and due to the fact that not all language schools organize specialized courses for this type of students, the respondents were students of all types of courses at beginner level. Continuing beginners were then identified according to the following criteria, which are generally accepted among EFL teachers as characteristic of continuing beginners:

- repetitive attempts to start learning English;
- the length of study time spent at beginner level.

However, there are no exact quotas as to how many attempts to begin or how much time spent learning the language make a continuing beginner. Therefore, the subsequent criteria have been applied:

- **Three or more** attempts to start learning English. Abandoning one's studies once and then resuming it sometime later seems quite likely for various reasons, including health, financial or family problems. However, more frequent commencements without gaining enough knowledge and skill to move past beginner level appear suspicious.
- **Four or more** years spent studying English at beginner level. Han states that language stabilization may take as long as four years because of interlanguage restructuring (see page 18). Therefore, anything longer should be hinting at language fossilization and getting "stuck" at the level.

The respondents who did not fulfil these criteria were analyzed for comparison of the results between the groups in order to determine if there are any substantial differences between *continuing* and other beginners.

2.3.2   Questionnaire Structure

The test has been logically structured into six sections, reflecting the areas studied. The first section comprising seven questions collects information about the respondents in order to be able to identify them as continuing beginners or not. It uses two open questions to determine respondents' age and gender. Although these social variables are not directly related to the main focus of the survey, there are two reasons for including them. Firstly,

they are a substantial part of almost any questionnaire and the respondents surely expect them. A questionnaire without these data may give the impression of not being "real" or "authentic" so these questions actually contribute to the face validity of the questionnaire. Secondly, an interesting correlation between some of the areas studied and age or gender may arise despite the fact it has not been predicted. This could make the characteristics of continuing beginners as a group of learners more precise. The remaining five questions in the first section are formulated as closed multiple-choice questions with four options. Not only are they easier and faster for the respondent to answer, but the same applies for the analysis of results.

The next four sections aim at the analyzed factors influencing the learning process (learning styles, teaching styles, motivation, hindrances to learning). They are conceived as a series of statements, answers to which the respondents mark on a four-option scale, ranging from absolutely true (4) to partially true (3) to rather untrue (2) to absolutely untrue (1). This enables counting the weight of individual subtypes of the factors and establishing their proportion within the group.

The learning styles are evaluated from the perspective of perceptual learning styles, as these appear to be the easiest to test within an overall questionnaire. The VARK model[8] of distinction between visual, auditory, read/write and kinaesthetic styles of learning has been adopted. It simplifies the previously introduced Gilley's version distinguishing between the seven senses, which seems too elaborate for the purposes of this thesis, especially assuming that olfactory and haptic styles do not play such an important role in language learning. All of the four subtypes are represented by three statements, which were formulated with the help of VARK and the Institute for Learning Styles websites and translated into Czech by ŠM. For more details see Figure 1.

The teaching styles are assessed from the same perspective as learning styles in order to be able to discover the match/ mismatch with learning styles easily. Their evaluation is as perceived by the students. This could indeed produce different results than if judged by the teachers themselves but interviewing both students and teachers would be impossible to accomplish in a diffuse sample of respondents. A comparison of how the students' and

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[8] For more information see <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=categories>.

teachers' evaluation differ may become the subject of a follow-up study. For more information about the teaching styles assessment, see Figure 2.

visual	I can visualize where the information needed is written in the textbook/ notebook/ page.	Umím si vybavit, kde jsou patřičné informace umístěny v učebnici/ v sešitě/ na stránce.
	Highlighting or underlining notes with different colours helps me in my learning.	Při učení mi pomáhá podtrhávání či zvýrazňování různými barvami.
	If I cannot remember the spelling of a word, I visualize what it looks like.	Když si nemohu vzpomenout, jak se nějaké slovo hláskuje, představím si ho, jak vypadá.
auditory	I can remember well what someone tells me.	Dobře si pamatuji to, co mi někdo řekne.
	When I learn, it helps me to recite the text.	Při učení mi pomáhá, když si látku mohu alespoň polohlasně předříkávat.
	If I cannot remember the spelling of a word, I try to pronounce it silently.	Když si nemohu vzpomenout, jak se nějaké slovo hláskuje, zkusím si v duchu říct různě varianty.
read/ write	I can remember information better when I write it down.	Lépe si pamatuji informace, které si zapíšu.
	I can understand instructions more easily when I read them.	Snáz porozumím instrukcím, když si je mohu sám/a přečíst.
	If I cannot remember the spelling of a word, I try writing down the possible variants.	Když si nemohu vzpomenout, jak se nějaké slovo hláskuje, zkusím si ho napsat v různých variantách.
kinaesthetic	I like manipulating with objects, such as flashcards, when learning.	Při učení rád/a manipuluji s objekty, např. kartičkami.
	I can learn well in real situations which enable me to take part in active practice	Dobře se mi učí ve skutečných situacích, kdy mám možnost si látku aktivně vyzkoušet.
	If I cannot remember the spelling of a word, I write it with my finger in the air.	Když si nemohu vzpomenout, jak se nějaké slovo hláskuje, napíšu si ho prstem do vzduchu.

Figure 1 – Perceptual Learning Styles Statements

visual	My teacher supplements his/ her presentations with visuals.	Svůj výklad doplňuje grafickými znázorněními.
	My teacher demonstrates the structure of a topic on the board.	Strukturu probíraného tématu znázorňuje na tabuli.
	My teacher often uses pictures or videos.	Používá při výuce obrázky či videa.
auditory	My teacher often gives oral presentations	Při výuce často spoléhá na výklad.
	My teacher often gives instruction orally.	Často zadává instrukce slovně.
	My teacher often uses discussions and eliciting.	Hodně využívá diskuze a kladení otázek.
read/ write	My teacher mainly builds his/ her lessons on texts and articles.	Při výuce hodně vychází z textů nebo článků.
	My teacher often lets students to work individually on the exercises from the textbook.	Při výuce nechává individuálně vypracovávat cvičení v učebnici.
	My teacher uses handouts with exercises.	Při výuce používá pracovní listy s cvičeními.
kinaesthetic	My teacher uses role-plays for teaching.	Při výuce využívá hraní rolí.
	My teacher uses games in the class.	Do výuky zapojuje hry.
	My teacher uses expressive gestures and/or pantomime.	Při výuce používá pantomimu a/nebo výrazná gesta.

Figure 2 – Perceptual Teaching Styles Statements

Motivation has been appraised from Pavelková's perspective (see page 30) as it presents a comprehensive, but not overly detailed classification of learning motivation. Furthermore, having taken the course lead by Mrs Pavelková herself, the author of the thesis feels better qualified for analysis from this perspective rather than from other perspectives. The statements referring to motivation classification are captured in Figure 3.

instrumental	I need it in my job.	Potřebuji Aj pro svou práci.
	English will help me to get a pay rise or a better-paid job.	Angličtina mi pomůže získat vyšší plat / lépe placené místo.
	It can be useful in the future.	Aj se mi může se v budoucnu hodit.
social	I like meeting my classmates.	Rád/a se scházím se skupinou spolužáků.
	I do not want to be worse than others/ an outsider.	Nechci být horší než ostatní, chci se zařadit.
	I want to prove the others that I can do it.	Chci dokázat ostatním, že na to mám.
competence	I want to raise my competence.	Chci se zdokonalit ve svých schopnostech.
	I want to prove myself that I can do it.	Chci si dokázat, že to zvládnu (že na to mám).
	It makes me feel successful.	Zažívám při tom pocit úspěchu.
cognitive	I enjoy learning new things.	Rád/a poznávám nové věci.
	I am interested in the language.	Aj mě zajímá jako jazyk.
	I am curious about it.	Ze zvědavosti

Figure 3 – Motivation Statements

As regards the hindrances to learning, even Rogers in the chapter "Blocks to Learning" of his *Teaching Adults* mentions that especially the personality blocks are difficult to disclose and understand. Therefore, the form of a questionnaire does not quite stand in favour with revealing these blocks. Probably the best way to uncover them would be observations complemented by individual interviews, which is not realizable in the current conditions, and consequently could encourage further research. Nonetheless, some of the hindrances, particularly situational ones and those based on social relationships in the class, can be touched upon. In total, ten statements were created to examine the possible learning impediments. For the exact wording see Appendices (page II and V).

Lastly, the sixth section of the questionnaire has been devoted to learning disabilities. A simple dichotomic question is posed to discover if the respondent has ever been

diagnosed as learning disabled and it is complemented by an open question for further specifications.

The end of the questionnaire gives the respondents an opportunity to express any comments they may want to share with the author. Also, the respondents are offered the possibility to get acquainted with the results of the survey, should they be interested.

2.3.3 Amassing Data

The questionnaires were distributed prevailingly electronically, with some additional hard copies. The total number of distributed questionnaires was 142, out of which only 9 were hard copies. In the era of computer devices and electronic communication, the author deemed it more effective to collect data electronically for several reasons. Firstly, electronic communication makes it easier to find hypothetic respondents without previous acquaintance. Secondly, the responses can be gained more quickly via the Internet, sometimes even within minutes since the respondent's consent to complete the questionnaire. Thirdly, electronic questionnaires can be more easily surveyable for the respondents, as the questions can be designed to appear one by one and the questionnaire can ramify according to the respondent's previous answers. Nonetheless, some people may still feel more comfortable working with paper-based documents and that is the reason why additional hard copies were distributed when asked for.

The questionnaire was created and displayed at Vyplnto.cz, a Czech survey server, and fully completed online. The respondents could access it easily via the link <http://zacatecnici-v-anglictine.vyplnto.cz>. As regards the means of finding suitable respondents, social networks, email contacts and physical acquaintance were of help.

2.3.4 Response Rate

The response rate of the questionnaire was rather low: 35.3 % in the electronic form and 78 % with the hard copies, which makes an overall response rate of 38 % in total. Precisely 54 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned. This may be caused by several factors, but there appear to be two most prominent ones. Firstly, as most of the respondents who did not finish the questionnaire dropped at the question *What course are you attending?*, it can be estimated that they had not carefully read the questionnaire

instructions informing about who the survey is suitable for. Secondly, many respondents abandoned the survey at question 8, where the format of the questionnaire changes from short multiple choice questions to more complex, scaled questions. It is possible that the respondents got discouraged by the seeming length of the questionnaire, though the average time to fill out the whole questionnaire was only slightly above 7 minutes.

2.3.5   Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2007, online statistics calculators (Daniel Soper's Statistic Calculators; QuickCalcs by GraphPad Software) and Vyplnto.cz free statistic tools. For descriptive purposes, average (means), mode, median and quartiles were applied. More advanced statistical methods were used to determine if the responses given by continuing, false and absolute beginners significantly vary in any respect. To compare average results obtained from scaled questions, the ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test was run to determine the existence of any statistically significant differences between the groups. When examining only two groups of average results, such as student and teacher related data, unpaired t-test, which is suitable for statistical comparison of the means of two groups, was made use of instead of ANOVA. For the comparison of categorical variables in yes – no questions, the chi-square test was used. All the tests worked with the null hypothesis that *there are no significant differences between the groups* and with the probability value of 0.05, that is that the null hypothesis was rejected only if the probability value obtained was lower than 0.05.

When analyzing the scaled questions concerning respondents' learning styles, motivation and blocks to learning, average respondents' inclinations towards particular types were counted as an average of relevant subquestions, ranging from 1 (all subquestions answered negatively, i.e. "absolutely untrue") to 4 (all subquestions answered "absolutely true"). Consequently two terms were introduced: strong preference and strong dispreference, the former referring to the average score of three points or higher, the latter to two points or lower. The average score between 2 and 3 points was considered neutral, i.e. neither preference nor dispreference.

Two constraints must be noted regarding the data analysis. Firstly, as the author is not an experienced statistician, all the tests were run by online applications and the author was only in control of the input data, not the output. Secondly, the sample studied being rather small, none of the results obtained can be taken as a dogma valid for all beginner

students. To be allowed to generalize, a large-scale study would have to be carried out. So the results presented here are but giving hints in what directions future research may head.

2.3.6   Sample Characteristics

Out of the given sample of respondents, 81.5 % began learning English more than four years ago and 44.5 % have started learning English for at least three times. 42.5 % of respondents fulfilled both these criteria and will, therefore, be regarded as representatives of continuing beginners. Only 7.5 % of respondents proved to be absolute beginners who started learning English just once and have learnt it continually for one or two years. The remaining 50 % of respondents could be labelled as false beginners, either having repeatedly started learning English over a shorter period of time or having been learning English for a stretch of time up to four years.
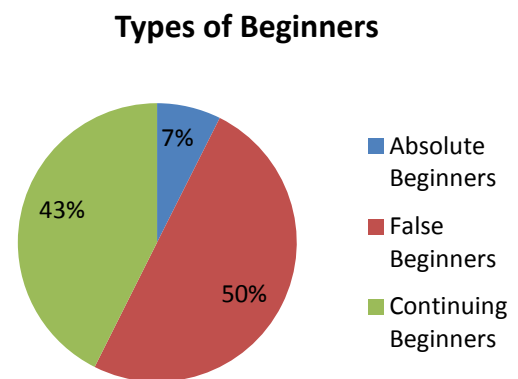
Types of Beginners

Graph 1 – Types of Beginners

While the sample proved to be approximately equally balanced with respect to *continuing* and *other* beginners, it showed inequality as regards gender distribution. The majority of 74 % of respondents were women whereas only 26 % were men. The average age of respondents was 35 years, with 25 % of respondents older than 45 years of age and 25 % aged 24 or younger.
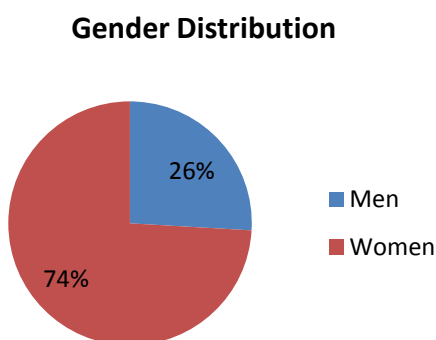
Graph 2 – Gender Distribution
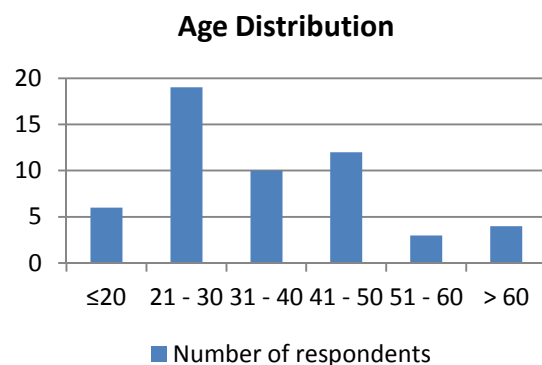

Graph 3 – Age Distribution

2.4 Hypotheses Verification

2.4.1 H_1

H_1: Continuing beginners will show negative results in two or more of these categories: correspondence between teaching and learning styles, motivation, hindrances to learning, learning disabilities.

To be able to explore this hypothesis further, it is necessary to concretize the meaning of *negative results*. In principle, a *negative result* in the test is a result indicating a presence of a factor that slows down or inhibits learning. The test was assessing learning styles, teaching styles, motivation and hindrances to learning on a scale from 1 (absolutely not true/ disagree) to 4 (absolutely true/ agree). A *negative result* is, therefore, considered to be the score of 2 or lower; the score between 2 and 3 pointing to neutrality and 3+ indicating positive, learning reinforcing results. However, as hindrances to learning were formulated in the form of negative statements, negative results are marked by the score of 3 or higher. Learning disabilities were investigated through yes-no questions so a negative result in this area needs to be defined differently. As the average incidence of learning disabilities in population is reported to be around 10 % by multiple sources, any higher incidence discovered will be considered a *negative result*.

Graphs 4 – 7 illustrate the results obtained in the respective categories. In none of them do continuing beginners seem to show remarkably low scores that could be hinting at the presence of a strong learning-inhibiting factor. None of the overall means scores can be regarded as a *negative result* according to the previously set criteria; in other words, none of the examined categories as a whole displays low scores. Weaker results were received in some of the subsections, for instance in the area of time constraints and social motivation. Nevertheless, the overall motivation tendencies seem to be rather strong with few countervailing hindrances to learning, many of which do not appear deeply influential. As regards the mismatch between the teaching and learning styles, strong differences in style preference were reported in maximum 13 % of cases, which is surely not a negligible proportion but it cannot be considered a large-scale matter, either. The issue of learning disabilities did not bring any strikingly negative results, rather vice versa (for more see Chapter 2.4.3).
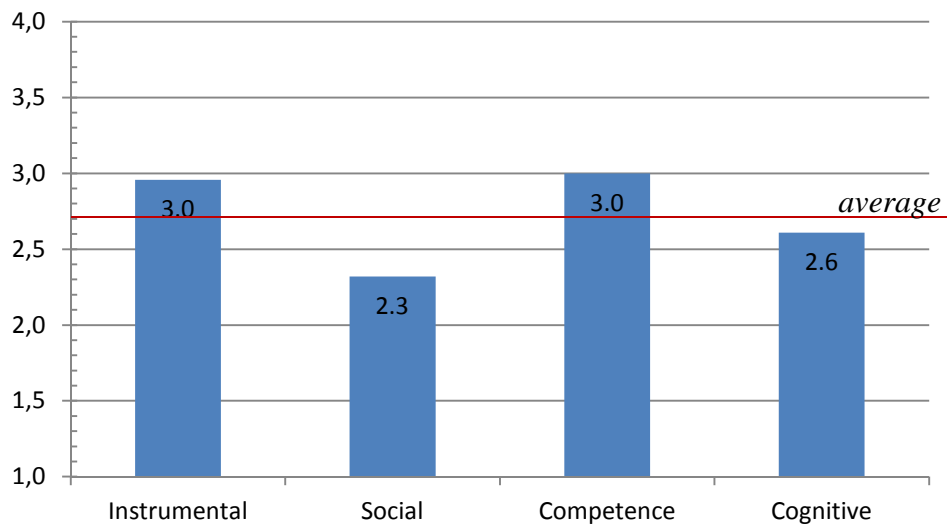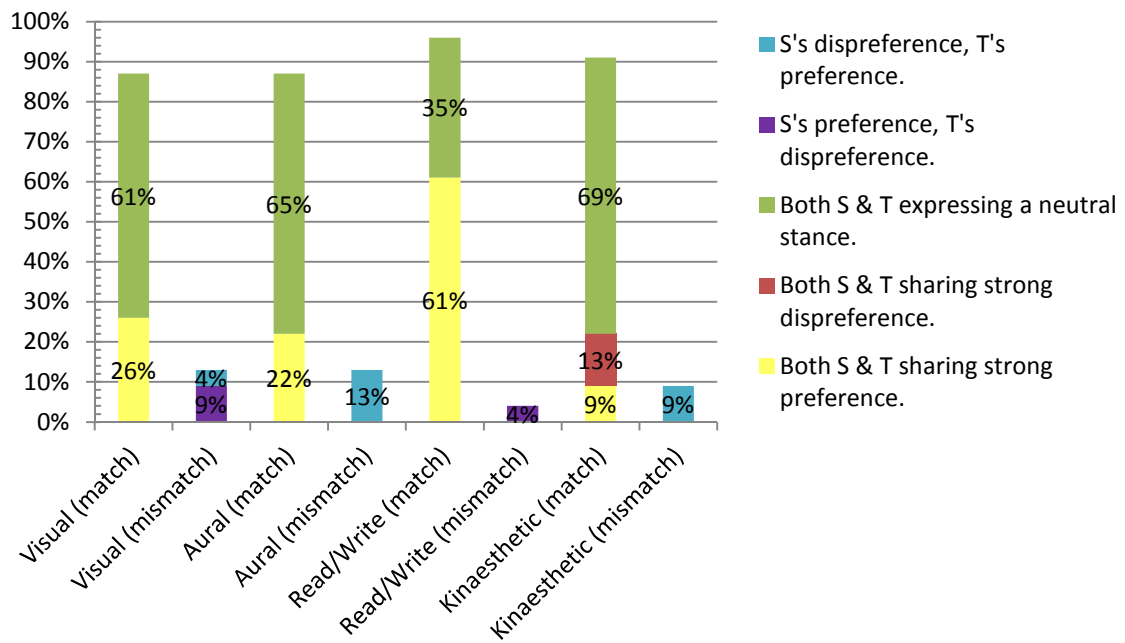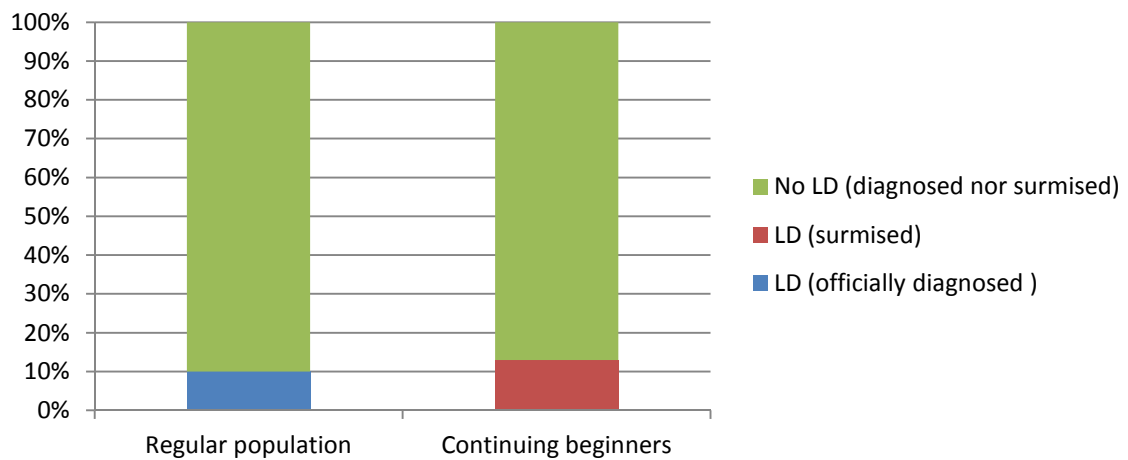
Graph 4 – Motivation Types Scores

Hindrances to learning
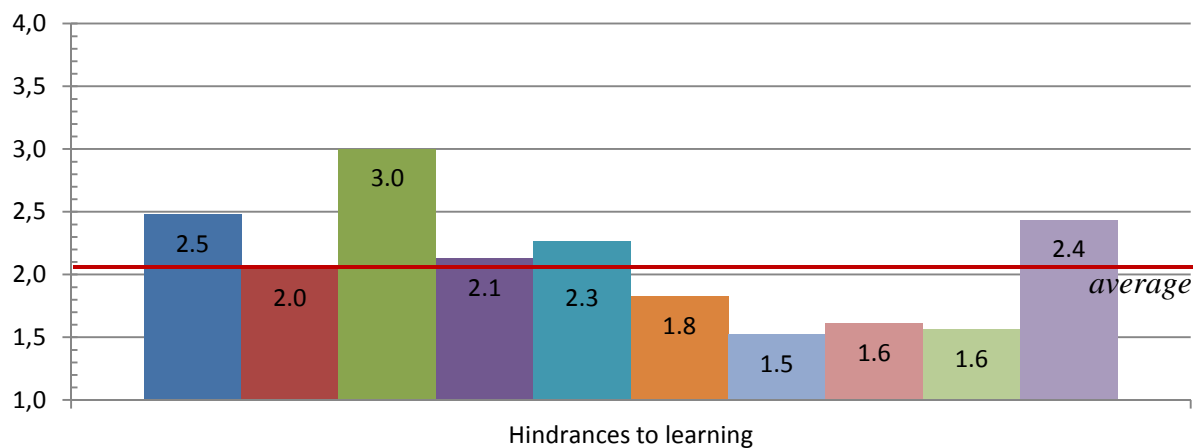
- ◼ I often feel tired during the classes.
- ◼ I am not comfortable in the classroom (because of the seating arrangement, lights, temperature etc.).
- ◼ I do not have enough time to study at home.
- ◼ I fear that I will fail.
- ◼ I fear that I will embarrass myself in front of the other students.
- ◼ The methods used by the teacher do not suit me.
- ◼ I disagree with what the teacher tells us.
- ◼ I mind the teacher's personality.
- ◼ I do not feel well among the classmates.
- ◼ I know I can never learn it anyway.

Graph 5 – Hindrances to Learning – Average Scores

Graph 6 – Learning and Teaching Styles Mis/Match

Legend:
- S's dispreference, T's preference.
- S's preference, T's dispreference.
- Both S & T expressing a neutral stance.
- Both S & T sharing strong dispreference.
- Both S & T sharing strong preference.

Categories (x-axis): Visual (match), Visual (mismatch), Aural (match), Aural (mismatch), Read/Write (match), Read/Write (mismatch), Kinaesthetic (match), Kinaesthetic (mismatch)

Values shown: 61%, 26%, 4%, 9%, 65%, 22%, 13%, 35%, 61%, 4%, 69%, 13%, 9%, 9%

Graph 7 – Learning Disabilities (LD) among Continuing Beginners

Legend:
- No LD (diagnosed nor surmised)
- LD (surmised)
- LD (officially diagnosed)

Categories (x-axis): Regular population, Continuing beginners

To conclude, no substantial evidence was found to confirm the hypothesis that continuing beginners would be stricken by factors inhibiting learning in multiple areas and it, therefore, cannot be verified.

2.4.2 H$_2$

As for many adult learners in general, it was presumed that continuing beginners' drive to study English will be shaped prevailingly by external factors and externally regulated goals. That is, in other words, that their motivation will be primarily extrinsic, not intrinsic.

H$_2$: Continuing beginner*s* will have developed extrinsic motivation more strongly than intrinsic motivation.

H$_{2(0)}$: There will be no significant differences in the development of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of continuing beginner learners.

According to Pavelková's classification, the rate of overall extrinsic motivation development is counted as a means of social, competence and instrumental motivation while intrinsic motivation was taken as equal to cognitive motivation. The summary of the results obtained is shown in the table below.

respondent	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
I	3.2	1.7	2.7	2.8	3.0	3.5	2.3	2.7	3.3	2.3	2.2	2.7
E	3.2	2.0	2.6	2.7	3.0	3.3	2.7	2.9	3.3	2.4	2.3	2.9
respondent	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	SVIII	IXX	XX	XXI	XXII	XXIII	
I	2.8	2.2	2.8	2.5	2.8	2.5	3.0	3.0	2.3	2.3	2.0	
E	2.7	2.3	2.8	2.6	3.2	2.7	3.0	3.1	2.7	2.9	2.2	

Figure 4 – Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation Scores
I = intrinsic, E = extrinsic

The data obtained were submitted to an unpaired t-test, returning the p-value of 0.2878, which is not a statistically significant result. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the development of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation cannot be rejected. It must not be forgotten that this test does not measure the ultimate force of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, or the proportion by which the individual motivation components contribute to achieving a result. That would be far more complicated to determine and evaluate, especially as the extrinsic motivation comprises more subtypes.

When analyzing the impact of individual components of extrinsic motivation, it has been discovered that while competence and instrumental motivation are attributed approximately the same weight, social motivation was relatively weaker (the ANOVA test

returned the p-value <0.05). A t-test also revealed statistically significant differences between social and intrinsic motivation in (p=0.0433), which with a certainty marks social motivation influences as the least influential among the others.

To summarize, it has not been proved that continuing beginners would display a more developed extrinsic motivation to study English than intrinsic. Nevertheless, it has been discovered that social motivation is less acknowledged than other motivation types.

2.4.3 H_3

Searching for the causes of continuing beginners' stagnating progress, it was assumed that continuing beginners may be more often suffering from learning disabilities than regular population. Therefore, the following hypothesis and its null counterpart were articulated.

H_3: Continuing beginners will report a higher rate of learning disabilities than in regular population (10 %).

$H_{3(0)}$: There will be no statistically significant difference in the rate of learning disabilities among continuing beginners and regular population.

The collected data are shown in the table below.

	Continuing Beginners		Regular Population
	Diagnosed	*Surmised*	*Expected*
learning disability	0	3	10 % (2.3)
no learning disability	23	20	90 % (20.7)

Figure 5 – Learning Disabilities among Continuing Beginners

The chi-square test equalled 2.556 with 1 degree of freedom, the two-tailed p-value was 0.1099. That indicates that the difference is not considered to be statistically significant. However, the sample examined being two small, the p-value detected may not be absolutely precise. Therefore, the test was run again with the whole sample of 54 respondents to see if any significant differences could be discovered there.

	Questionnaire Respondents		Regular Population
	Diagnosed	*Assumed*	*Expected*
learning disability	3	5	10 % (2.3)
no learning disability	51	46	90 % (20.7)

Figure 6 – Learning Disabilities among All Questionnaire Respondents

This time the chi-square equalled 1.185 with 1 degrees of freedom and the two-tailed p-value equalled 0.2763. The sample was big enough to obtain precise data but still there was no statistically significant difference found.

Consequently, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. The proportion of all respondents suffering from learning disabilities has not been proved different from that of regular population and nor has it been confirmed that continuing beginners would show a higher rate of learning disabilities.

2.5 Characteristics of Czech Continuing Beginners

One of the aims of the research was to determine the characteristics of continuing beginners as an autonomous group of learners. None of the hypotheses having been confirmed, the following chapter will more closely examine the differences between continuing beginners and other beginner students and will depict in greater detail the characteristics of the sample studied.

The sample included 42.5 % of continuing beginners with regard to the criteria set out in Chapter 2.3.1. Most of them reported to be attending a course directly intended for their group or false beginner courses. Only about a fifth of continuing beginner respondents claimed to be attending a different course. This was in contrast with false beginner respondents out of whom only a fifth was attending a course targeted at their group and over two fifths attending further unspecified courses. So the teachers of false beginner courses should be aware of the fact that a number of students in their classes are continuing beginners. For detailed information about course type distribution see Graph 8.
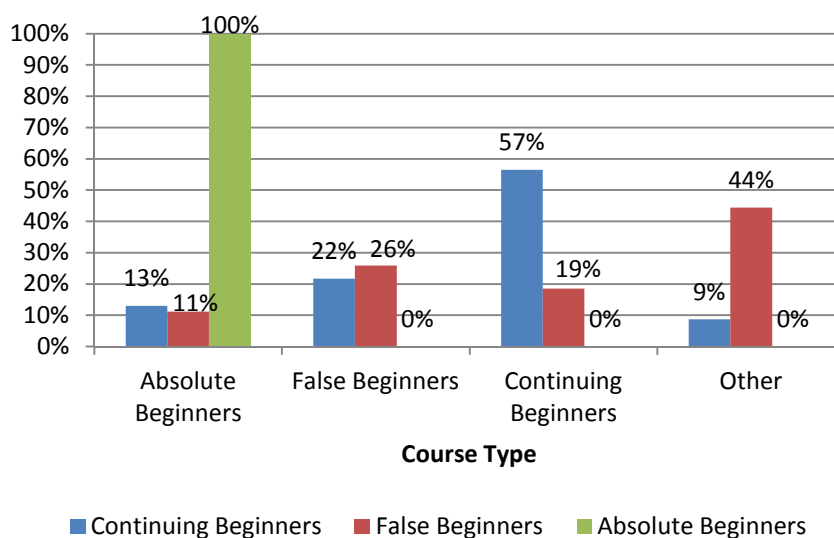
Graph 8 - Course Type Distribution

As regards continuing beginners' motivation to study English, instrumental and competence motivations, with the average value of three points out of four, seem to be the strongest, followed by cognitive motivation (2.6 points) and lastly social motivation (2.3 points). In total, 65 % of respondents answered "absolutely agree" or "agree" to instrumental motivation statements and 57 % to competence motivation statements, while only 26 % gave the same answers for cognitive motivation and 22 % for social motivation. The most highly rated statements were that "English can be useful for the future." (instrumental motivation) and "I want to raise my competence." (competence motivation). That indicates that continuing beginner students keep learning English without any specific goal in mind (such as job-related goals), simply considering it functional and craving to increase their own competence. This may also be at the root of their perseverance in learning as more concretely set goals may lead to the cessation of motivation if not completed within an expected time limit.
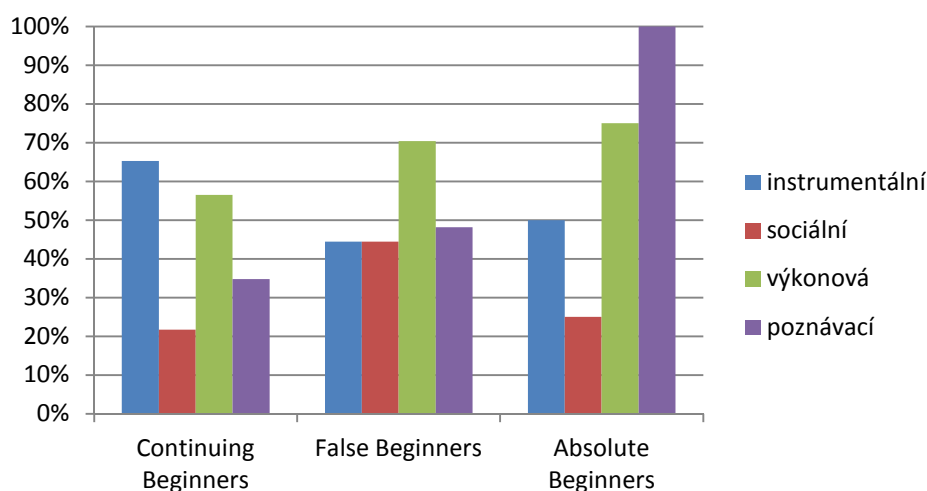
The motivation tendencies of continuing beginners are slightly different from false and absolute beginners' motivation tendencies. Unlike continuing beginners, both absolute and false beginners reported competence motivation as the most influential and instrumental motivation as less prominent. Moreover, absolute beginners also declared strong cognitive motivational influences. In comparison with the two remaining beginner groups, this difference has been found statistically significant. Strong cognitive motivation of absolute beginners may correspond with them being new to the language and eager to develop it more thoroughly. Absolute beginners were also noted to be generally stronger motivated in comparison to the other two groups whose motivation was at the same level. (Overall average motivation of absolute beginners scored 3.2 points while continuing and false beginners' 2.7 points.)

Motivation – Average Score*				
	instrumental	social	competence	cognitive
continuing beginners	3.0	2.3	3.0	2.6
false beginners	2.7	2.5	3.0	2.7
absolute beginners	3.2	2.6	3.5	3.5

*as assessed on a scale, ranging from 1 = absolutely untrue, 4 = absolutely true

Figure 7 – Motivation Average Score

Percentage of Strongly Motivated Students**

** who marked the motivation tendencies 3 (= partially true) or 4 (= absolutely true)
Graph 9 – Percentage of Strongly Motivated Students

The most serious blocks to learning set against continuing beginners are those of situational nature. 74 % of respondents found themselves fighting against temporal constraints, disabling them to devote as much time to their English studies as they would wish. This is in accordance with the information obtained from the initial section of the questionnaire where 70 % of continuing beginners reported to study English 1 – 2 hours a week including the lesson duration. 52 % of students also suffered from tiredness during their classes. The third strongest hindrance was the fear of embarrassing oneself in the eyes of others, which is also reflected in the low level of social motivation. It was followed by more personality-based blocks, such as the conviction that one can never master the language and the fear of failure. On the other hand, the issues that appear to be the least problematic are the interaction-related blocks stemming from the relationship with the teacher and fellow students. The distribution of blocks to learning was analogical among false and absolute beginners, except the fact that continuing beginners expressed these blocks somewhat more prominently (e.g. 74 % of continuing beginners lacking time to learn as opposed to 56 % of false beginners and 50 % of absolute beginners). However, ANOVA did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the three beginner groups in this respect (for time constraints p = 0.184, for tiredness p = 0.723, for the feelings of embarrassment p = 0.623 etc.).

| Blocks to Learning as Reported by Continuing Beginners	
I do not have enough time to study at home.	74 %*
I often feel tired during the classes.	52 %*
I fear that I will embarrass myself in front of the other students.	48 %*
I know I can never learn it anyway.	43 %*
I fear that I will fail.	35 %*
I am not comfortable in the classroom (because of the seating arrangement, lights, temperature etc.).	26 %*
The methods used by the teacher do not suit me.	13 %*
I mind the teacher's personality.	13 %*
I do not feel well among the classmates.	9 %*
I disagree with what the teacher tells us.	0 %*

*rate of respondents who answered 3 (=partially true) or 4 (=absolutely true)

Figure 8 - Blocks to Learning as Reported by Continuing Beginners

In respect to learning styles, the read/write type proved to be the most widely spread among continuing beginners, scoring the average of three points out of four. It was closely followed by visual style (2.8 points) and aural style (2.5 points). The least favoured learning style among continuing beginners was kinaesthetic (2.1 points). Namely the read/write style was endorsed by 74 % of continuing beginner respondents, visual by 52 %, aural by 30 % and finally kinaesthetic by 22 %. There is a discrepancy in the average score and percentage of people favouring the aural style, which testifies that the aural style is rather strongly preferred by several individuals but generally rather dispreferred.

The popularity of learning styles does not entirely correspond to the teaching styles adopted in continuing beginners' English education. There is a coincidence in the most widely preferred style, i.e. the read/write style, reported to be used frequently by 78 % of teachers. The second most utilized style was aural style with the preference of 70 % and the third place was occupied by visual and kinaesthetic styles, both scoring 48 %. Therefore, there seems to be a discrepancy in the popularity of aural style among continuing beginner students and their teachers. This issue was further examined and it has been found out that a strong preference of aural style was shared by the students and their teachers in 22 % of cases. On the other hand, 13 % of students showed a strong dispreference of aural style while their teachers were declared to use it excessively. Similar results were obtained for kinaesthetic style where in 9 % of cases the teachers were reported to make a frequent use of kinaesthetic style despite it not being preferred by the students. Interestingly, an inversion of this phenomenon was spotted in the use of visual style. Although it was strongly preferred by more than a half of the students, 16 %

out of this majority claimed that their teacher used it rarely. The following graph depicts the matches and mismatches between learning and teaching styles as reported by continuing beginner students in greater detail.

Learning - Teaching Styles Preferences
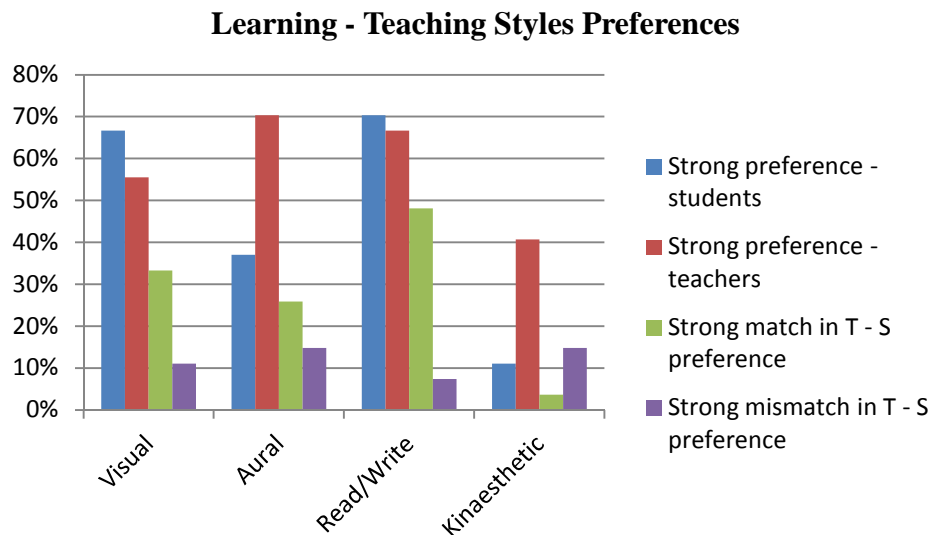
Graph 10 – Learning – Teaching Styles Preferences

The comparison of learning style preferences between continuing beginners and other beginner students revealed no statistically significant differences. Therefore, it can be assumed that the distribution of the four learning styles is approximately the same among all learners at beginner level. The subsequent table shows the concrete data collected.

	Visual		Aural		Read/ Write		Kinaesthetic	
	Average score	Standard deviation	Average score	Standard deviation	Average score	Standard deviation	Average score	Standard deviation
continuing beginners	2.9	0.51	2.6	0.46	3.1	0.41	2.3	0.58
false beginners	3.1	0.62	2.6	0.52	3.0	0.46	2.2	0.57
absolute beginners	3.4	0.17	3	0.24	2.9	0.36	2.7	0.41

Figure 9 – Learning Styles Distribution

As regards the matter of learning disabilities, surprisingly none of the respondents proclaimed to have been officially diagnosed as learning disabled. Nevertheless, 13 % of respondents expressed a suspicion of having an undisclosed learning disability. Their most often reported problem was lapse of concentration, which could be a general symptom hinting at numerous kinds of learning disabilities (see Chapter 1.6).

Finally, the issue of group work will be discussed, as it has been suggested in the theoretical part that it may be one of the stress-raising factors. The data show that group work was "liked" or "rather liked" by 39 % of continuing beginner respondents. The teachers were reported to make use of group work "frequently" or "rather frequently" in 70 % of cases. Students' and teachers' preferences regarding group work overlapped in 61 % of cases, i.e. in 39 % of cases the students were in favour of group work, but the teacher did not often employ it and vice versa. However, the differences in the average preference of group work between students and teachers have not been found statistically significant as the p-value returned by a t-test equalled 0.1044.

Group Work					
	Average score – students	Average score – teachers	Students' preference	Teachers' preference	Match in T&S' preference
continuing beginners	2.2	2.6	39 %	70 %	61 %
false beginners	2.6	2.8	56 %	67 %	52 %
absolute beginners	2.8	2.8	50 %	75 %	25 %

Figure 10 – Group Work Preferences

To summarize, continuing beginners do not display striking differences from other beginner students within the perspectives investigated. They do not report substantially different motivational incentives and hindrances to learning nor do they report a higher rate of learning disabilities than regular population. Continuing beginners are students who are generally motivated to study English by instrumental and competence reasons. Most of them learn best via the graphic or visual channel whereas their teachers seem to be employing also aural channel rather frequently. In addition, continuing beginners seldom favour pair work as much as their teachers. Nonetheless, a serious mismatch between students' and teachers' styles can be traced only in a minority of cases. The most powerful constraints of continuing beginners are lack of time to study and tiredness. Considerable setbacks are also caused by some of the social factors and to them related feelings of embarrassment and low self-esteem.

2.6   More Findings of Interest

Taking into account the most powerful hindrances to learning, namely the lack of time to study, tiredness and social anxiety, it appears meaningful to attempt to disclose any

correlations between these and the social characteristics of the respondents as such information may prove helpful in running virtually any adult class.

According to a correlation analysis tool available at Vyplňto.cz, the above listed hindrances seem to be linked to age level rather than gender. The following implications were indicated:

1. **between age and the lack of study time**. The trend was such that if the respondent was 35 years old or older, it decreased the probability of positive answers (3 – 4) for the statement *I do not have enough time to study at home* and vice versa.

2. **between age and fear of failure**. For respondents aged 35 or older, there was a higher probability of responding affirmatively to the statement *I fear that I will fail.* There were no similar nor opposite tendencies disclosed for younger respondents.

3. **between age and tiredness**. The respondents of 35 years of age or more were less likely to react affirmatively the statement *I often feel tired during the classes* unlike the respondents younger than 35 who showed the very opposite tendencies.

4. **between gender and self-assurance**. Women were less likely to reply affirmatively to the statement *I know I can never learn it anyway* than men.

However interesting these correlations are, it must not be forgotten that the sample was rather small, and therefore, the results do not have enough confidence value for any universal conclusions to be drawn.

2.7 Discussion

2.7.1 Constraints of the Findings and Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this survey are surely limited by the sample size and the respondents' distribution. As already outlined in Chapter 2.3.6, the sample consisted of 54 respondents. While the number of continuing and false beginners was approximately equal, absolute beginners were much fewer in number. As a consequence, the results presented here cannot be taken as universally valid, especially those related to absolute beginners. To be able to generalize, a larger survey with a balanced sample of respondents would have to be

carried out. Nevertheless, the findings were presented here in this form because they are pioneering in this area and are supposed to spur interest in further investigations.

Other constraints placed on the findings stem from the testing method. A questionnaire is relatively easy to carry out and to analyze, which made it suitable for the purposes of the thesis. Nonetheless, it only presents a one-way perspective on the issue, and that is the students'. In order to achieve more objective, embracive results, the teachers' perspective should be supplied, as well. To achieve even more objectivity, it would be useful to complement the questionnaire by a series of observations to be able to assess the students' performance in class, and possibly interviews with both students and teachers in order to get a better insight in the situations observed. This is apparently an utterly complex task, which would require a long-term realization. However, with the continuous demand for adult English education such an extensive survey becomes almost a must to be able to provide the teachers of continuing beginners with appropriate methodological support.

One more restriction has been noted to the findings presented, specifically the extent to which the results reflect the truth and to which they were influenced by their desirability. The questionnaire was anonymous and in most cases distributed online so the temptation to alter the results so that they were more socially desirable should be minimal. Nevertheless, some of the results, such as the relatively low recognition of diagnosed learning disabilities by continuing beginners, were rather surprising. Since learning disabilities are still somewhat a taboo topic, which is often not discussed among older generations, the results may not have been influenced by social desirability but by the fact that people are truly not aware of their condition.

2.7.2 Terminological Implications

When examining language fossilization in Chapter 1.2.3, it was suggested that it is only meaningful to contemplate it if the students fulfil three preconditions: they must have adequate motivation to study, sufficient target language input and numerous opportunities to practice it (Han). The question, therefore, is whether it is meaningful to talk about language fossilization in relation to continuing beginners. Could they be labelled as *fossilized learners*, or more specifically *fossilized beginners*?

If adequate motivation is understood in the sense of varied, mostly positive and long-term motivation tendencies, then continuing beginners could be regarded as adequately motivated. The findings presented above give enough evidence that continuing beginners acknowledge instrumental, competence and cognitive types of motivation and to a lesser extent social motivation. Moreover, their motivation tendencies proved comparable to those of false and absolute beginners, which also speaks in favour of motivational adequacy.

The second precondition is rather difficult to contemplate. *Sufficient input* is again rather an indefinable term with a lot of individual variations. Nevertheless, it is generally recognized that learning a foreign language requires as much contact with the language as possible, ideally on a daily basis. 70 % of continuing beginners reported that they dedicated one or two hours a week to studying the language, including the language lesson. The remaining 30 % admitted three hours a week. Since adult language lessons are customarily ninety-minute sessions, it is obvious that the students have little contact with the language outside the classroom. Even if the lesson itself was overflowing with study stimuli and offered enough input, still the third condition of *sufficient practice* could hardly be met. This is also supported by the fact that lack of study time was recognized as the most severe hindrance to learning among 74 % of continuing beginner respondents.

Consequently, the term *fossilized beginner* does not quite fit this group of students by definition, though their observable characteristics seem to be identical to those of language fossilized students. With this in mind, the term *continuing beginners* was used throughout the thesis. Moreover, the present participle attribute in this designation connotes the focus on learning as a process, rather than a final product which tends to be implied by a past participle form. In this sense, the term *continuing beginners* implicitly suggests that students actively contribute to their learning process and are also partly responsible for it.

2.7.3 General Andragogical Implications

The survey was conducted in the hope of finding some distinct characteristics or issues which would explain the stagnation of continuing beginners' learning and provide some insight into the subject for their teachers. Adopting a pedagogically optimistic approach, it was assumed that once the problematic areas were pinpointed it would be possible to focus on their rectification and to restore the students' learning process.

However, though not quite surprisingly, the survey showed few substantial differences between continuing and other beginners, and the factors working counter to the learning process were found to be prevailingly external factors, mostly lying out of the scope of the teacher's influence. But still, the teachers should not succumb to pessimism and indifference as there is always something one can do.

One of the most pedagogically depressing findings could be the finding that most students do not have enough time to practice outside the classes, which is known to affect badly their memory retention and subsequent recall of information. But to be honest, probably few teachers always reflect on their students' time possibilities when assigning homework. Personal experience suggests that homework usually includes exercises from the textbook, which the students presumably do not take with them elsewhere than to the class, and occasionally extra handouts, which are prone to be deposited somewhere and not to be found later when needed. Consequently, the common practice is that the students complete their homework at work or in public transport just before the class or not at all, which destroys any beneficial effects that repetition in between the classes might have. The reality, therefore, might be calling for a new way of assigning homework. Ideally, there should probably be more but shorter ones so that the students could squeeze them in their daily schedule. The teacher should direct the students to do a short piece of homework every day, explaining the benefits of regular repetition. Moreover, in the online era when many people are said to procrastinate several hours a day surfing on the Internet it seems reasonable to exploit the electronic means and make the homework available via email, social networks etc. All in all, a helpful idea might be to introduce a series of "five-minute-a-day" pieces of homework, which could also be accessed online, to minimize the time needed, but maximize the students' contact with English.

Another important hindrance to learning reported in the survey was tiredness. This is not surprising as many people take their classes in the evenings after work. Therefore, the teachers should resist the need to give the students as much information and possible, even though the common practice of attending courses once a week may require the teachers to do so. The teachers should carefully plan the lessons so that the lesson stages were not overly long, and deliberately insert fillers and coolers in order to let the students recover their mental capacities.

As regards the findings from the sphere of motivation, it was disclosed that instrumental motivation of continuing beginners is rather unspecific, focused on possible future long-term goals. The teacher should attempt to actualize this kind of motivation occasionally, as any motivation is likely to fade out if not actualized for a long time. This can be done through linking the subject matter directly to real-life situations, showing the students when and where it can be used, and thus maintaining the sense of purposefulness of their learning. The teachers should also carefully approach the aspects of social motivation, which was found to be relatively weaker and to be set back by certain internal blocks, such as feelings of embarrassment. Despite the relatively low frequency of lessons, the teachers should always try to build rapport with the class and to create a safe learning environment. Most of all, the students should always be regarded as living human individuals, not just as sources of income.

Finally, some discrepancies were also detected in students' and teachers' preference of learning styles. According to the results, the teachers should be careful not to turn to using too many aural stimuli since only a minority of continuing beginner students reported preference of aural style. Surely listening is a crucial skill which forms an inherent part of language learning and it cannot be taught otherwise than through listening. Ergo, the more listening practice students get, be it in the form of recordings or life interaction, the better for developing their skills. By no means should the dispreference of aural style reduce the input of spoken language in the classroom. The teachers should rather consider when to preserve exclusively the aural form and when to complement it with other stimuli, such as visual or written, keeping in mind that using one's less preferred learning style is always more mentally demanding than using one's preferred style.

To summarize, in the case of continuing beginners the teachers are dealing with many factors that they can influence only with difficulty. Nonetheless, it is advisable to react to real conditions and to adjust one's teaching so as to maximize the learning effect in spite of minimal out-of-class support. This involves establishing a safe learning environment, keeping students' motivation actualized, reasonable lesson planning including periods of "mental relaxation", adapting the forms of homework assignments and using varied teaching techniques in order to comply with all students' preferred learning styles.

3 Conclusion

The focus of this thesis was upon the phenomenon of continuing beginners in adult EFL classes, its main aim being to characterize continuing beginners as a specific group of learners and gain deeper understanding of the issues underlying the phenomenon. To do so, the theoretical part introduced several factors which notably influence the learning process, presupposing that these factors may play a crucial role in becoming a continuing beginner. All of these factors were at first generally described and then related to ESL teaching. Most importantly, the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process is maximal, when there is a match between teaching and learning styles, when the students have varied motivation for learning, when hindrances to learning are eradicated or at least minimized and when learning disabilities are adequately compensated. On this basis, three hypotheses were formulated about continuing beginners' characteristics, namely that they will be showing inconsistencies in more than two of the factors mentioned, will be extrinsically motivated rather than intrinsically and will be suffering from learning disabilities more frequently than the regular population. A questionnaire survey was carried out to verify these hypotheses and gain more detailed insight into the issue.

The survey was only partly successful in achieving its goals. None of the hypotheses has been verified because the results have not been proved statistically significant. That means that, at this point, continuing beginners cannot be viewed as disadvantaged or different from other beginner students in terms of the four factors discussed. In addition, they are motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically to study English and they do not differ from the rest of the population in the incidence of learning disabilities. However, on a closer look, several characteristic nuances were detected. For example, although the distribution of motivation types was approximately the same for all the beginner groups, continuing beginners generally returned somewhat lower ratings than the other groups. Analogous results were obtained for hindrances to learning, which continuing beginners, oppositely, rated somewhat higher than the other groups. So in this respect, the original expectations were confirmed, though not with sufficient statistical confidence.

As regards the overall characteristics of Czech continuing beginners, the survey was more fruitful since it introduced several points interesting from a teacher's perspective. Continuing beginners are students who are generally motivated to study English by

instrumental and competence reasons, but they lack more specific goals (such as dealing with problems at work etc.). Most of them learn best via the graphic or visual channel, which is not in direct correspondence to the preferences of their teachers who also seem to employ aural style rather frequently. Moreover, there is a discrepancy in the attitude to group work; while more than two thirds of the teachers favour it, the students much less frequently do so and in 39 % of cases there is a clash between the teacher's and the student's preferences. Continuous beginners are often confronted with a lack of time to study English at home and tiredness during lessons. Their learning is also restricted by social factors, especially by the fear of embarrassing oneself in front of others and low self-assurance.

Pedagogically, it is important to bear these findings in mind and attempt to maximize the learning effect despite the restrictive influences, among which time and other situational constraints feature. The findings seem to suggest that the teachers are forced to tailor their teaching to a pedagogical reality where there is a minimum of learning happening outside the classroom. Under no circumstances should this lead to despair, but rather to focusing the attention on the concept of the lessons. This should include creating a safe learning environment, regularly actualizing students' motivation of different types, reasonable lesson planning including a sufficient number of coolers, which allow the students to refresh their mental capacities, adapting the forms of homework assignment to suit the students' lifestyle and schedule and using varied teaching techniques in order to tackle all students' preferred learning styles.

The thesis has raised a number of questions and definitely calls for additional investigation of continuing beginners' characteristics and specifics. Firstly, there is a need of a large-scale study, which would enable to draw more universal generalizations. In the future, it is also necessary to employ other testing methods than a questionnaire survey and to bring more perspectives on the topic apart from the students'. Moreover, further connections should be made between adult EFL teaching and students' learning disabilities since even though the rate of learning disabilities has not been greater among continuing beginners than elsewhere, the disregard of the cause in adult EFL causes may be fatal for some students' success in EFL learning.

To conclude, the thesis has presented as comprehensive a view of continuing beginners as possible within its boundaries. It may be useful as a source of information for

any EFL/ESL teacher, interested in the subject, and provide support to any beginner teacher. It could also function as a starting point for related research conducted in the field.

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