Estonian-Language Teaching Materials for Non-Estonian Speaking Children

Svetlana Belova, Marje Sarapuu

svetlana.belova@meis.ee, marje.sarapuu@meis.ee

Integration and Migration Foundation "Our People" (Estonia)

Abstract

Knowledge of the national language (Estonian) is seen as the primary vehicle for facilitating the economic, social and political integration of the country's non-Estonian-speaking population. An early start is particularly important, in language learning. Children at the kindergarten level can acquire significant skills in a second language. If supported properly, children at that age learn a second language using the same natural process with which they acquire their mother tongue. There are over 600 kindergartens in Estonia. Of these, 124 are Russian-language kindergartens. The largest concern of kindergarten teachers is the lack of appropriate teaching materials for voluntary language learning at early age and, as well as e-learning materials to support national language learning. Integration and Migration Foundation in cooperation with Lasteveeb OÜ launched a project under financial support of the Ministry of Education and Research. This project aimed to provide non-Estonian speaking children, their families and kindergarten teachers in Estonia with much-needed teaching materials to support the voluntary learning of the national language, Estonian. E-learning materials (songs, games, cartoons, etc.) were developed and published in http://mudila.lastekas.ee/. By supporting non-Estonian-language children in their quest to learn Estonian, the project helps provide students with a head start to integration. Voluntary language training programs at the kindergarten level allow students to gain a remarkable level of fluency in second languages and set the stage for later more rapid learning. We would like to present the criteria and process used to develop these E-learning materials, the make-up and unique features of the e-learning games, related teachers guide and feedback from users.