

ATTITUDES OF THE 1ST YEAR TEACHER'S COLLEGE
STUDENTS TOWARDS THEIR STUDY
WITH A SPECIAL ACCENT ON ELT

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The article deals with the results of a survey on attitudes of our 1st year Teacher's College students (academic year 1996/97) towards their study of Future primary school teachers with a special regard to foreign language (FL) teaching. They like the idea of the early introduction of foreign language/s/ in primary schools, although they seem less apt to take on such a responsibility in their future classes.

KEY WORDS: students, attitudes, English, learning, early, teaching, school

It has been several years now since four-year-studies of Primary school teaching started at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zadar. About 35 students enter this department of Primary school teaching every year, being trained for future primary school teachers. Among the courses required at these studies is English, as a foreign language, which will be particularly discussed within this paper.

In 1991 Dr Mirjana Vilke and Dr Yvonne Vrhovac proposed the project of Early foreign language learning in primary schools in Croatia. "The project is sponsored by the Croatian Ministry of Education and the educational authorities of the city of Zagreb. The research part is supported by the Ministry

of Science and conducted by a group of ELT specialists from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. The project is a part of a network of similar projects in 20 European countries and Canada, in a medium term programme entitled Language learning for European Citizenship, under the umbrella of the European Council in Strasbourg" (Vilke, Vrhovac, Children and foreign languages, 1993, 5). As M. Vilke states "An early start to foreign languages could mean in the long run bilingualism for the entire population" (Vilke, Vrhovac, Children and foreign languages, 1993, 24). This proposal was taken into account at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zadar. This projects reflects into two directions:

- introducing early foreign language at schools, and
- preparing the future primary school teachers for foreign language teaching.

The tendency considering the latter has been to select and additionally educate the most talented students among the group. Coming back to our circumstances in Zadar, it has to be pointed out that being in a situation of war from 1991 to 1995, and having some staff and spatial problems, it was only in 1996 that we had the opportunity of establishing English as an eight-semester course.

As an English teacher myself, I have been particularly interested in our student's attitudes towards the study, with the special accent on their English language learning, and let us hope, their future English language teaching (ELT). A similar but a more complex survey had been done in Zagreb by Smiljana Narančić-Kovač under the title "The attitudes towards English of the Croatian students being trained for Primary school teachers" in 1994.¹

Therefore I made a questionnaire of some nine questions and in October 1996 the group of 33 students (32 females and 1 male) were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Have you willingly come to this study of the future primary school teachers?
2. Are the possibilities of employing teachers in Croatia, known to you?
3. Do you like the idea of early foreign language learning?
4. Do you approve of a primary school teacher being an FL teacher, too?
5. Would you like to teach English to early graders aged 6-10?
6. What is your pre-knowledge of English?
 - a) poor
 - b) sufficient
 - c) good

¹ Thanks to S. N. Kovač whose paper was available to me while preparing mine.

7. What was your average mark in English in the Secondary school?
 a) excellent
 b) very good
 c) good
 d) sufficient
8. Are there a) enough, or
 b) too many courses at the 1st year of your study?
9. Would you like to attend more English periods per week throughout the semester/s?

Table 1. *Willingness towards the study*

	Students	%
Yes	29	87,9
No	4	12,1

Table 2. *Possibilities of employment for teachers in Croatia, known to you?*

	Students	%
Yes	30	90,9
No	3	9,1

As it is obvious from Tables 1. and 2. four students have come to this study non-willingly for some other reasons, while 29 followed their vocation towards the profession of primary school teachers. They seem to be well informed of a great need of teachers throughout Croatia and consequently of the opportunities of employment.

Table 3. *Early foreign language learning*

	Students	%
Yes	30	90,9
No	3	9,1

Table 4. *Ordinary teacher = teacher of FL*

	Students	%
Yes	26	78,8
No	7	21,2

Introducing English (or perhaps any other foreign language) from the very beginning of the obligatory schooling showed the student's liking of the idea, as seen in Table 3., and also the role of a teacher as an FL teacher, is considered rather welcome among 26 out of 33 students, in Table 4.

Table 5. *Desire for future teaching English as an FL*

	Students	%
Yes	18	54,5
No	15	45,5

Here in Table 5. the students seem to be less enthusiastic about the possibility of their future FL teaching, which probably arises from the self evaluation of their pre- knowledge of English presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Student's self evaluation of their pre-knowledge of English*

	Students	%
poor	7	21
sufficient	17	51,5
good	9	27,5

Table 7. *Average mark in English during the Secondary school*

	Students	%
excellent	4	12,1
very good	8	24,3
good	13	39,3
sufficient	8	24,3

These figures indicate the self evaluation of 33 young persons entering the Faculty with the notion of their pre-knowledge as rather weak. In Table 7. some 21 students claim not to have had excellent or very good marks during their secondary schooling but instead, the marks good and sufficient which do not promise a good basis for future studying of English at a higher level.

Table 8. *a) Enough or b) too many courses in the 1st year at the Faculty*

	Students	%
a)	16	48,5
b)	17	51,5

Table 9. *Extra English periods per week/per semester*

	Students	%
Yes	21	63,5
No	12	36,5

Considering the number of courses at the 1st year of their study (Table 8.) approximately one half opines there are enough courses per week/per semester, while another slightly bigger half feels being overburdened. Anyway it is interesting to note from Table 9. that 21 students, which is 63.5%, answered positively in favour of more English classes per week or per semester.

From the given data it is obvious that the majority of our 1st year students came to this Faculty determined to become future primary school teachers. More than half of them, after being dully trained, would accept the role of future FL teachers. Moreover it is encouraging that although 51.5% of the total claim to being overburdened with lessons, 63.5% of them would have more periods of English, to improve their present knowledge. In the course of time, let us hope, some of them could take on the challenging duty of future primary school teachers qualified for FL teaching.

Bibliography

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*Irena Fadić: STAVOVI STUDENATA PRVE GODINE RAZREDNE
NASTAVE PREMA NJIHOVU STUDIJU S POSEBNIM OSVRTOM
NA UČENJE ENGLESKOG JEZIKA*

S a ž e t a k

U članku se donose rezultati ankete provedene 1996. godine u grupi od 33 studenata 1. godine Razredne nastave o njihovom odnosu prema studiju koji su odabrali, s posebnim osvrtom na učenje, odnosno podučavanje engleskog jezika.

Od 1991. godine u Zagrebu i nekim drugim gradovima Hrvatske počeo se ostvarivati dugo planirani projekt ranog učenja stranih jezika od početka obveznog osnovnog školovanja. Također se istovremeno radilo na osposobljavanju što većeg broja učitelja stranih jezika. Iz ankete je vidljivo da naši studenti pozdravljaju ideju ranog uvođenja stranog jezika u početne razrede osnovne škole. Nešto su skeptičniji po pitanju individualnog izvođenja te nastave, ali su ujedno voljni većim brojem kolegija iz (u našem slučaju i za sada samo) engleskog jezika steći kroz svoj studij potrebno znanje i vještine, te eventualno obnašati i tu ulogu u svom budućem pozivu.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: studenti, stavovi, engleski, učenje, rani, poučavanje, škola