AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN CURRICULAR (RE)DESIGN: ALIGNING THE INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES WITH STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

The paper investigates the correlation between the mechanisms of curricular planning and design on the one hand and students' expectations from the language instructional process, on the other hand. The authors discuss the issues of decisional autonomy and accountability in relation to the principles of institutional language policies (at Babeș-Bolyai University), as well as to the intended learning outcomes formulated in the syllabi of English for Tourism delivered at the Faculty of Geography and the Faculty of History and Philosophy (both at B.A. and M.A. levels). The present study additionally measures students' expectations regarding the role and impact that university language instruction could have on their future socio-professional integration.

Keywords: *curricular design, language policy, intended learning outcomes, holistic development, socio-professional integration*

INTRODUCTION

As the role of language teaching is morphing according to variables which have to do with the wider socio-cultural and educational spectrum, language instructors need to be properly equipped to deal with change and, ideally, to be able to anticipate change. It has become increasingly important to correlate curricular design with various factors directly impacting the educational process; one way to ensure this is to consider all stakeholders involved in the management of language education.

In the context of formally managing narrow LSP[1] teaching, the identification of the various stakeholders is prerequisite to any further development: LSP students, LSP teachers (language teachers/context experts)[2], subject teachers (content experts – especially in CLIL[3] courses), assessment experts, course designers and, whenever possible, field experts (especially in the case of tailor-made courses). In an ideal organisational setting, the collaboration of all stakeholders involved should contribute to fostering a 'holistic development' (Quinlan, 2011) of the students understood as "people who are growing and maturing affectively (emotionally) and morally" (Quinlan, 2011, p. 7). This perspective further enhances the role of universities in the students' wider lives, as issues of social responsibility or education for citizenship surface whenever higher education curricula aim at "going beyond knowledge and skills to include other aspects of being a person in society" (Quinlan, 2011, p. 7).

In turn, such an approach to higher education questions the very role of the language instructor as well as his/her complex set of skills for 2020+ education, as formulated in the 2019 *Wulkow Memorandum on the Identity and Profile of Language Teachers in Language Centres on Higher Education Institutions,*[4] for instance. Moreover, university LSP instructors need to acknowledge and address the shifts in the labor market demand from "guaranteed lifelong employment to self-managed lifelong employability (…) which implies possessing knowledge and the skills to apply that knowledge in a multidisciplinary, team-oriented, dynamic environment and engaging in lifelong learning" (Luka, 2015, p. 76). As language learning for specific purposes cannot be studied in isolation (no matter how 'narrow' the LSP field), a continuous process of curricular revision needs to be advanced to ensure both a flexible learning environment for a (more) holistic development and a realistic language policy framework.

The present study stems from the authors' concern for measuring the impact their ESP[5] classes have had on undergraduate, master and graduate students alike and to weigh this impact against their perspective on curricular planning and design.

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[1] LSP – Languages for Specific Purposes.

[2] According to the *ALTE Guidelines for the Development of Language for Specific Purposes Test*, language teachers are considered 'context experts' (Van Gorp and Vîlcu, 2018, p. 5).

[3] CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning.

[4] According to the Memorandum, the 2020+ skill-sets of the language instructor necessarily include "*professional expertise, openness to change, digital competence, managerial competence, team skills*" (2019, pp. 4-5).

[5] ESP – English for Specific Purposes (e.g. English for Tourism, Medical English, English for the Aviation Industry, etc.)

CURRICULAR DESIGN AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE POLICY DOCUMENTS: RELEVANT LITERATURE

The financial and decisional autonomy granted to Romanian state-budgeted universities gives the academic bodies the freedom to design and revise their curricula according to the strategic priorities of the universities in question, to their financial possibilities or constraints and, last but not least, to the needs and demands of its stakeholders. *The Babeș-Bolyai University Language Policy Official Document* (2014) and the *Methodological Appendix to the Language Policy Document* (2018) both function as guidelines for implementing the teaching and assessment of foreign languages for specific and academic purposes of (non)philologist students, according to similar strategic (European) quality assurance frameworks and the local view on linguistic development for employability and socio-professional integration.

Despite certain undeniably noteworthy aspects (Păcurar, 2019), there are several areas where the local language policy documents could be considered for further improvement and critical revision, such as:

- *The Methodological Appendix* does not inform about specific teaching methods, but rather on testing *procedures*;
- As both teaching and testing are designed for narrow LSP (especially English), the language curriculum (not included in the language policy body) is rather generic (and built on the CEFR[6] descriptors for the main skills), thus making language instructors accountable for the selection and adaptation of teaching materials, for drafting syllabi and for course and test administration and development in general;
- The final language proficiency test (mandatory for all non-philologist students) is the main focus of the language policy document, thus shifting the attention of stakeholders away from the teaching and learning towards language testing only;
- Despite the fact that the target levels for B.A. students (at least B1) and for M.A. students (at least B2) are clearly specified in the language policy documents, each Faculty ultimately decides on the best ways of implementing language learning routes. This makes it difficult for the language departments to standardise teaching and testing procedures on the medium and long-term and to produce a sustainable strategic plan for further improvement of the institutional language policy documents;
- There is no mention of the involvement of (external) quality assurance agencies in the process of language teaching, learning and testing (in the case of LSP departments);
- There are very few specifications of the means to correlate the curriculum of foreign language for specific purposes instruction with the expectations of a morphing labor market, as well as of the need

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[6] CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

to prioritise the type of language education that facilitates the acquisition of transversal and cross-sector skills.

Similar international strategic documents repeatedly stress the importance of useful, realistic and flexible language education that would "enable [the students] to perform the tasks they are likely to face in further education or in professional life".[7] Hence, a different approach to the 'holistic learning environment' for the future graduates will take into account the following elements whose interdependence guarantees the socio-cultural value of the educational process: "creating organisational conditions (culture, curriculum, co-curriculum, community), leadership of learning (knowledge of, and involvement with, teaching and learning) and modelling a meaningful life (sense of purpose, intentionality, authenticity, identity, reflection)" (Quinlan, 2011, p. 13).

We understand the term *curriculum* as "the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the **desired learning outcomes** to be achieved" (Richards and Rodgers, 2016, p. 363). As the focus of ESP/EFL[8] classes in a communicative approach is fostering students' skills and competences rather than mere accumulation of information, the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) should:

- "be sufficiently high-level enough to endure routine updates to programme contents;

- be written in terms of what the student is able to *do*;

- be challenging and set high expectations;

- not be comprehensive of *everything* a student may learn on a programme" (Quinlan, 2018).

Having clearly formulated intended learning outcomes is beneficial for all parts involved as they are an essential step in the organic development of curricular design, thus helping:

- "provid[e] coherence across a programme;

- guid[e] the design and teaching of particular papers, modules, lectures and formative activities to ensure they contribute to the overall programme outcomes;

- clarif[y] what students need to practice during the programme and, therefore, the teaching approaches and methods used;

- choos[e] methods of assessment that test whether the students can do what they are expected to be able to do;

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[7] For further details, see the European Commission 2012 Report on *Language Competences for Employability, Mobility and Growth*.

[8] EFL – English as a Foreign Language.

- communicat[e] to students what is expected of them so they can direct their study accordingly;
- enabl[e] an institution to determine whether the programme is meeting its aims" (Quinlan, 2018).

On a closer examination of our syllabi (inclusive of intended learning outcomes) for English for Tourism courses (delivered at the Faculty of Geography and the Faculty of History and Philosophy respectively), it would appear that our list of intended learning outcomes covers most of the *can do* statements (field-specific as well as transversal ones) that could be transferred to various fields. As an example, the current syllabus for *English for Cultural Tourism* states:

At the end of the course, the students will be able to:

a. use in-depth knowledge to think critically with and about the use of language in the specific field (cultural tourism);
b. identify, explain and interpret various forms of specific content and genres and their conventions in the (academic and socio-professional) field of cultural tourism;
c. transfer concepts/principles/methods of learning in the process of (oral and written) reception and production of information, of text organisation and of communication strategies;
d. use standard grids in order to (self)-assess the products of oral and written communication in the specific field (cultural tourism);
e. solve individual tasks in the context of autonomous learning;
f. participate in team projects, with an emphasis on collaborative team work;
g. monitor their (linguistic) progress, reflect on their ability to use language effectively and accurately and on their learning strategies and resources.

In this respect, our intended learning outcomes surface a preoccupation for fostering transferable learning strategies, with a focus on both individual and collaborative skills – which could be effectively correlated with several soft skills required by employers today: "integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic" (Robles, 2012, p. 453). As revealed in recent literature, employability skills are no longer solely technical skills, but more often than not, they aim at equating 21st century skills with "applied" skills such as "personal skills" or "people-related skills", since: "While technical skills are a part of many excellent educational curricula, soft skills need further emphasis in the university curricula so that students learn the importance of soft skills early in their academic programs before they embark on a business career" (Wellington, 2005 qtd. in Robles, 2012, pp. 454-454).

There have been several suggestions for ways of integrating soft skills in the curriculum so as to match the realities and expectations of future employers; some of them might be worth discussing especially as they suit the status of our LSP courses as mainly practical courses with a communicative aim. By definition, the role of ESL classes in general is to

"concentrate on things they need to do in the society they are living in" (Harmer, 2014, p. 4). According to Evenson (1999), including such skills in the curriculum could be achieved by planning to:

"1. Introduce students to basic people skills so they understand how to get along with people.

2. Segue to teaching essential customer service skills.

3. Foster student understanding by facilitating a problem-solving discussion based on real-life situations.

4. Have students demonstrate the people skills they have learned using roleplay exercises in a mock business setting" (Evenson, 1999 qtd. in Robles, 2012, p. 461).

The question of language curriculum planning in LSP courses inevitably draws on the correlations between the content we teach, the process of teaching/learning and the (intended and actual) outcomes of the teaching and learning process. As there are certain (institutional) constraints that have to do with curriculum planning and drafting (in advance, before the start of new the academic year), the dilemma we face, as context teachers, is: how do we align students' needs with the intended learning outcomes? And how can we effectively measure the actual learning outcomes?

This brings into question the strategies of **forward curriculum planning** and **backward curriculum planning**. According to Richards and Rodgers (2016), the model of forward curriculum design (see Figure 1) privileges the linear vision whereby the input, the process and the output come in a fixed order.

content ⟶ syllabus ⋯⟶ methodology ⟶ outcomes ⟶
assessment

Fig. 1. The model of forward design

This model functions well in cases where there is little decisional autonomy in terms of selecting teaching materials and drafting a tailor-made syllabus. The model of backward curriculum design (see Figure 2), in turn, starts from the formulation of intended learning outcomes and proceeds to adapt the content of teaching activities to these intended results:

outcomes ⟶ syllabus ⟶ materials & tests ⟶ teaching ⟶
assessment
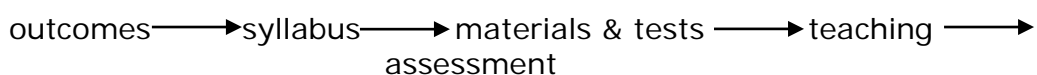
Fig. 2. The model of backward design

As opposed to the more limitative forward design, backward curricular design is more suitable for LSP classes where context teachers are more

accountable for designing syllabi, where testing is less centralized (not aligned to national/international standardisation) and "where resources can be committed to needs analysis, planning, and materials development" (Richards and Rodgers, 2016, p. 377). It certainly matches our perspective on language curricular design with a footnote regarding the fact that needs analysis is typically administered *after* the stage of drafting the syllabus. This leaves context teachers is a position to adapt-as-they-go and restructure (a part of) the teaching resources during the academic year.

THE STUDY

The current study has been aimed at obtaining a panoramic view of the academic and professional impact of studying at least one specialized foreign language at Babeș-Bolyai University (with the focus on studying English compulsory) among 1st year students, M.A. students and graduates specializing in tourism. The results of this study are important for the authors not only as a needs' analysis measurement tool, but first and foremost, as a way of identifying students' expectations regarding the role and impact that university language instruction could have on their future socio-professional integration. Moreover, it was used in discovering the manner in which studying English in college has influenced or even facilitated for tourism graduates obtaining a job in their domain and has helped them in fulfilling their job-related tasks appropriately.

To take a few steps further, the outcomes of this study will be used by the authors[9] to align the intended learning outcomes formulated in the syllabi of English for Tourism (at both B.A. and M.A. levels) with the students expectations and needs, as well as with the linguistic policies currently in force at our university.

The authors have felt that only a complete 360° view of the academic and professional context of studying English in the university and then using it on the labour market will produce an accurate image of this process. Therefore, this quantitative approach study was designed as a series of five questionnaires meant to interrogate all the actors of this academic and professional process about the role and use of learning a specialized foreign language – in our case – English for Tourism. Besides tourism students at

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both B.A. and M.A. levels, the study also included graduates of this specialism, possible employers form the hospitality industry and, for a better understanding of the specific content needs of this domain, professors from Babeş-Bolyai University, teaching tourism related courses at the Faculty of Geography and the Faculty of History and Philosophy. Students, specialism (content) professors, graduates and prospective employers – all contributed with their point of view towards providing the authors with a better understanding of what is expected from ESP teachers in tourism and how they can improve the educational process to maximize their students' chances of future professional success.

Due to the amplitude of research and findings, for this particular paper, the authors have reduced the analysis of results and their implications to those of the first two questionnaires, those dedicated to the 1st year students and to the M.A. students specializing in tourism or respectively cultural tourism at BBU (Babeș-Bolyai University).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

For the purpose of this study a quantitative approach has been adopted in investigating the opinions of the undergraduate and postgraduate Tourism students by means of two questionnaires. The first has been addressed to 1st year students from the Faculty of Geography, specializing in the *Geography of Tourism* and from the Faculty of History and Philosophy specializing in *Cultural Tourism*. The second questionnaire interrogated the views of 1st year and 2nd year M.A. students from the former faculty specializing in *Tourism Planning and Development* and from the latter faculty specializing in *Heritage and Cultural Tourism*. As previously mentioned, the tool used to collect data consisted of two on-line questionnaires that had to be completed by students using *Google Forms*.

Both undergraduate and graduate students received via e-mail from their ESP instructors the web address of the questionnaire. The time frame allotted for the completion was of four weeks, from April 15th to May 12th 2019 (which included the Easter holiday). The recommended duration of questionnaire completion was of 15 minutes. The students were also informed of the anonymity of the process and the fact that results were to be used for academic research studies.

The first questionnaire addressing undergraduates was a quantitative based approach and consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions. The second questionnaire directed toward postgraduates had a mixed quantitative and qualitative nature, consisting of 12 multiple choice questions and two open ended ones.

SAMPLING

The data were drawn from a wide range of participants comprising both male and female, undergraduate and postgraduate students from two faculties of BBU. The authors dedicated the 1st part of their study to the students they interact with directly, on a weekly basis, during the *English for Tourism* courses attended by 1st year undergraduate full-time students studying this domain, from the Faculty of Geography and the Faculty of History and Philosophy. Full-time M.A. students from these faculties took part in this study as well.

The respondents belonged to both the Romanian and Hungarian line groups, which mirrors the multicultural dimension of our university. However, no questions were addressed that would point to or relate to the ethnic group identification of our students.

To show the students' availability for answering the questionnaires, from an estimated number of 198 students enrolled in the 1st year at the above-mentioned specialisms and faculties, the authors registered a total of 134 respondents. Almost 80% of these respondents are studying at the Faculty of Geography and 20% attend the Faculty of History and Philosophy. The postgraduate students' questionnaire registered a number of 23 respondents out of an estimated number of 142 1st and 2nd year M.A. students. We believe that this lower rate of responses can be explained by the fact that for a substantial number of M.A. students (those belonging to the Faculty of Geography), the connection with their former English teacher is weakened by a lack of direct contact (there is no English course in their M.A. syllabus). Even though these students do not have English in their M.A. syllabus, their answers to this questionnaire are relevant as they are aimed at measuring the usefulness of their undergraduate language instruction and their expectations regarding the use of English during their academic studies and in their future career. The authors have expected to see (and their expectations were confirmed by the survey) that M.A. students have a different perspective on the usefulness of English for a future career and even for their ongoing academic studies, from their younger B.A. peers.

In terms of socio-metric measurements of the respondents' characteristics, the authors have found out that at the B.A. level, more than ¾ (73%) of students were aged between 18-20 and only ¼ were aged between 20-25 (26%). The same percentages also appeared in the gender differentiation: a little more than ¾ were female and ¼ were male. Roughly the same visible unbalance between genders was noticed in the graduates' responses – 87% were female and only 13% were male. However, in this case the age group allotment was more diverse: 78% were aged between 20-25, more than 4% between 25-35 and respectively 30-35, with a remarkable 13% respondents aged 35+.

Overall, these two items showed us that most of our students are female and most of them are very young, more than 78% for the M.A. ones and all of the B.A. ones are under 25 years old. The general tendency for M.A. students is to continue their studies immediately after graduation. The 13% of M.A. students aged over 35 bring a note of age-related maturity and professional expertise to the answers provided, given the fact that these respondents already had the chance to see how English can be useful or not on the labour market and how exactly it could help them.

In what their engagement on the labour market is concerned, as expected, a large majority of B.A. students (83.6%) are not currently working, while 16.4% have already got a job. By comparison, more than a third of M.A. students are employed, 14 out of 23 declaring that they are not currently employed. The truly surprising finding came from the fact that among those 9 M.A. students already employed, only one worked in tourism, as a tour guide, the others working mostly in the services and business sectors (customer service representative, secretary, content manager, teacher, marketing specialist, procurement analyst, beautician). These findings will be crucial in analysing the data coming from questions regarding the contexts they use English in.

MAIN FINDINGS

### Current level of English proficiency and professional expectations

Considering the linguistic background that the respondents possess, the overall view is that both B.A. and M.A. students have extended previous experience of studying English and the overwhelming majority are already at an intermediate level (B1-B2) the moment they enroll in their study programs.

B.A. level respondents

77% of the B.A. students reported having studied English between 8-12 years prior to their enrolment at the university (with approximately equal percentages, around 25% registered for 8 years, 10 years, and 12 years). Only a very small minority of 6.7% have studied English for 4 years and 14.2% have studied it since kindergarten. In high school, half of them have studied it for 1-2 hours every week and an impressive 37.3% have studied English for 3-4 hours per week. Considering this extended and rather intensive English instruction they have received from the lower education system, their *Baccalaureate exam* average levels seem to be somewhat disappointingly low – 85% of them obtaining B1 and B2 results (32.8% - B1 and 53% - B2) with only a small 6.7% scoring a C1 level and 0.7% scoring a C2 level. However, one must keep in mind that this exam was targeted at a maximum level of B2, which could explain the large number of students

classified as intermediary and upper-intermediary users of English. Curiously enough, 84.3% mentioned that they considered their Baccalaureate level to be accurate and a surprising 15% estimated it to be higher or lower than the real one (10.4% say they have been given a higher mark than they deserved).

By comparison to the Baccalaureate exam results, their *Placement test* results have showed that things are much more nuanced. This could be accounted for by a better construction of the test, which has items that address each individual level, and also by the fact that it is a written multiple-choice test, therefore we consider it to be more objective than the overall mostly viva evaluation of the Baccalaureate exam. At the *Placement test* taken at the beginning of their 1st academic year, a comfortable majority, 63.4%, of our students are classified as B1-B2 achievers (35 were at B1 level and 50 at B2 level), while 8.2% (11) registered C1 and 1.5% (2) reported C2. At the other end of the spectrum, 14.2% (19) mentioned they were at level A2 and none reported to be at level A1. Disappointingly, more than 12% did not take the test (see Figure 3).
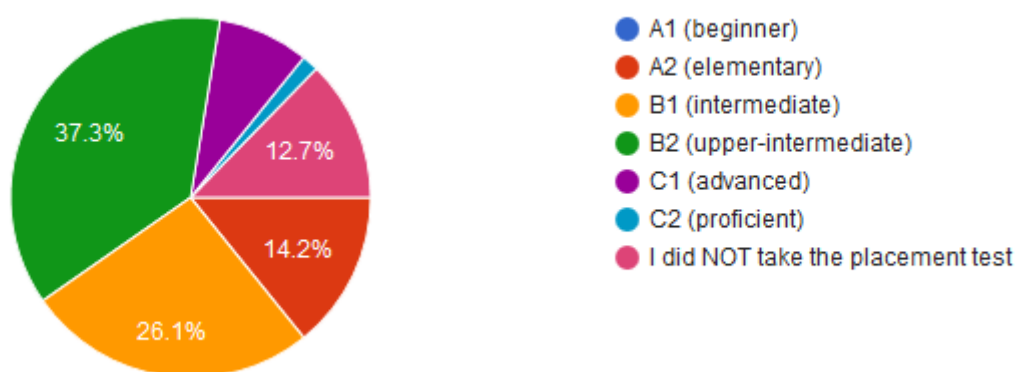

Fig. 3. Undergraduate students' language proficiency levels after placement test

Out of the 134 B.A. level respondents, more than half, 64.2% admitted that currently they could understand more than they could express in English and 31.3% mentioned that their productive and receptive skills in English were equal. Only 4.5% mentioned that they could express more than they understood, which was to be expected. In terms of particular aspects of using English at the moment they enrolled in college, most 1st year students say that their rage of vocabulary is good or acceptable (a total of 113 respondents), 91 say that their knowledge of grammar theory is weak (38) or at best acceptable (53), but more consider that applying the theory in practice is even harder for them (45 say they are weak at that and 41 say their proficiency in this aspect is acceptable). A vast majority of respondents consider that they are good or very good at understanding reading materials (books, articles, magazines) and understanding a conversation with native speakers. This confirms what they mentioned about having more receptive skills in English than productive ones.

However, in understanding a conversation with non-native speakers and participating in a conversation with both native and non-native speakers, most respondents mentioned their skills to be only acceptable (83 respondents) or at best good (91 respondents). This confirms the differentiation between the easiness in using receptive skills versus productive skills and also the fact that understanding the foreign, non-standard accents and probably a lower level of English of non-native speakers proves to be a challenge for our students. Most of our B.A. respondents declared themselves to be good or at least acceptable (39/54 out of 134) at understanding TV news or movies without subtitles or translations or using English as a tourist in a foreign country (43/46 out of 134).

Regarding their professional future plans, an overwhelming majority of undergraduate students – 91% say that studying English at university will be useful for their future career and that same extraordinary number of students, 96.3% say that English will be useful for a career in tourism (see Figure 4). With a prospective career in tourism, ¾ of respondents estimated they would use English frequently (56%) or all the time (almost 26%). Half of respondents expect to use mostly spoken English (54.4%), almost 40% expect to use both written and spoken English. Only 8 respondents expect to use mostly written English with a possible career in tourism. These findings accentuate the need for the ESP instructors to emphasize the practicing of spoken skills in class, and to a considerably lower degree the writing skills.
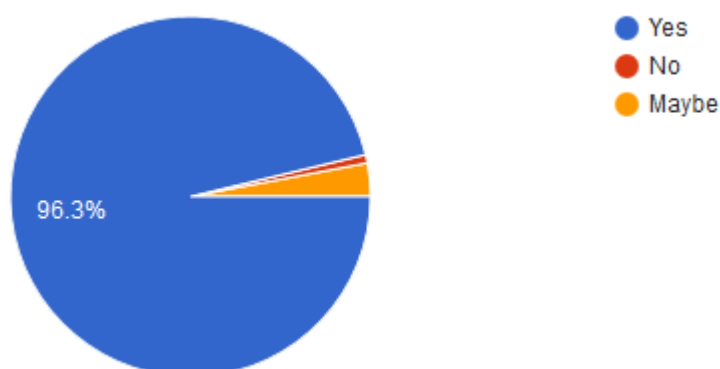
Fig. 4. Respondent percentages on usefulness of English
for a career in tourism

Surprisingly enough, when it comes to the domain of their future career, there is of course a high potential for tourism specialists (almost 71% of respondents), yet 29.1% said they would not have a career in tourism and 8.2% answered "maybe", which amounts to a concerning 1/3 of students at the beginning of their specialization who doubt they have made the right choice. Still, a vast majority of 85.6% consider that English will still be useful for them, even if they get a career in another domain than tourism. There were no students who considered that English would be of no use for them in their future. This is a consistent finding across all our

questionnaires; English is seen by a vast majority as useful and needed in the professional field.

Cumulated with these findings about the importance of English for their future career in any domain, a vast majority of our B.A. students, more than 61%, expected to study English compulsory at university. Even more, most of them expected to study another language as well. Out of 134 respondents, 32.1% expected to study only English compulsory, 29.1% wanted to study English compulsory and another language optional. More than 26% expected to study two foreign languages compulsory without any mention of preferences. Nonetheless, an important 10.4% expected to have the *option* of choosing to study foreign languages or not and 1.2% did not expect to study foreign languages at all. Cumulating the last two percentages it may not seem to represent a large number of students (only 16 out of 134 respondents), but this may illustrate an apprehension towards foreign languages on the part of students who have chosen to major in something else.

M.A. level respondents

A vast majority of the M.A. students, 73.9%, mentioned that they have a language certificate and only ¼ mentioned that they do not. Based on the proficiency level mentioned on these certificates, we can conclude that at the postgraduate level, the overall English proficiency level is much improved as compared to the B.A. level situation. Almost ¾ of respondents are upper-intermediate or advanced students (in an equal 34.8% for each) (see Figure 5). Only 13% reported a B1 level, the same 4.3% reported level A1 and level A2 respectively and more than 8% reported level C2.

This increase in proficiency level could be explained by several factors: the extra years of studying English in college and the ESP instructor's effort towards improving his/her students' skills, the fact that supposedly only the best and the most ambitious students continued with their M.A. studies; and, last but not least, the fact that *the BBU Language Policy document* strongly "encourages" faculties to limit admission in the M.A. programmes to students possessing a minimum B2 level of language proficiency.
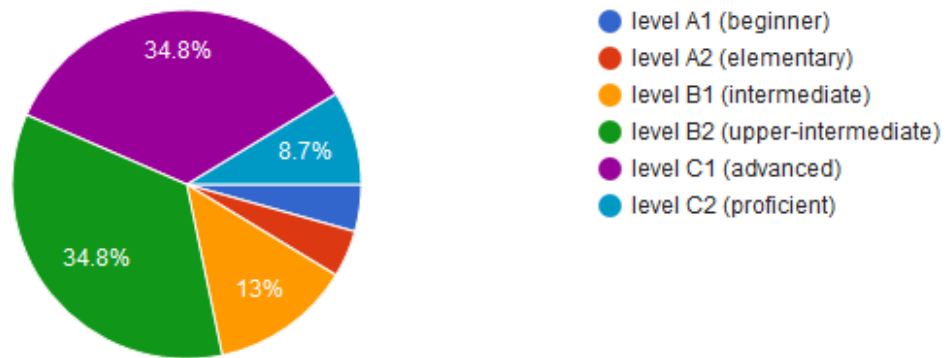
Fig. 5. Graduate students' language proficiency levels
as specified on language certificates

Considering the duration of studying English at undergraduate level, the results are truly mixed, reflecting the many shifts in the strategic plan regarding students' linguistic trajectory at our university which has gradually reduced the number of foreign language instruction throughout the recent years (from six to two at the Faculty of Geography, for example). Most students, almost 35%, have studied English for two semesters, some 26% and 21% having studied three or respectively four semesters. Only a small 13% have studied English for six semesters. Out of the 23 respondents, only eight still study English at the M.A. levels (at the Faculty of History and Philosophy), so we can say that $^1/_3$ still have direct contact with the language during courses.

This dwindling tendency of reducing the students' possibility to study a foreign language for free at university (as part of compulsory or optional but no-charge courses) comes into direct contrast with the overwhelming percentage of students who argue that English is essential for their future career (in tourism or not) and that they expect to study it in college along other foreign language courses. This fact has been repeatedly stressed by our M.A. students in their responses at one open-ended question that asked them to write about their expectations from the job market in relation to their current/ previous language instruction and skills. To enhance their chances on the labor market, more than half, 52.2% mentioned studying another foreign language through other facilitators of instruction: at a language center or with a private tutor or by themselves. As previously detailed in the theoretical opening of this article, in establishing the goals of our teaching/learning process for the English for (Cultural) Tourism courses, we have tried to insist on bringing forward transferable skills that would suit any other foreign language our students would like to learn or need to use in their future career.

Regarding their possible future career, only 56.5% of the respondents mentioned that they were looking for a career in tourism, 43.5 % saying "no", which in our opinion represents paradoxically a very low level of interest in the domain they are specializing in. This particularly surprising finding made us reconsider the way we formulated the intended learning outcomes in our syllabi. As mentioned in the introduction, these should point to both field specific *can-do* statements as well as transversal ones which would be applicable to various professional domains. Since more than half of our (M.A.) students envisage working in another field than tourism, insisting on domain-specific technical skills alone would be counterproductive. In this context, ESP instructors need to help their students acquire soft/interpersonal skills, in addition to digital skills, if students are to have a chance of finding a rewarding job that would allow them to fully develop their potential. It is to be noted that ESP instructors have the responsibility to make the correct choices regarding the content of their teaching and the skills they consider the society at large, and the labor market demand nowadays.

From another perspective, considering that among the M.A. who are already employed only one out of nine has a job in tourism and cumulating these findings with the low percentage of 1st year students who definitely

want a job in tourism (62.7%) (see Figure 6), we have to ask ourselves what does this tendency exactly represent? Why do they choose to study tourism, if in such important numbers they do not show interest for a particular job in the field? Why do they choose to continue with it for the master's degree?
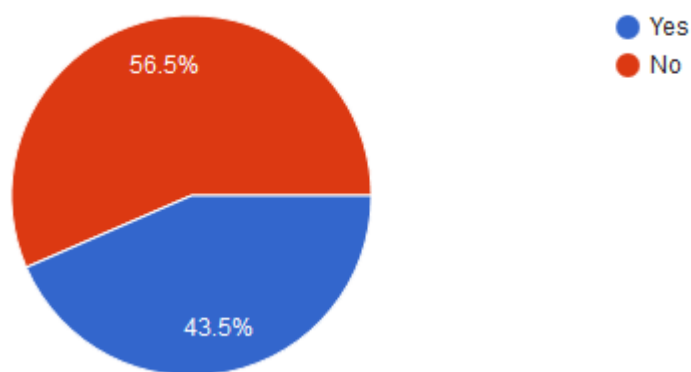
Fig. 6. Graduate students' intention of finding a job in tourism

Admittedly, the low number of respondents at the M.A. level questionnaire influences the accuracy of our findings, however, the tendency to avoid tourism as a career choice is there, which definitely contradicts the students' academic choices. A possible but yet unverified answer could come from the (relatively) low-income levels that tourism as a professional domain offers and from the scarcity of the jobs in tourism on the labor market that would need specialized academic studies. Stranger still, at first glance, is the finding that only 52.2% of M.A. students are currently looking for any job at all, with a very high 47.8% saying they are not looking for a job, while only nine out of the 23 respondents are employed. Presumably, this could be explained by the fact that students want to focus on studying during their M.A. programme, leaving the concerns of finding a job for later, so as to avoid managing two demanding, simultaneous activities like studying and working at the same time.

The vital importance of English for professional use

One of the most important dimensions the survey tried to scan referred to the expectations students at both levels had towards the way they would put into practice their English skills and the specific professional, educational and personal contexts in which they would anticipate using English most. One of the most revealing findings was that both B.A. and M.A. level students mentioned that using English in the professional context was very important (the M.A. questionnaire) and they would use it frequently in 13 out of the 15 specific work contexts presented in the survey (the B.A. questionnaire).

Regarding the specific professional contexts in which they would use English frequently, out of the 134 undergraduate students, a comfortable majority (between 66-70 respondents) mentioned that they would use it to have a conversation with foreign tourists, to give explanations and solve problems in English and to process internet/ phone reservations in English. Almost half of them (60) responded that they would use the foreign language to give oral presentations of tourist attractions and to read emails/hotel or tourist attraction/destination descriptions in English. More than a third (between 44-58) indicated that they would use the language to give guided tours in English, answer email and official letters in English, to negotiate contracts with partner companies, to understand specialized Internet sites, to write descriptions of holiday packages or tourist attractions in English, to read rules, instructions and descriptions in this language and to interpret graphics and statistical data for their company or write their CV and/or application letter in English. More than 1/3 considered that only sometimes they would have to pass their employment interview in English or write reports for their company in this language.

Our postgraduate students considered in a large majority (more than 17 out of 23) that English was very important first of all when working in tourism, secondly when working with technology (computers, specific software). Also, more than half considered it very important to increase the chances of getting a job abroad or to apply for and getting a job in Romania. They considered it less important for teamwork or other fields of activity (not tourism).

To get further insight into the importance of English in the professional life of our graduate students (and, indirectly, to measure the correlation between our ILOs and the actual learning outcomes) their questionnaire has been provided with an open-ended question which lent a qualitative dimension to our investigation. All respondents to this question underlined how useful English was in finding employment and in being able to carry out their job-related tasks. Asked to comment on the expectations from the job market in relation to their current or previous English language instruction and their communicative skills, out of the 19 respondents that answered this inquiry, four underlined the necessity for companies from the labour market to provide their employers with language classes, especially in English, to further enhance their communicative skills and overall proficiency.

From this we understand that, with our students, English learning does not need to stop with their formal education years: "*English is very important in finding a job. But I think that the job market should have special English courses for workers or special seminars so we can always improve*" [S1[10]]. "*I feel like companies could invest in further English lessons, like 2 times week lessons.*" [S2] "*Job market should be, within limits, flexible with the different language skills that the candidates possess; granting them the chance to maybe improve these skills at the workplace.*" [S3] All of the respondents at this open-ended question mentioned that

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[10] S1-S5 – responses from Student 1 – Student 5.

having language skills was a must nowadays; one of them even said that: "*English is very common now, to surprise HR you need to know the third language as well*" [S4] or "*Being able to speak and write in English is crucial*" [S5].

English as a medium of content-based instruction

If we consider that for the M.A. students going to classes is their "job" (as previous descriptions of their (lack of) interest in the labour market suggests), the way they see the use of English in the academic context is significant and we will present it here at this particular spin-off of our findings. Almost all of them (22 out of 23) use it for reading books/articles/magazines/ websites for research. An equally impressive number (19 out of 23) use it to write articles/papers/projects and to watch videos/ documentaries for research (see Figure 7). The next preferred activities (mentioned by almost half of them) are presenting research projects and participation in face-to face discussions. Very few (4 or 5) would use English to collaborate with colleagues in a multicultural context, to participate in virtual classes (electronic platform, webinars), or to communicate with teaching staff members who do not speak their mother tongue. We believe that this last finding can be explained by the fact that our students are rarely in such situations where their colleagues or teachers do not speak the same language as them, while virtual classes are still something of an exception at BBU.
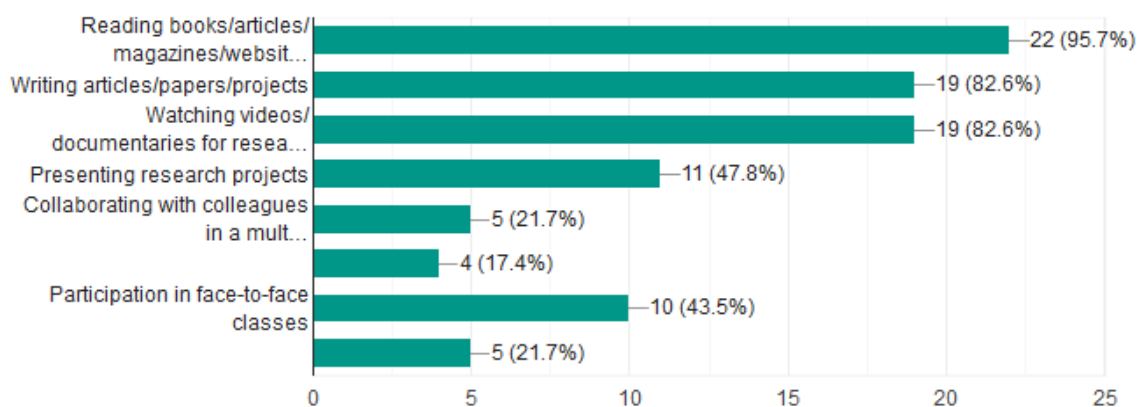
Fig. 7. Use of English in academic contexts among postgraduate students

The constant usage of English for personal use

M.A. respondents had to consider which aspect (academic, professional, personal) would take precedence when it comes to how useful English would be for them. A comfortable majority (between 13-20 students) indicated that English was very important in all those aspects, with the exception of the personal relationships where nine people considered it only "important" and seven persons considered it "very important". Most students (20)

considered they would use English mostly for personal entertainment (reading fiction, watching movies, listening to music, playing computer games). The next context to use English in was the professional relationships indicated by 15 respondents as being *very important*, followed by the academic domain/ education, the extracurricular activities (field trips, club membership, volunteering etc.) and the job, indicated all of them by an equal number of 13 respondents. In all these contexts, for four of the items mentioned, none of the students ticked the "not important" or "slightly important" options; the large majority of answers being in the "very important" column. This is highly indicative of the fact that in either personal, academic or professional context, English is essential to our M.A. students.

Some of the postgraduate students realize that studying and using a foreign language is a chance that the previous generations did not have, but it can also represent an extra demand their parents did not have to rise to in order to find a job. It is a blessing because it opens the world for them and gives them confidence in their skills and self-esteem, but it also represents a further effort that they have to make. On a personal level, understanding and speaking English can also serve as a link between people: "*I think the ability to learn English is important in everyday work, both professionally and relational. The chance that our generation benefited and those who did not have it before. We have to try to use English as a useful tool in getting closer to others, but also as a bridge between souls*" [S1]. Sometimes our students feel that they lack confidence in using English, even if they know it, and this is where the teachers could lend a helping hand: "*I wish my future job will be 'gentle' with me, even if I manage to speak, write and understand English, I still have a lot to learn, especially when it comes to my confidence. I think that a lot of students have this problem, to be afraid that they can do it, but the beauty should be in trying, trying to overcome yourself*" [S2].

Asked to mention the contexts they would use English in, provided their career is not in tourism, more than half of the undergraduate students said they would use it *all the time*, first of all for travelling in/to a foreign country, for personal entertainment (understanding films, music and computer games), for the social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), as well as for studying abroad. More than 1/3 mentioned they would use English *frequently* for emigration or working abroad and for reading bibliography for their future postgraduate courses. Almost half of respondents mentioned that only *sometimes* would they use English for a job interview or completing job-related tasks in another domain or for keeping in touch with foreign friends.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, graduate and undergraduate students' perception regarding the role of ESP classes on their educational and professional background ascertains the positive impact that language instruction has had, since English is generally regarded as essential for both personal and professional

communication nowadays. The main findings of the current stage of our research point to the respondents' focus on mainly speaking skills (interacting with tourists, taking phone/Internet reservations, delivering guided tours, solving problems and complaints), as well as on specific writing skills (answering emails and formal letters, writing descriptions of holiday packages, tourist attractions, hotels). In the personal sphere, the importance of the use of English is supported by the frequency of its use for social media and personal entertainment. Furthermore, their expectations from the labour market and their willingness to find a job regardless of the field are proof to their flexibility, mobility, adaptability and openness to intercultural exchange.

This translates into our need to acknowledge these findings by, first and foremost, improving the area of curricular redesign so as to ensure the correlation between the intended and the actual learning outcomes regarding soft and transversal skills (with a particular focus on digital, interpersonal and intercultural competences).

The next stage(s) of our research (dedicated to measuring the actual learning outcomes of our graduate students and to identifying the employers' expectations regarding the communicative skills of their future employees) are aimed at reinforcing the process of developing blueprints for curricular (re)design and offering relevant information about the importance of transversal skills in language and communication syllabi for ESP classes.

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