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Students of Today Changing English Language Studies of Yesterday

ABSTRACT

In recent times, concern has been expressed as to whether English Language Studies are in tune with the wider social, political, technological and economic trends, and the latest developments in applied linguistics and English language education. In line with these views, the aim of this study is to explore – by means of interviews with 25 English majors from the University of Rijeka – the students’ expectations with respect to the skills and competencies (to be) developed in their course of English studies, their relevance to the job market, as well as the teaching approaches and methods used to reach these learning outcomes. By comparing and contrasting the emerging educational trends triggered by the Bologna Process with primary data collected in our interviews, we focus on the implications that our results might have in terms of introducing changes to traditional English Language Studies educational paradigms.

Keywords: English Language Studies (ELS); Bologna Process; learning outcomes; job market; curriculum development

Kako današnji študenti spreminjajo včerajšnji študij angleškega jezika

POVZETEK

V zadnjem času se pojavlja vprašanje, ali je študij angleškega jezika v skladu s širšimi družbenimi, političnimi, tehnološkimi in ekonomskimi smernicami ter najnovjšim razvojem v uporabnem jezikoslovju in izobraževanju na področju angleškega jezika. Skladno s tem je cilj tega članka, na podlagi intervjujev s 25 študenti angleščine z Univerze na Reki, ugotoviti njihova pričakovanja glede razvoja sposobnosti in kompetenc znotraj študija angleščine, njihovo relevantnost na trgu dela, kakor tudi pedagoške pristope in metode, ki se uporabljajo za dosego učnih ciljev. S primerjavo porajajočih se izobraževalnih trendov, ki jih je sprožila bolonjska reforma, s podatki, dobljenimi v intervjujih, se bomo osredotočili na posledice, ki jih naši rezultati lahko imajo pri uvajanju sprememb v tradicionalne izobraževalne paradigme študija angleškega jezika.

Ključne besede: študij angleškega jezika; bolonjski proces; učni cilji; trg dela; razvoj učnih načrtov

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1 Introduction

In recent years, English has truly become a global language and its changing role in the world has had far-reaching implications on (language) education. Today, English is introduced in schools as a compulsory subject at an early age (Nunan 2003), and in some universities throughout Europe, it has become the language of instruction (Phillipson 2006). Furthermore, in certain disciplines it “appears to be the universal language of communication”, and it is a prerequisite in government, industry and businesses (Nunan 2003, 590). There is no doubt that as an international language English has entered all walks of life and, accordingly, it has sparked interest in and demand for teaching and learning.

In line with these trends, in recent years English has gained ground in Croatian universities. Several Master's programmes in different disciplines are offered in English and every major university in the country offers an English Studies Programme. In fact, two such programmes have been established in the last fourteen years due to ‘popular demand’ and employment possibilities.

At present, English Language Studies (ELS) seems to be among the more popular programmes at Croatian universities and at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, ELS has always attracted the largest number of student applicants (along with the Studies Programme in Psychology). This is not surprising as English has become (1) the undisputed lingua franca, (2) by far the most widely taught foreign language in Europe (Eurydice 2012) and (3) the dominant medium of instruction in higher education (Coleman 2006). In fact, “English [...] is the language we have to use if we wish to prepare our students for an international career in a globalizing world” (Nieuwenhuijzen Kruseman 2003, 7).

In the domain of higher education (HE), closely linked to English (and internationalization) is the Bologna Process. Indeed, Bologna is a key factor which has changed the face of academia in Croatia and thus of ELS. The Bologna-driven reform of study programmes began in 2005, which initiated widespread structural changes in HE (Šćukanec 2013) as well as a major paradigmatic shift towards learning outcomes and a market-driven educational orientation (Pavletić et al. 2012). Accordingly, in 2008, the University of Rijeka launched the third phase of the Bologna Process aimed at the implementation of learning outcomes (Pavletić et al. 2012) as one of the University's main strategic goals to streamline education with “the needs of the community” and develop skills and competencies for the labour market (Pavletić et al. 2012, 14). These qualitative changes from a teacher-oriented content-driven model towards a learning outcomes student-centered orientation were initiated by Bologna and, by implication, (should have) affected all study programmes. Hence, Bologna and the paradigmatic transition from a broad humanistic knowledge towards a more market-driven skills and competencies orientation has raised numerous questions for (English language) teachers and students with regard to the desirable learning objectives and learning outcomes.

In line with this view, the implications of Bologna reflected in the need for ‘real-life’ skills and competencies in English, i.e. the intersection between educational status quo and innovation stemming from the transition to the Bologna Process, will be explored in this study through the eyes of English Studies majors at Rijeka University (RIU).

The overall structure of this paper takes the form of six sections, including this introductory section. Section two begins with a discussion of the educational reform relative to the socio-political landscape and ELS. The third section is concerned with the motivation for the study. The fourth section provides the theoretical background used for categorizing and interpreting the data. Section five presents the findings of the research focusing on four key themes that have been identified in the analysis. Finally, the conclusion gives a brief summary and critique of the findings, and includes a discussion of the implications of the findings for the future of ELS.

2 Contextualizing Educational Reform

2.1 Educational Reform and the Broader Socio-Political Changes

In recent years, social changes have affected education, which has become increasingly driven by a market economy (cf. Giroux 2001). Similarly, in Central and Eastern Europe, Bologna initiated a widespread educational paradigm which has (1) marked a move towards standardization and a concurrent upgrading of university standards to Western levels (Field 2003), and (2) initiated changes from teacher-centred instruction towards a student-centred orientation (Ash 2006). In post-socialist countries with teacher-centred education and centralized curricula, these changes might have posed greater challenges than in other parts of Europe (Silova et al. 2006), which is not surprising as the new market economies demand skills and competencies that were not fostered during socialism (Ammermuller et al. 2005). A case in point is our particular context (cf. Pavletić et al. 2012).

Nevertheless, educational practices do adapt to political, economic and social transformations by making changes in learning and teaching (Berryman 2000), and today, one of the key objectives of modern universities is to prepare students for sustainable employment (Bergan 2011) and “to increase higher education’s relevance to economy” (Amaral and Magalhaes 2004, 79). Departing from this position, in 2008 the Croatian Ministry of Science Education and Sports expressed concern about teaching practices in Croatian Universities and stated: “it will be necessary to secure continual education of teachers at higher education institutions so they could adapt to European teaching methods and standards” (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports 2008). From this it would follow that there is a disparity between Croatian and European university standards.

While the Bologna Process has introduced formal structural changes (e.g., the two-tier 3+2 system, ECTS), questions are, however, raised whether (the more complex) qualitative changes comprising, among other, a market-oriented education which develops skills that provide market opportunities (Smith 2003) are following suit in our particular context (cf. the Croatian national report regarding the Bologna Process implementation (Bologna Process – European Higher Education Area 2012) and Pavletić et al. 2012).

This complex issue of an outcomes-based market-driven educational philosophy will be discussed in greater detail relative to the English language (and relative to English Language Studies) in the following section.

2.2 Educational Reform and the Changing Landscape of English

The changing face of English in the world, coupled with a paradigmatic shift in (university) education in Europe, has had far-reaching effects on many a local (educational) context. In order to better understand the current position of ELS and the changing educational tides at our

particular institution, it might be useful to first take a brief look at English Studies prior to the introduction of the Bologna Process.

The current two-tier 3+2 English Studies Programme stems from the traditional one-tier four-year English Language and Literature Studies programme which offered courses in linguistics, translation, literature, English and a course on ELT methodology in the fourth (i.e. the final) year. Upon graduation, the students were conferred the title 'Professor of English Language and Literature' and it was widely believed that the broad humanistic (theoretical) knowledge obtained in the above-mentioned fields made them eligible to work in all areas related to English.

At the time, course content was used as a basis for curriculum design. In other words, the courses centred on the subject matter to be learned. Skills, competencies, student workload or the job market were not considered during curriculum development. The typically teacher-centred education placed value on 'knowledge of content' as a measure of success with little reference as to what the students were actually able to do. This position is not unusual for "institutions of higher education deeply rooted in the Humboldtian tradition [which] tend to depreciate practical and applied knowledge" (Pechar 2007, 116).

In English language classes this orientation was reflected in an extensive study of grammar and vocabulary (i.e. grammar theory as opposed to practical language skills). In fact, what was valued was a broad knowledge of the language system and lexis (Vodopija-Krstanović 2008). Oral skills were frequently assessed through knowledge of grammar rules, vocabulary definitions and lists of synonyms (Vodopija-Krstanović 2008). It was assumed that this knowledge was the groundwork which would enable the student to use the language accurately and appropriately (in all the four skills) and in all situations. In brief, there was no reference to specific learning outcomes or to market-driven skills and competencies in English.

However, Bologna seems to have replaced the ideal of a broad theoretical knowledge with a more pragmatic orientation of concrete skills and competencies geared toward the market. In addition, the general trend toward greater cooperation between colleges, universities and other learning providers and the world of work (Jessop 2008) led to the realization that language studies would need to become closer to 'real-life'. It would be expected that following the reform, ELS would better cater for the needs of the emerging models of economic and social development. In other words, one would expect that changes have been made to shift teaching from "the ivory-towered intellectual isolation back into closer and more continuous contact with the economy, the state and the community as vital co-producers and consumers of useful knowledge" (Jessop 2008, 32).

What does this specifically mean for English language learning and teaching?

First, it would mean that ELS would need to equip graduates with 'real-life' skills and competencies in English. Second, language teaching and curriculum development should be more in tune with student needs and the job market. Further, a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (see Section 4.1) would need to be adopted in language courses to develop knowledge of English as opposed to knowledge about English. And finally, there should be a closer correlation between the competencies and market-oriented job descriptions specified in the English Department (BA) curriculum and actual (teaching) practice, which is currently not the case. Indeed, curriculum design should not be driven primarily by content, yet nevertheless, it seems to be.

However, anecdotal evidence in our particular context suggests that the educational paradigmatic shift triggered by Bologna has created challenges for educators as it questions the long-standing humanistic tradition in ELS and raises two key questions (1) should education be primarily driven by the market economy and (2) what comprises a good (language) education? In fact, ELT professionals are voicing their concern about the changing face of English Studies and reservations are being expressed whether a skills-oriented education is sufficiently intellectual (Vodopija-Krstanović and Brala Vukanović 2011). Similarly in Germany, the change to the two-tier system and a more structured curriculum with explicit obligations for both students and teachers is considered 'degrading' for universities because it is imposing the learning cultures of schools on higher education (Pechar 2007). Likewise, in our contexts, one of the complaints voiced against Bologna is that it has turned universities into high schools and lowered the evaluation criteria (cf. Krištof et al. 2011).

Following these discussions, it would seem that in our context issues relative to ELS reflect the dialectics between (1) traditional versus contemporary educational practices and mediums of instructions, (2) the humanistic ideal of broad knowledge orientation versus a market-driven educational philosophy premised on the development of specific skills, competencies and concrete learning outcomes, and (3) the global dimension of English and English language teaching and the implications in local contexts. These issues represent some of the challenges that lie in the very centre of ELS following the Bologna reform.

3 Motivation for the Study

This particular study has been motivated by several factors. First, the fact there have been numerous discussions and debates surrounding English language teaching in local and global contexts (Block and Cameron 2002; Holliday 1994, 2005; Canagarajah 1999, 2002) English in the academy (Phillipson 2006; Turner 2011), English language (and education) policy (May and Hornberger 2008; Norrby and Hajek 2011; Phillipson 2007) and innovation in English language education (Holliday 2001; Waters 2009). To our knowledge, however, there has been little discussion about English language teaching and ELS in the context of the Bologna reform.

Second, the Bologna Process and the educational changes have received substantial attention in the literature (e.g. Cardoso et al. 2008; Gaston 2010; Keeling 2006; Kwiek 2004; Witte 2004). However, this attention has not been on ELS.

Third, given that the teaching and learning of English has become an increasingly significant area in applied linguistics, and that the educational reform has had a widespread impact on higher education in Europe, it seemed relevant to explore the intersection of the two.

Fourth, in our particular context, there seems to be disagreement among practitioners about the extent to which disciplines (can be and should be) influenced by market economies. Interestingly, in Croatia, there seems to be little dialogue between higher education and employers on curriculum design, work placements and international experience (cf. the Bologna national report for Croatia (Towards the European Higher Education Area 2007–2010)). From this it would seem that the ivory towers of academia still seem to be driven by traditional beliefs about education and instruction with little concern about the job market. A case in point is our particular English Studies Department which has no explicit language and education policy to underpin curricula development and instructional practices. Furthermore, no contact or dialogue has taken place with (potential) employers as to whether the graduates' skills and competencies respond to job market needs.

Fifth, equally important is a recent brief (albeit worrying) decline in the number of students enrolled in the English Language and Literature (BA) studies at Rijeka University. Given that, since 1998, the English Studies Department has been one of the two most popular departments¹ at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, the smaller number of applicants in 2011 and 2012 has raised concern.

Sixth, in 2001 an evaluation report of the University by the Visiting Advisors of the Salzburg Seminar (2001) indicated that the teaching context was highly teacher-centered with traditional teaching styles and forms of student assessment, i.e. a “lack of practicum” and an overemphasis on “book knowledge” and “rote learning.” Furthermore, the results of a survey on the implementation of Bologna conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka in 2010 by the Faculty Quality Assurance Board showed that students’ main complaints about study programmes at the Faculty were related to traditional teaching methods, irrelevant courses and inappropriate innovation.

Finally, we wanted to utilize the findings which emerged in this study as a guide for our departmental curriculum development, i.e. as a springboard for redesigning the English language curriculum to streamline it with student needs and current educational trends.

These observations prompted us to examine the ELS and mediums of instruction in the English Department at Rijeka University as to whether changes are indeed taking place at RIU and whether (and how) these changes reflect and relate to student needs and the broader emerging educational trends.

4 Theoretical Background

This study draws on conceptual frameworks of (1) the learning outcomes-based and market-orientation in education discussed above and (2) *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) and learner-centred education (Savignon 2005; Spada 2007), as an approach which could develop the necessary language skills and competencies.

English language teaching (ELT) needs to take into account the changing face of English as well as its current role in the modern world and educational domain (Nunan 2003). ELT is uniquely complex because it reflects the local educational culture and context where it is taught, the international character of English as a global language, and ELT methodology developed in English speaking countries (Holliday 1994; Kumaravadivelu 2008; Pennycook 2000, 2001).

Today, the byword is Communicative Language Teaching, which is taken as “a point of reference in discussions about language teaching” and is, in fact, considered to be “the first truly global language teaching method” (Block 2008, 39). Undoubtedly, the major change that has occurred in the teaching practice of the last twenty years was the move towards CLT and learner-centred instruction, premised on learner needs and active learner involvement (Nunan 2003), i.e. on the assumption that the language has to be *needs-based* and *real* (Cook 2000). This is exemplified in the terms commonly used to characterize the approach: ‘meaningful learning’, ‘interactive’, ‘real-life’, ‘authentic’, ‘negotiation for meaning’, ‘fluency’, and ‘communication in real situations’, among others. The process is oriented towards learner-centred classrooms and learner autonomy and the subject content of English is focused on the communicative aspect of the language with

¹ The other one being the Psychology Department

concentration on meaning, and less on code knowledge. The general educational purpose is to develop the learners' intercultural communicative competence (Alcon Soler and Safont Jorda 2008; Byram 2002) with a particular eye to students' needs (Cook 2000).

In brief, it seems fair to say that mainstream methodology: (1) takes into consideration learner needs, and (2) advocates learner-centred classrooms which focus on communicative language teaching through tasks which reflect the kind of language use students will encounter in the *real world*. Consequently, the methods used to teach and assess English should reflect these aims.

5 The Study

Clearly, the global spread of English and the increased market orientation of 'traditional humanistic studies' is raising questions about the very nature (and future) of the English language and ELS. In line with these discussions the aim of this study is, in the first place, to examine Croatian students' conceptualizations of ELS. In the second place, the study examines the English Language Programme and teaching practices in the English Department in Rijeka (with respect to current educational trends). And third, it is intended as a critical contribution (from the Croatian context) to educational practices and mediums of instruction in English language programmes in the light of the changing face of higher education.

5.1 Research Questions

The guiding questions for the study focused on the intersection of ELS in the light of the Bologna Process educational reforms and the job market. More specifically, the study aims to address the following questions:

RQ1: What skills and competencies are developed in a course of ELS?

RQ2: What are the common educational practices used?

RQ3: What are the principles underpinning the English language curriculum?

RQ4: How does ELS respond to the general trend towards a market-oriented education?

RQ5: What are the perceived learning outcomes of ELS?

5.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 25 students, of whom 13 were in the BA programme and 12 in the MA in TEFL programme in the academic year 2010/2011. All the participants were enrolled in the double major programme, i.e. they were English majors studying another subject. The students were all native speakers of Croatian. The age ranged from 19 to 25 years.

5.3 Method

The data were obtained by means of semi-structured interviews. The interviews consisted of 12 questions focusing on the following topics: (1) the skills and competencies developed in and learning outcomes of the MA and BA Programmes, (2) the dominant educational practices, (3) the extent to which ELS prepares the students for the job market and (4) the desired future direction of the English Studies Programme.

The data were transcribed and then analysed in terms of descriptive answers' content and common features, to find general trends by identifying responses to the guiding questions. Answers containing the same argumentative elements were grouped together and the common features described under a single heading.

5.4 Findings and Discussion

Previous studies from Central and Eastern Europe, namely, Slovenia, Poland, Croatia, and the Czech Republic have reported on the challenges academia is facing in the light of the Bologna Process, the job market, the teaching quality and the development of foreign language curricula (see Będkowska-Kopczyk et al. 2011a, 2011b). As there has been little discussion about ELS in the light of the educational changes, in this section, we will look at the findings and data on ELS as it pertains to the reform.

The following section has been divided into four parts. First, (the desired) skills, competencies and learning outcomes will be discussed. Part two will focus on the curriculum, current educational practices and mediums of instruction. The third part will look at ELS in the light of the job market. And finally, students' proposals for the future of English Studies will be presented.

5.4.1 Skills, Competencies and Learning Outcomes

Regarding skills and competencies developed, i.e. the students' impressions relative to the outcomes of the learning process, we first need to note that there seems to be a greater level of dissatisfaction at the BA than the MA level.

In fact, 10 out of 13 BA students at some point during the interview pointed out that (1) there exists a wide gap between their initial expectations and what they actually get in class, and (2) the organization of the curriculum results in a worrying lack of critical thinking development. On the other hand, MA students feel a greater degree of satisfaction with the actual skills and competencies developed at the MA level, and this seems to be particularly true of the profession of EFL teacher (only 2 of 12 expressed clear dissatisfaction with some aspect of the MA programme). It is obvious, then, that our respondents value in particular the skills and competencies which are relevant for 'real life' purposes.

More specifically, when asked to point out what they have actually learnt during their course of studies (i.e. which specific skills and competencies were developed), BA students single out (responses sorted by frequency of appearance, starting with most frequent): (1) broader vocabulary; (2) improved knowledge of grammar; (3) improved reading and writing skills; (4) more thorough knowledge of linguistics; (5) better knowledge of literature. MA students, on the other hand, depict their skills and competencies which they feel they have improved during their course of studies as (again, listed by frequency): (1) improved understanding of the teaching process/methodology, knowledge of how to approach (future) students (in this respect, they are especially satisfied with the pre-service training), (2) better theoretical understanding of FLA, SLA and psycholinguistics (occasionally too theoretical, with lack of relation to practice); (3) insufficient improvement in general English language skills (English language courses should continue into the 4th and 5th year). This latter remark seems to be of particular relevance when it comes to the next change in the curriculum at the English Department at Rijeka University. In order to give an illustration of some of the most indicative answers, below we present a few quotations taken directly from our students' interviews regarding their perceived learning outcomes.

“read English books”;

“make fewer errors”;

“how to work with children”;

“knowledge about linguistics”;

“how to work under pressure and respect deadlines”;

“how to express my opinion”;

“what does being a teacher include and how to do it”;

“how to be a successful teacher”;

“that knowledge, especially the knowledge of a language’ is something you have to continuously work on – lifetime’s learning”;

“understand native speakers”;

It is interesting to note here that among the skills and competencies listed by our students, alongside theoretical and language-related specific notions, we find theoretical or rather non-linguistic skills and competencies such as ‘critical thinking’ and ‘respect of deadlines’ which, in a way, are by-products of the teaching process, recognized and valued by the students.

5.4.2 Educational Practices and Mediums of Instruction

The answers that we obtained relative to questions that were aimed at exploring students’ views on the specific elements of educational practices and mediums of instruction, are, again, somewhat different for the two sets of respondents. BA students point out that:

- (1) the BA curriculum is overly fragmented, too general, too theory-driven, lacks a clear focus;
- (2) not organized according to learners’ outcomes;
- (3) there exists a wide gap between students’ initial expectations and what they actually get in class. We could sum this up by saying that the picture painted by our BA respondents is a clear criticism of the traditional educational approach (lecture-based theory). In other words, the data seems to corroborate previous findings that modes of instruction are predominantly teacher-centred (see Section 3) and the curriculum is content-driven.

MA students are, once again, overall more satisfied with the educational practices. What 10 students have singled out is the fact that they are particularly satisfied with the modes of instruction and practical-skills orientation. We read this as a clear recognition of the value of an education that prepares students for the real world. Some illustrative examples of answers given by our students to questions addressing issues of educational practices are listed below:

“There is no practice only theory and that is not enough for the market, also the market doesn’t recognize BA...”

“Too many lectures.”

“I don’t think the BA course has a real aim at all. You get a bit of literature, a bit of language,

some strange elective courses but all this is not connected into coherent matter.”

“We do too much theory; there is no exchange programmes which would enable us to go to the foreign countries, too few opportunities to practice our language.”

“Too much work at home.”

“It gets overloaded.”

“Enough attention is not given to developing our translation skills.”

“The MA is better because we do different things, work in groups, do projects, don't only listen and learn.”

Indeed, one worrying observation that seems to emerge from the answers listed above, and most others as well, is the question of employability of (our) BA bachelors, particularly so with respect to the discrepancy between the competencies described and those acquired in the programme, and the recognition of the degree itself by the job market.

5.4.3 English Studies and the Job Market

The first set of questions, which yielded only minor differences between the answers given by the BA vs. the MA group, pertained to those relative to their expectations following the completion of their course of studies. Virtually all of the respondents, 23 of them see themselves within the market place, 17 of whom as teachers, (both at BA and MA levels), and 6 as translators. The data clearly show that our students, 22 of them, feel that our curriculum is still too theory-driven, which is in contrast with their interests and needs to develop concrete, market-oriented skills and competencies. This indicates that, unfortunately, the objectives and outcomes orientation does not underpin the design of courses. In fact, English language classes are seen as focusing too extensively on the study of grammar and vocabulary (cf. Vodopija-Krstanović 2008) and not providing enough knowledge that will make them marketable (see examples below). We obviously witness a mismatch among students' expectations, job market orientation and formal education. This is clearly exemplified by a selection of our interviewees' responses cited below:

“There is too much theory...some classes are really useful ... translation ... we need more practice in English much more. Our classes are about theory... and we forget most of the theory after the exam.”

“In language classes we learn too much grammar. We have to learn the rules in Quirk. This does not help me much because I learn the rules only for the exam and when I use the language I never think about the rules. We need to do more things with the language not just learn and then write tests.”

“We learn vocabulary lists of words and synonyms... lots of words by heart.”

“What could I do? I am not sure because I don't think I know English like we are supposed to know. We need more practical English classes even at the MA. We learn so much stuff but the most important thing is how we know English.”

“We cannot do anything with a BA; it's like high school ... where could we work? What can we do? So we all have to go to the MA.”

“We learn how to teach that we can do but I don't want to be a teacher.”

A related study (Vodopija-Krstanović and Brala Vukanović 2011) has shown that other professions which mainly BA students see as their possible future employment include: librarian, writer, proof reader, journalist, and researcher. MA students, by and large, see themselves as future English language teachers (sporadically, international relations and business – neither of which, of course, are addressed or developed in the current programme).

5.4.4 Students' Proposals for the Future

When specifically asked to propose ideas that might improve their course of studies in the future, we first need to note that at both the BA and the MA level students seem to make a clear distinction between skills and content courses, and would like to have more focus put on skills courses. Let us point out here that by the terms 'skills' they primarily emphasise 'speaking, reading and writing' English. Looking at the two sets of answers in detail, we note that at the BA level 20 students point out the need to introduce 'more English'. They specify this as: 'actual use of the language'; 'more speaking, reading, writing'; 'more interactive / creative classes'; 'work in (smaller) groups'; 'student oriented classes'; 'more electives'; 'reorganize Bologna'; 'more focus on quality than quantity'; and 'changes in teaching'.

MA students describe their needs and ideas in the following terms: 'change Bologna', 'more work on English skills'; 'more electives'; 'less theory, more practice'; and 'fewer general education (pedagogy) courses (in Croatian)'.

When we look at the results in general, we observe that they can actually be grouped into three distinct subsets: (1) actual use of English ('authentic language'); (2) more flexibility / electivity / market oriented courses; (3) more interactivity in the courses. Again, we offer a few examples that should help illustrate our students' views:

"There should be more actual use of English... more talking, more interaction, more translating, more practice something more dynamical... force students to use the language."

"I would make smaller groups and I would give them the opportunity to choose more optional courses."

"I would put more importance on the language workshop because I think they are the most important and should provide us with good knowledge of the language."

"Since this is a language study it is important for students to learn in an environment which is close to the native speaker."

"Take a deeper approach to the content you are teaching."

"Leaving out some of those didaktika, edukacijska psihologija, more practice, no courses in the last semester."

"... a richer programme with more elective courses and modules like translation."

"Apply theoretical knowledge to your needs in practice..."

From the data it is evident that the students would prefer their education to be closer to the principles of Bologna and in line with current trends in language teaching, i.e. CLT. In fact, students (23 out of 24) express, at least at some point in the interview, that they would prefer language learning to be 'meaningful', 'interactive', 'real-life', 'authentic', and based on 'communication in real situations'.

6 Concluding Remarks

The move to the Bologna Process and the socio-political changes that have taken place in this particular context call for qualitative changes in education, more specifically in ELS. As the findings in this paper have suggested, it would appear that (our) students are aware of the fact that Bologna recommendations and the reality of the job market both imply a market-oriented education and, thus, they expect the programme to better prepare them for specific jobs. However, it seems that the current position of ELS within the curriculum reflects a more traditional educational paradigm based on a content-based curriculum model, which remains relatively unaware of the students' needs, and of market dynamics. In fact, the traditional educational paradigm and the content-based curriculum seems to linger on as students tend to focus more on (theoretical) 'knowledge about English' as opposed to the development of specific skills and competencies, i.e. 'knowledge of English' (e.g. as needed for translation).

While we are aware of the fact that these assumptions reflect solely students' perceptions regarding ELS, and more research would be needed in order to (1) investigate market needs, (2) employers' satisfaction with our graduates' competencies, (3) employed graduates attitudes towards their attained skills and competencies, (4) the impact of the general economic trend on employability of (particularly BA) graduates, and (5) most recent analysis of and trends (i.e. developments) in EFL curriculum development, we hold that the input provided by our students should nevertheless be taken into consideration to help us make informed decisions regarding ELS.

Therefore, we maintain that we would need to revisit our instructional practices and re-examine the ELS curriculum in terms of (1) CLT b) students' needs, (2) market demand/possibilities, and (3) a learning outcomes. More specifically, we need to make some conceptual changes in terms of how we (1) understand ELS, (2) design courses and educational programmes, (3) conduct instruction, namely by emphasising specific learning outcomes (in particular) at the BA level, and (4) need to provide more opportunities to develop the students' productive skills (a CLT orientation).

In brief, we need to negotiate a balance between theory and practice / practical training. Possibly, this has been at least partly achieved at the MA level where, interestingly, we note a higher degree of satisfaction by the students. We would like to suggest that this is so because, indeed, the MA programme is more oriented towards specific skills, i.e. teaching, than the BA programme, and offers practical and applied knowledge. At the same time, it is obvious that the BA remains a fragmented programme, lacking clear focus or specific aims. This raises a number of questions about its (market) purposefulness as an independent course of studies.

The implications of these findings are that, in the meantime, we have initiated changes in the English language curriculum. More specifically, in 2012, we began restructuring the English language courses at the BA level with the aim of making both qualitative and quantitative changes. More specifically, we have doubled the number of contact hours devoted to English language skills and incorporated more translation courses. Undoubtedly, curriculum design is a process and follow-up studies will be necessary to examine the outcomes, capitalize on the strengths and adjust the weaknesses.

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