

ATTITUDES OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDENTS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING*

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Abstract. *This paper explains the relation between the attitudes of students in the humanities and social sciences to foreign languages and their average college grade. The main goal of language learning is not just mastering a new language system, but preparing for interpersonal communication and cooperation and the promotion of equality of men in education, culture, science. Also, foreign language skills enable a more intensive exchange with other people, aiming to promote tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. On an individual basis, mastery of a foreign language encourages the development of a student's personality and identity. Studies indicate that knowledge of a foreign language allows an individual to meet with the most significant cultural and historical characteristics of foreign countries. The aim of this study is to define the attitudes of students towards foreign languages, their opinion on possible choices and the need for mastering a foreign language in contemporary society. The goals of the study were: (1) To find out what influences their choice in choosing the foreign language, (2) To identify the favorite foreign languages among the student population, (3) To determine the reasons for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language, (4) To find out the students' opinion on the importance of knowing a foreign language for their future interest, (5) To identify situations in which students use a foreign language in everyday life. The results showed that language learning is affected more by social reasons than by personal interests or cultural reasons, that learning English is considered to be of general interest, as a help in using computers and the like. Boring lectures and topics are the reasons for the lack of motivation for learning foreign languages, more than uninteresting textbooks, teachers and subjects ($p < 0.001$). The facts identified in our study also suggest that students consider learning a foreign language very important for their future interest and also for everyday situations when using the Internet.*

Key words: *foreign languages, student education, student attitudes, interculturalism.*

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INTRODUCTION

The promotion of the idea of foreign language learning has always been associated with historical and political factors. New ideas and methods of teaching and learning were a result of major economic and political changes and new needs in communication between people. Today the idea of the importance of learning and equality of language culminated in accordance with the economic, political, cultural and educational unity of Europe. Political and practical needs for the use of foreign languages gave a new value to many languages of the people and communities involved in the great European and world family. Language learning continues throughout one's entire life: education is a continuous, reversible, meaning that the individual is free to go back into the education system in accordance to their wishes. On the other hand, multilingualism assumes mastery of multiple languages at different levels of competence and asks for a level that is different from the simple coexistence of language. It is considered a must for the individual and society.

Foreign languages are becoming an increasingly important part of our lives. Their importance stems from the globalization of urban as well as political, economic and educational integration. In terms of linguistic competence, it is understood as a communicative, or as a set of skills and knowledge not only of language but of the structure of language use in accordance with the socio-cultural norms of the community in which it is spoken. Languages and cultures they stem from are not separated in the minds of individuals who master a given language. They do not represent separate knowledge, but are integrated in the broadest perspective of the communicative competences of an individual. All the languages which individuals use to interact in form of a framework of communicative competence, both at the cognitive (understanding of one language helps us improve our cognitive abilities) and at the socio-communicative level. Basically, all the ideas related to the issue of language, native and foreign, fall under the idea of multilingualism. Multilingualism is defined as the ability of individuals to participate in intercultural interaction in several languages and that allows them to be involved in a number of cultural communities.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE AS A UNIVERSITY COURSE

Foreign language teaching is an organized process, whose goals are determined in accordance with the general educational policy of our society and its current tasks (Đorović, 2004). Studying a foreign language is a compulsory learning process which begins in the first grade, or in the fifth grade, according to the provisions of the plans and programs. Learning a foreign language continues throughout high school and college. The overall objective of the course is that students master the language in terms of the basic vocabulary, and oral and written understanding and adoption of reading and writing comprehension skills. This allows them to complement and widen their general language skills and to develop expressive abilities and the general ability to think and remember. Knowledge of foreign language enables an individual to meet with the most significant cultural and historical characteristics of foreign countries and establish a certain level of attitude towards the community, whose language he is learning. In elementary school, foreign language teaching has the character of a general education course in which, in addition to educational content, students acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to achieve mutual understanding in a foreign language.

The need to achieve complete understanding of a foreign language calls for applying the principles of the linear-spiral arrangement of learning material. The main accent is on speech and understanding the spoken language. During the period of learning foreign languages in elementary and secondary schools, students adopt not only the language skills, but they also acquire communication skills. In high schools, learning a foreign language is also compulsory. In most professional schools, to the overall goal of learning foreign languages, a new element is added: the students learn the basic vocabulary of the profession which enables them to read and understand simple texts of their professional interest. Learning foreign languages from primary and secondary schools continues to colleges and universities. These educational institutions improve the students' knowledge and provide new levels of learning. They also provide new contents with which the students have not met during their former education and offer them the possibility to choose the level and orientation of the course.

In Serbian universities foreign language courses are becoming a burning issue for decades, debated often in the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as among his teachers. That is the reason why foreign languages have very different statuses in our university curricula: from the appreciation of its value (this is especially true for the English language) and emphasizing its role in the professional involvement of our young professionals in scientific circles in Europe and the world, to the underestimation of its importance and reducing foreign language courses to optional subjects, for which in some universities there is not even a permanent teacher. At some colleges, foreign languages are taught through all the years of study, at some for three years, and somewhere it ends with the first or the second year of study. The fact that all of this is happening at a time when we are heading toward Europe, and involved in processes of adjusting to the European educational community where the protection of multiculturalism and multilingualism is the basic principle, makes the situation even more absurd.

Teaching foreign languages at the Faculty of Philosophy has a humanistic orientation, diverse and rich in language and thematic content. In addition to the language-related content, the curricula include themes in connection with civilization, culture, arts, the scientific and technical achievements of the people whose language is being learned, as well as excerpts from selected works of literature, and popular scientific literature. Language programs built on elementary and secondary education and have a linear-helical structure. The programs are based on syntactic progression, and language requirements are formulated in terms of descriptive grammar with elements of the communicative approach.

The number of classes of foreign language courses varies depending on various higher education institutions, but generally, a foreign language is an obligatory course in the first years of study, in the form of lectures and exercises. Of all foreign languages that are taught, withoutdoubt, English is the most common, but equally necessary in the light of the increasing presence of globalization that connects all parts of the world, in all spheres of modern life. English is an integral part of the business world and politics, science and education, and everyday communication, the world of entertainment and all kinds of leisure activities. Eighty-five percent of all information in science and technology information centers in the world is in English (Grabe & Kaplan, 1986; Zengin, Erdogan & Akalin, 2007). Students take part in exchange programs, which are available to our students through EU funds, with the perspective of further expanding these possibilities in the near future.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The European Union has about 450 000 000 people belonging to different language groups and 20 official languages in daily use. Quality work in any profession, especially at the academic level, at present involves the understanding and active use of at least one foreign language. This knowledge is necessary for reading professional literature, communication with foreign business partners, as well as for correspondence and various forms of written expression. Consequently, many academic institutions in their study plans provide foreign language instruction as a course through which students could acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in various aspects of communication in a foreign language.

English is also taught through the content of the curriculum of vocational subjects, engaging students' knowledge of the language. Application-based learning tasks and the overall approach to language through contemporary and authentic professional materials as well as through encouraging students to meaningful use of language allows the student to successfully develop all four language skills. But (...) demands of the profession are dictated by specific priorities which occur due to the asymmetry in the learning requirements. Written language was given precedence over the oral and receptive language skills, which, on the other hand, have an advantage over the productive use of language. Thus, we can conclude that the use of literature in foreign language teaching is a priority goal for most professions. In addition, it is necessary to train students for self-exposure in a foreign language, both orally and in written form, in the form of writing papers, articles to be published in professional journals, reports, presentations, recapitulation (...) (Šafranj, 2005: 241).

The importance of learning foreign languages lies in acquiring, extending and deepening the knowledge and skills in all language activities, in learning about the cultural heritage created by the country whose language is being studied and in training for further education. The tasks of teaching a foreign language include:

- to help students acquire a spoken language and new words and expressions,
- to adopt proper pronunciation and intonation with paying special attention to those prosodic and rhythmic schemes that are important in oral expression,
- to improve their understanding of speech (directly and through the media), and enable them to spontaneously express themselves within the themes of everyday life and the basic themes of the natural and social sciences,
- to master the technique of informative reading and understanding complex linguistic-style structures in the text, and familiar features of language, which enables them to read passages from famous literary and scientific and popular works,
- to develop the proper skills of written expression, writing short individual compositions and their own interpretations,
- to acquire new knowledge about the characteristics of the countries and peoples whose language is being learned, especially those that are essential for understanding the language and culture of the people they meet, historical events that are important in global terms, scientific and technical achievements of the countries whose language is being learned, the choice of suitable content in correlation with other areas of education and upbringing,
- to be able to carry on a conversation about our country, its beauties, cultural and historical heritage, acquire general knowledge and develop cross-cultural cooperation

and tolerance, moral, and aesthetic values and intellectual ability, imagination and creativity,

- to qualify them for further self education and introduce them to using dictionaries, thesauruses and other reference books.

THE METHOD

This research includes students of the humanities and social sciences who had different average marks throughout their studies. The aim of this study was to determine their attitudes towards foreign languages and their opinion on the election and the need for a foreign language in contemporary society.

The goals of the study were: (1) To find out what influences their choice in choosing to study a foreign language, (2) To identify the favorite foreign languages among the student population, (3) To determine the reasons for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language, (4) To find out the students' opinion on the importance of the knowledge of foreign languages for their future personal and professional progress, (5) To identify situations in which students use foreign language in everyday life.

The research hypotheses were: (1) It is assumed that the students' choice in choosing to study a foreign language is influenced by a compelling social need, (2) It is assumed that students primarily choose the English language, (3) It is assumed that boring lectures and topics are the reason for the lack of motivation when learning a foreign language, (4) It is assumed that students perceive foreign languages as very important for their future personal and professional progress, (5) It is assumed that foreign languages are most often used on the internet. The variable in the study was the students' GPA.

This research is part of a larger study on the role of foreign languages in higher education that lasted throughout 2009, 2010 and 2011. The study used survey techniques and a survey instrument list that was made for this study. The sample consisted of graduates of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš from the following departments: Pedagogy, Psychology, Sociology, History, Journalism, Philosophy and Serbian language and comparative literature. The characteristics of the sample are shown below:

Table 1. Sample structure

| | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) | Cumulative percentage (% cf) |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| | 6-7 | 130 | 21.8 |
| | 7,01-8 | 31 | 5.2 |
| Average rating | 8,01-9 | 263 | 44.2 |
| | Above 9,01 | 171 | 28.7 |
| | Total | 595 | 100.0 |

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

When asked in the survey list what influences their choice of learning a foreign language, we got the following information:

Table 2. Selection of a foreign language

| | | | Average rating | | | | Total |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---|----------------|--------|--------|------------|--------|
| | | | 6-7 | 7,01-8 | 8,01-9 | Above 9,01 | |
| Choice of learning a foreign language | Social Needs | f | 95 | 21 | 230 | 144 | 490 |
| | | % | 16.0% | 3.5% | 38.7% | 24.2% | 82.4% |
| | Personal interests | f | 30 | 9 | 28 | 27 | 94 |
| | | % | 5.0% | 1.5% | 4.7% | 4.5% | 15.8% |
| | Cultural reasons | f | 5 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 11 |
| | | % | .8% | .2% | .8% | .0% | 1.8% |
| Total | | f | 130 | 31 | 263 | 171 | 595 |
| | | % | 21.8% | 5.2% | 44.2% | 28.7% | 100.0% |

$$\chi^2 = 21.567, df = 6, p = 0.001, V = 0.135$$

It was determined that there is a statistically significant difference in the responses of students about what influences the choice of learning a foreign language formed on the basis of their average grade ($p = 0.001$). Cramer is a high correlation coefficient indicating the strength of differences between the groups. Most of the respondents (82.4%) said that the choice of learning a foreign language is influenced by social needs (television, internet, travel). The personal interests for learning a language amounts only to 15, 8%, while the cultural reasons for learning a foreign language are completely neglected, which is proven by the fact that only 1.8% of respondents found it a main reason.

When asked in the survey list to choose a specific foreign language, students gave us the following information:

Table 3. Choosing a foreign language

| | | | Average rating | | | | Total |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|---|----------------|--------|--------|------------|--------|
| | | | 6-7 | 7,01-8 | 8,01-9 | Above 9,01 | |
| Choosing a foreign language | English | f | 73 | 17 | 99 | 91 | 280 |
| | | % | 12.3% | 2.9% | 16.6% | 15.3% | 47.1% |
| | German and French | f | 42 | 12 | 138 | 67 | 259 |
| | | % | 7.1% | 2.0% | 23.2% | 11.3% | 43.5% |
| | Russian | f | 15 | 2 | 26 | 13 | 56 |
| | | % | 2.5% | .3% | 4.4% | 2.2% | 9.4% |
| Total | | f | 130 | 31 | 263 | 171 | 595 |
| | | % | 21.8% | 5.2% | 44.2% | 28.7% | 100.0% |

$$\chi^2 = 20.088, df = 6, p = 0.003, V = 0.130$$

It was determined that there is a statistically significant difference in the responses that affect choosing a foreign language than the average score ($p < 0.001$). Cramer is a high correlation coefficient indicating the strength of the differences between groups. The data show that by far the most popular language is English, which we confirmed and 47.1% of respondents. This means that almost every second respondent chose this option. Many of the respondents opted for French and German (43.5%), while the least popular was Russian, with 9.4% of the respondents who confirmed this option.

When asked in the questionnaire to state the reasons for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language we got the following information:

Table 4. Reasons for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language

| | | | Average rating | | | | Total |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|----------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| | | | 6-7 | 7,01-8 | 8,01-9 | 9,01-10 | |
| Motivation for learning a foreign language | Boring lectures and topics | f | 79 | 15 | 233 | 117 | 444 |
| | | % | 13.3% | 2.5% | 39.2% | 19.7% | 74.6% |
| | Uninteresting textbooks and teachers | f | 38 | 12 | 24 | 50 | 124 |
| | | % | 6.4% | 2.0% | 4.0% | 8.4% | 20.8% |
| | Not an interesting way of working | f | 13 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 27 |
| | | % | 2.2% | .7% | 1.0% | .7% | 4.5% |
| Total | | f | 130 | 31 | 263 | 171 | 595 |
| | | % | 21.8% | 5.2% | 44.2% | 28.7% | 100.0% |

$\chi^2 = 64.313$. df = 6, p = .000, V = 0.232, C = 0.313

There was a statistically significant difference in the responses between the groups of students formed on the basis of overall achievement in the study ($p < 0.001$). Cramer's coefficient $V = 0.232$ is high, which indicates the strength of the differences between groups. Most respondents stated that boring lectures and themes are the reason for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language (74.6%), mostly among groups of subjects with an overall grade of over eight (58.9%). An extremely small number of students cited uninteresting the mode of motivation as a reason for learning a foreign language (4.5%). Uninteresting textbooks and teachers as a reason for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language were cited by five respondents (20.8%).

When asked in the questionnaire whether knowledge of a foreign language is important for their future personal and professional progress, we got the following information:

Table 5. The importance of foreign language for future jobs

| | | Average rating | | | | Total | |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|
| | | 6-7 | 7,01-8 | 8,01-9 | 9,01-10 | | |
| The importance of foreign language for future jobs | Very important | f | 75 | 22 | 140 | 121 | 358 |
| | | % | 12.6% | 3.7% | 23.5% | 20.3% | 60.2% |
| | Important in some aspects | f | 41 | 6 | 85 | 38 | 170 |
| | | % | 6.9% | 1.0% | 14.3% | 6.4% | 28.6% |
| | Unimportant | f | 14 | 3 | 38 | 12 | 67 |
| | | % | 2.4% | .5% | 6.4% | 2.0% | 11.3% |
| Total | f | 130 | 31 | 263 | 171 | 595 | |
| | % | 21.8% | 5.2% | 44.2% | 28.7% | 100.0% | |

$$\chi^2 = 16.258, df = 6, p = 0.012, V = 0.117, C = 0.164$$

There was statistically significant difference in the responses between groups of students formed on the basis of overall achievement ($p < 0.001$). Cramer's coefficient $V = 0.117$ is high, which indicates the strength of the differences between groups. More than half of the students surveyed believe that language is very important for their future jobs (60.2%), while about a third of the respondents believe that it is important only in some aspects (28.6%). It is interesting that a tenth of the respondents felt that knowledge of foreign language is irrelevant for their future jobs.

When asked in the questionnaire in which everyday situations they use a foreign language, we got the following information:

Table 6. Use of foreign language in everyday situations

| | | Average rating | | | | Total | |
|---|-------------------|----------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|
| | | 6-7 | 7,01-8 | 8,01-9 | 9,01-10 | | |
| Using a foreign language in everyday situations | Internet | f | 91 | 20 | 219 | 140 | 470 |
| | | % | 15.3% | 3.4% | 36.8% | 23.5% | 79.0% |
| | Foreign films | f | 34 | 11 | 38 | 27 | 110 |
| | | % | 5.7% | 1.8% | 6.4% | 4.5% | 18.5% |
| | Music and printed | f | 5 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 15 |
| | | % | .8% | .0% | 1.0% | .7% | 2.5% |
| Total | f | 130 | 31 | 263 | 171 | 595 | |
| | % | 21.8% | 5.2% | 44.2% | 28.7% | 100.0% | |

$$\chi^2 = 16.682, df = 6, p = 0.011, V = 0.118, C = 0.165$$

There was a statistically significant difference in the responses between groups of students formed on the basis of success in school ($p < 0.001$). Cramer's coefficient $V = 0.118$ is high, which indicates the strength of the differences between groups. Data from 79.0% of the respondents indicated that language is most used (and most needed) when using the

internet, a fifth of the respondents felt that language is needed when watching foreign films (18.5%) and only 2.5% of the respondents see the need for foreign language in music and the press.

CONCLUSION

The obtained results raise the following questions: do we educate professionals that are like ourselves, instead of ones that practice requires? Do these differences in attitudes stem from the limited supply of linguistic content in foreign language teaching, which is inconsistent with the needs of specific language knowledge and skills for their future use? The answers to these questions require a more detailed analysis to get an idea to what extent students were trained for communication in a foreign language. Based on the research, we came to the following statements:

(1) When asked in the survey list what influences the choice of learning a foreign language, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference in the responses of students about what influences their choice of learning a foreign language formed the basis of their grade point average ($p = 0.001$). Cramer high correlation coefficient indicates the strength of the differences between groups. Most of the respondents (82.4%) said that the choice of learning a foreign language is influenced by social needs (television, internet, travel). Learning based on personal interest is only 15, 8%, while cultural reasons for learning a foreign language were completely neglected, and only 1.8% of the respondents chose this option.

(2) When asked in the survey list to choose a foreign language, the students showed a statistically significant difference in the responses that affect forcing foreign language learning than the grade point average ($p < 0.001$). Cramer high correlation coefficient indicates the strength of the differences between groups. The data show that by far the most popular language is English, which was confirmed by 47.1% of the respondents. This means that almost every second respondent selected this option. Many of the respondents opted for French and German (43.5%), while the least popular, Russian language, was chosen by 9.4% of the respondents.

(3) When asked in the questionnaire about the reasons for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language, a statistically significant difference is revealed and the responses between groups of students formed on the basis of overall achievement in the study ($p < 0.001$). Cramer's coefficient of correlation is high, which indicates the strength of the differences between groups. Most respondents stated that boring lectures and topics are the reason for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language (74.6%), mostly among groups of participants with an overall grade of over eight (58.9%). An extremely small number of students cited the uninteresting mode of motivation as a reason for learning a foreign language (4.5%). Uninteresting textbooks and teachers as a reason for the lack of motivation for learning a foreign language were selected by five respondents (20.8%).

(4) When asked in the questionnaire about the importance of learning foreign languages, a statistically significant difference was determined in the responses between groups of students formed on the basis of overall achievement ($p < 0.001$). Cramer's coefficient of correlation is high, which indicates the strength of the differences between groups. More than half of the students surveyed believe that language is very important

for their future jobs (60.2%), while about a third of the respondents believe that it is important only in some aspects (28.6%). It is interesting that a tenth of the respondents felt that knowledge of foreign languages is irrelevant for their future jobs.

(5) When asked in the questionnaire in which everyday situations they use foreign languages, the results showed a statistically significant difference in the responses between groups of students formed on the basis of success in school ($p < 0.001$). Cramer's coefficient of correlation is high, which indicates the strength of the differences between groups. Data from 79.0% of respondents indicated that a foreign language is mostly used (and most needed) when using the internet, a fifth of the respondents felt that a foreign language is needed when watching foreign films (18.5%) and only 2.5% of respondents found the reasons in music and the press.

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STAVOVI STUDENATA HUMANISTIČKIH I DRUŠTVENIH NAUKA PREMA STRANIM JEZICIMA

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Ovom radom objašnjava se relacija studenata humanističkih i društvenih nauka prema stranim jezicima na osnovu prosečne ocene na fakultetu. Glavni cilj učenja jezika nije samo ovladavanje novim jezičkim sistemom, već predstavlja osposobljavanje za međuljudsko sporazumevanje i saradnju, unapređivanja jednakosti ljudi u obrazovanju, kulturu, nauci. Takođe, znanje stranih jezika razvija intenzivniju komunikaciju sa ljudima, a sve to sa ciljem širenja tolerancije i poštovanju kulturne različitosti. Na individualnom planu učenje jezika podstiče razvoj ličnosti studenata i njegovog identiteta. Istraživanje ukazuje na to da poznavanje stranog jezika omogućuje upoznavanje pojedinca

sa najznačajnijim kulturno istorijskim karakteristikama starih zemalja. Cilj ovog istraživanja je utvrditi odnos studenata prema stranom, njihovom mišljenju o izboru i potrebi stranog jezika u savremenom društvu. Postavljeni zadaci u istraživanju su: (1) Saznati šta utiče na izbor učenja stranog jezika, (2) Utvrditi koji strani jezik studenti forsiraju, (3) Utvrditi razloge nemotivisanosti studenta za učenje stranog jezika, (4) U kojoj mjeri poznavanje stranog jezika važno za buduće zanimanje, (5) Utvrditi u kojim svakodnevnim situacijama se koristi strani jezik. Rezultati istraživanja su pokazali da na učenje stranog jezika utiču društveni razlozi više nego lična interesovanja ili kulturni razlozi, da je učenje engleskog jezika predstavlja opštu informisanost, kao znanje rada na kompjuteru i slično. Nezanimljiva predavanja i temu predstavljaju razloge nemotivisanosti za učenje stranog jezika, više nego nezanimljivi udžbenici, teme i nastavnici ($p < 0,001$). Činjenice u istraživanju nam ukazuju na to da je učenje stranog jezika veoma važno za buduće zanimanje a da strani jezik u svakodnevnom životu najčešće koristimo prilikom upotrebe interneta.

Ključne reči: strani jezici, obrazovanje studenata, stavovi studenata, interkulturalizam.