

## **LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN ACADEMIA VS. LABOR MARKET NEEDS: THE TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES IN MONTENEGRO**

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Original research paper:

DOI: 10.31902/fl.42.2022.3

UDK 81'232:378(497.16)

**Abstract:** The present paper outlines the key findings of a study that was carried out in Montenegro with the aim of getting an overview of the current state of play in language for specific purposes teaching and the actual needs from the perspective of students, university staff members (both academic and nonacademic) and employers. To this end, an online survey was designed and distributed among the target groups with an overall total of 1,985 participants. Furthermore, an online English placement test was conducted among the first year students at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Montenegro with an overall number of 853 respondents, in order to compare the language proficiency entrance levels to the curriculum expectations. The results suggest the high level of need for LSP proficiency, both for academic and occupational purposes, the general dissatisfaction with the English language proficiency level of the prospective employees that apply for job posts, the need to master an additional foreign language apart from English and the need to enhance the policy of LSP teaching at HEIs in Montenegro, which are seen by employers as a key partner in terms of quality control and assurance in language teaching. The paper concludes with recommendations for LSP teaching and planning at HEIs in Montenegro.

**Keywords:** LSP, labor market needs, academia, Montenegro

### **Introduction**

The importance of an efficient and effective foreign language education policy that matches the educational and occupational needs has been highlighted by a number of initiatives that have shaped the language teaching approaches at

the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe and beyond. This comes as no surprise as multilingualism has become a cornerstone for economic and educational development. Regarding the former, studies suggest that in Europe alone the shortage of language skills has had a significant impact on the loss of business. For instance, a survey conducted across the sample of nearly 2,000 small and medium enterprises shows that 11% had lost contracts cumulatively valued between €8 and €13.5 million as a result of the lack of language skills, among which English for negotiations and English for correspondence seem to be the most common deficits (ELAN 2006, Mulkerne and Graham 2011). Indeed, an increasing number of people are learning English and other foreign languages because of economic necessity since multilingualism is “a factor in the European economy’s competitiveness and people’s mobility and employability” (European Commission 2008).

With regards to education, language competences are an indispensable prerequisite for any attempt at internationalizing academic experience and “a key dimension of modernizing European education system” (European Commission 2012). Internationalization is the official policy and strategic orientation of the HEIs in Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries. Even though some progress has been made in this regard, studies suggest that insufficient language proficiency level is still “an enormous obstacle to mobility for the purposes of education and training” (European Parliament 2012). As people from all socio-economic backgrounds need to have an equal opportunity to learn languages and thus increase the employability prospects, the formal education system has a central role to play in empowering students with the language skills they need. In order to play that role properly, language policy has to be based on the principle of accessibility of language education for all and geared towards reaching the outcomes that support employability, mobility and growth relying on the country-specific needs. A well-aimed approach responding to the requests of domestic and international labor market will ensure a smart use of resources and increased capacities for growth and internationalization of the economy, an investment that pays back in the long run. Granted, the benefits of language learning go well beyond the immediate economic advantages.

With the goal of providing needs-based recommendations for foreign language teaching policy, with special reference to language for specific purposes (LSP), to HEIs in Montenegro, we have conducted a study the results of which will be presented in this paper. The study in question was carried out during the inception phase of the Erasmus+ CBHE project *Reforming Foreign Language Teaching in Academia in Montenegro* (ReFLAME) whose aim is to strengthen the capacities of Montenegrin universities to offer modern, market-oriented foreign language education for non-philology students in response to a growing demand for foreign language skills in most work positions. In the remainder, we

will focus on a brief overview of the foreign language teaching at the oldest HEI in Montenegro, University of Montenegro (UoM), followed by the study design, key study results, discussion and recommendations.

### **LSP teaching at HEIs in Montenegro: a brief overview**

Development of LSP at the University of Montenegro overlaps with the establishment of the Institute of Foreign Languages in 1979. Until 1993, teaching of LSP at the faculties of Montenegro was organized for two or four semesters, 2 classes a week, usually in the first and the second years of studies. The departments that offered four semesters usually had general English (Russian, French, German) in the first year and LSP in the second year. However, the Faculty of Economics offered LSP all four semesters.

The most prominent development started in 1993, when LSP was raised at a very high level. LSP was studied for 7 semesters, 4 classes a week, at all the faculties of the University of Montenegro. The first four semesters were dedicated to general LSP, while the other 3 semesters were focused on LSP. Bearing in mind the large number of classes per week, LSP was not a part of the curriculum, but it was compulsory for all the students. They had to pass an exam after each semester. After the fourth semester they had upper-intermediate level (B2) and without passing these tests students could not enroll in the third year. The languages offered were English, Russian, French and German.

Starting with this new model of studying LSP meant a reform in teaching LSP, including introduction of new textbooks published abroad. The approach was very flexible in terms of materials, so lecturers were free to change new and better textbooks or produce their own if no appropriate material could be provided.

The system was changed in 2004, when the Bologna process started. This marked a significant decline in the offer of LSP at UoM since the University gave up the centralized approach to foreign languages and allowed faculties to organize teaching in accordance with their own needs. The Institute of Foreign Languages was mainly not consulted any more, although it continued to organize teaching in accordance with the new curricula. Over the years, the number of classes declined. For example, at the beginning, the Faculty of Political Science offered two foreign languages at the Department of International Relations (English as a compulsory language plus Russian, German, French or Italian - students had to choose one). However, the Faculty decided to abolish the second language later as they "needed those credits for other courses". However, a number of materials were developed during this period (especially for the Faculty of Political Science and the Faculty of Law). As for the courses for general public, only business English was organized.

### Study design

The aim of the present study is to get an overview of the current state of play with regard to the foreign language teaching and the actual needs from the perspective of students, university staff members (both academic and non-academic) and employers in Montenegro. To this end, we designed three on-line surveys; one for each of the three target groups: students, university staff members and employers. For designing and distributing the survey, we used the online platform [1ka.si](http://1ka.si)<sup>1</sup>, which is an open source application developed by the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. The surveys consisted of combined questionnaires comprising of open-ended and closed-ended (mainly Likert scale, multiple choice, rating) questions. Foreign language professors at the three universities in Montenegro (University of Montenegro - UoM, Mediterranean University - MU, University of Donja Gorica - UDG) distributed the link to questionnaires among the students, university staff members and the Montenegrin Employers Federation. Most of the questionnaires were distributed and the data collected from 17 December 2019 until 20 January 2020. Upon the completion of the survey, the data were analyzed using mainly basic descriptive statistics. Additionally, we designed an online placement test through the [testmoz](http://testmoz.com)<sup>2</sup> platform and distributed it among the first year students from various departments at the UoM and MU and complemented it with the first year students' placement test results available at the UDG for the academic year 2018.

As already mentioned, in line with the overall goal of the study we had three target groups of participants: university students (1,439 respondents), university staff members (461 respondents) and employers (85 respondents) with the overall number of 1,985 participants who took part. As for the student background, the respondents were mainly from non-philological departments and faculties at the three universities among which Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Tourism, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Polytechnics and others. The university staff members included both academic and non-academic (mainly administrative) staff members. As for the employers, the respondents come from various sectors including law firms, small and medium-sized businesses, healthcare institutions, banking sector, education, oil and gas sector, wood processing, maritime transport, civil engineering, IT and programming, trade and hospitality, etc. The number of respondents that took part in the online placement test at the UoM and MU was 264 and in the testing organized at the UDG was 589. The overall breakdown of the sample size is given in the table below.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ika.si](http://www.ika.si)

<sup>2</sup> [www.testmoz.com](http://www.testmoz.com)

Target group	Number of respondents
<b>Students (overall)</b>	<b>1,439</b>
UoM	752
MU	151
UDG	536
<b>University staff (overall)</b>	<b>461</b>
UoM	364
MU	36
UDG	61
<b>Employers</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>1,985</b>

Table 1. The breakdown of the number of participants in the surveys

## Results

Due to the limitation in space, this section will present some of the key results of the questionnaires. Results are given according to the key target groups and these are further broken down according to the sub-groups.

### LSP in academia: student's perspective

As indicated in the previous section, 752 students from the UoM took part in the survey. Regarding the importance and the status of English language at the university and for the labor market, a vast majority (65%) thinks that studying English is extremely important both for their studies and future profession. Half of the respondents (50%) thinks that the level of proficiency acquired through secondary schooling is not sufficient for their current educational and professional needs and 83% thinks that it should be a mandatory subject at their study program, especially ESP. The top five reasons include: employability, further education, personal pleasure (travelling, interaction with people from other culture, etc.), the danger of forgetting the language if not practiced, expensive private schools and lack of ESP courses. As for the quality of current textbooks used, the majority expressed medium level of satisfaction stating that some of the disadvantages of current textbooks are that they are outdated, lack of relevant vocabulary for their future jobs. Furthermore, a vast majority (80%) thinks that modern technology should be used more in teaching, especially smartboards, apps for smartphones and tables, PowerPoint presentations, etc.

As for the second foreign language, 68% stated that it would be necessary to study it for their future profession (especially German, Italian and Russian), and 52% stated that they do not have the opportunity to study the second foreign language at their faculty. If they had the opportunity, 55% thinks it should be a general language course.

As indicated in the previous section, 151 students from the MU took part in the survey. Regarding the importance and the status of English language at the university and for the labor market, a vast majority (78%) thinks that studying English is extremely important both for their studies and future profession. Half of the respondents (50%) thinks that the level of proficiency acquired through secondary schooling is not sufficient for their current educational and professional needs and 80% thinks that it should be a mandatory subject at their study program, especially ESP. The top five reasons include: employability, further education, personal pleasure (travelling, interaction with people from other culture, etc.), the danger of forgetting the language if not practiced, expensive private schools and lack of ESP courses. As for the quality of current textbooks used, the majority (39%) expressed they are very satisfied. As for those who are not satisfied, some of the key disadvantages of current textbooks are that they are lack of relevant vocabulary for their future jobs, emphasis on British English only, and inconsistency with what is requested for the testing. Furthermore, majority (69%) of respondents thinks that modern technology should be used more in teaching, especially computers, translation software, smartboards, apps for smartphones and tables, PowerPoint presentations, etc. As for the second foreign language, 57% stated that it would be necessary to study it for their future profession (especially German, Italian and Russian), and 79% stated that they do not have the opportunity to study the second foreign language at their faculty. If they had the opportunity, 53% thinks it should be a general language course.

As indicated in the previous section, 536 students from the UDG took part in the survey. Regarding the importance and the status of English language at the university and for the labor market, a vast majority (68%) thinks that studying English is extremely important for their studies and 74% for their future profession. Most respondents (55%) think that the level of proficiency acquired through secondary schooling is not sufficient for their current educational and professional needs and 71% think that it should be a mandatory subject at their study program, especially ESP. Among the top reasons for this are: employability, further education and participation in exchange programs, personal pleasure (travelling, interaction with people from other culture, etc.), helps students taking it more seriously. As for the quality of current textbooks used, the majority (34%) expressed they are very satisfied. As for those who are not satisfied, some of the key disadvantages of current textbooks are that they are lack of relevant

vocabulary for their future jobs, lack of translation at lower levels. Furthermore, majority (75%) of respondents thinks that modern technology should be used more in teaching, especially computers, online tests, smartboards, apps for smartphones and tables, PowerPoint presentations, etc. As for the second foreign language, 68% stated that it would be necessary to study it for their future profession (especially German, Italian and French), and 90% stated that they do have the opportunity to study the second foreign language at their faculty.

### **LSP in academia: university staff's perspective**

Among the 364 respondents who are employed at the UoM, of which 65% are teaching staff members, majority (52%) stated that English is necessary for their work with only 3% stated they do not need it. Based on the self-evaluation, most of the respondents are at the intermediate or upper intermediate (30% each) and 27% at the advanced level. A vast majority (90%) thinks they would benefit from additional training for improving English language skills. Additionally, 50% stated they could not teach in English, and 71% has never participated in any teaching mobility programs for with the hindrance has been workload (the number of classes they teach), family obligations, language barrier (language anxiety and rustiness), and lack of transparency of the nomination process. 76% stated they would benefit from additional training in academic writing in English, while at the same time 56% stated they write their own journal articles in English. The recommendations that they give for language training include organizing specialized courses (e.g. presenting in English) and general language courses. Finally, 68% stated they would need the knowledge of another foreign language for their work, especially German, Italian and French.

Among the 36 respondents who are employed at the MU, of which 86% are teaching staff members, majority (56%) stated that English is necessary for their work with only 3% stated they do not need it. Based on the self-evaluation, most of the respondents are at the advanced (42%) or upper intermediate (36%) and 11% at the intermediate level. A vast majority (89%) thinks they would benefit from additional training for improving English language skills. Additionally, 68% stated they could teach in English, and 67% has never participated in any teaching mobility programs for with the hindrance has been lack of opportunities and language barrier (18%). 76% stated they would benefit from additional training in academic writing in English, while at the same time 70% stated they write their own journal articles in English. Finally, 79% stated they would need the knowledge of another foreign language for their work, especially German, Italian and French or Spanish.

Among the 61 respondents who are employed at the UDG, of which 92% are teaching staff members, majority (77%) stated that English is necessary for their work with only 2% stated they do not need it. Based on the self-evalua-

tion, most of the respondents are at the advanced (58%) or upper intermediate (21%) level and 16% at the intermediate level. A vast majority (85%) thinks they would benefit from additional training for improving English language skills. Additionally, 81% stated they could teach in English, and 60% has never participated in any teaching mobility programs for with the hindrance has been lack of opportunities and language barrier (language anxiety and rustiness for 14% of respondents). 79% stated they would benefit from additional training in academic writing in English, while at the same time 70% stated they write their own journal articles in English. Finally, 84% stated they would need the knowledge of another foreign language for their work, especially German, Chinese and Spanish.

### **LSP in academia: Employer's perspective**

Among the 85 respondents from various business sectors (maritime transport, trade, civil engineering, education, retail and wholesale businesses, oil and gas, IT and programming, wood processing, entrepreneurship, healthcare, banking, law firms, etc.), 53% thinks that English language proficiency is extremely important for the employees at their companies. A vast majority (82%) thinks that job applicants need to have a higher level of English language proficiency. 58% thinks that University should be primarily responsible for English language training of prospective candidates, and 29% thinks that the private sector should be responsible. The top reasons include the quality assurance and control guaranteed by the HEI system, responsibility of education system, and that university helps students take language learning more seriously. The majority of employers (53%) stated that language training should be in ESP and 47% in general English. As for the language skills which are especially necessary for their profession, a vast majority (69%) chose all 4 key skills, while 23% chose specifically speaking, 5% writing, and 2% reading. As for another foreign language, 55% thinks their employees would need another foreign language apart from English especially German, Italian, and Russian.

The table below shows requirements for specific vacancies that were publicly announced in the period from 1 January 2019 until 17 December 2019 and which explicitly state that certain level of English language proficiency is requested. It should be noted that not all vacancies explicitly state that English language knowledge is required. In some cases (e.g. IT sector, etc.) this is implied. Such announcements for vacancies were not obtained and are not given in the table below.

Required English language level as stated per specific vacancies	Total	I	II	III	IV	V	VI1	VI2	VII1	VII2	VIII
English language – elementary level	89	0	0	1	78	0	0	0	10	0	0
English language – intermediate level	167	15	0	41	93	0	2	0	16	0	0
English – higher or conversational level	338	7	0	40	113	0	5	0	164	9	0
English language – level A1	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	0
English language – level A2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0
English language – level B1	81	0	0	0	7	0	1	0	73	0	0
English language – level B2	51	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	51	0	0
English language – level C1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Knowledge of the English language	1150	104	12	204	526	0	38	0	248	18	0
<b>GRAND TOTAL =</b>	<b>1902</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 2. Vacancies explicitly requiring specific level of English language proficiency for the period 01/01/19 – 17/12/19

### Placement test results

The placement tests that were administered at the University of Montenegro, Mediterranean University and University of Donja Gorica in which 853 first year students took part suggest that as far as the English language proficiency is concerned, the average entry level at the HEI studies is B1 (intermediate). This is a discrepancy in terms of the expected level envisaged by the Montenegrin legislation according to which a B2 level is expected for students who have finished high schools.

As indicated above, the online placement test was designed through the testmoz.com platform to cover A1 to C1 CEF levels. The respondents were first year students at various faculties at the UoM and MU (Figure 1) and the link was distributed in February 2020. The overall number of respondents was 264. The

average score was 64% which corresponds to B1 intermediate level. The testing at the UDG (Figure 2) was organized in 2018 and 589 students took part. The average score was B1 Intermediate level. Granted, it should be noted that this placement test has its limitations as it mainly tested the lexical and grammar component of written language.

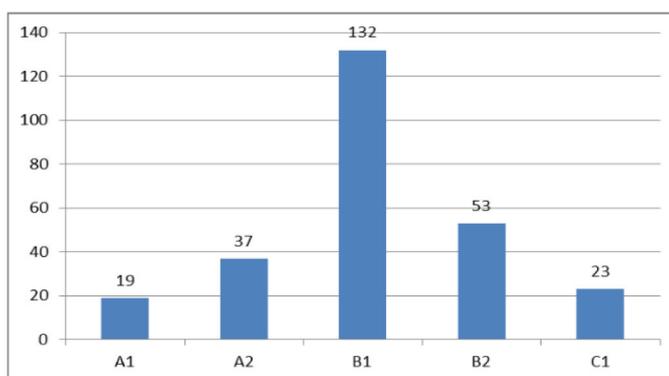


Figure 1. Placement test results for the UoM and MU

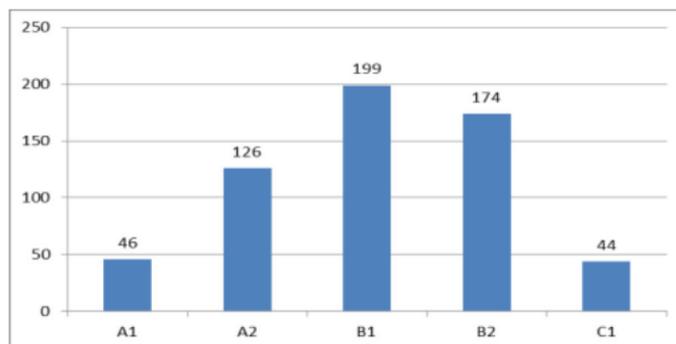


Figure 2. Placement test results for the UDG

### **Discussion and closing remarks**

This study aimed at getting an overview into the state of foreign language teaching at the HEI institutions in Montenegro and the actual needs from the perspective of students, university staff members, employers, and labor market. Several key takeaways can be taken from the results presented in the previous section.

As for the students, the results suggest a high level of awareness of the importance of English language for their education and future employment at all three universities. This is especially the case for the ESP which was identified as the type of training students seem to need the most. Most of the respondents

stated that this should be a mandatory part of their university education. The need for improving the current state was suggested in terms of the relevance of the teaching materials for the current needs of their future profession and improving the teaching methods by introducing more interactive approaches and modern technology as didactic aid. A need for introducing the courses for other foreign languages was identified as well, especially at the UoM and MU. As for the average general English language proficiency entry level of the students at three universities in Montenegro, the results suggest that it is B1 and, hence, not meeting the goal prescribed by the Montenegrin legislation.

As for the university staff, a vast majority stated that they need English very much for their work. The results suggest that majority of staff would benefit from additional training in ESP (such as presenting skills) and EAP, especially academic writing. This is in line with the fact that quite a number of professors did not participate in any form of the international teaching mobility programs and it seems that the language barrier, although not the primary reason in all cases, seems to have a significant share in this. The results also suggest that university staff would need another foreign language for their work.

As for the employers and labor market, the results show that there is a great need for English language proficiency at the labor market, which certainly did not come as a surprise. However, the results also suggest the general dissatisfaction with the English language proficiency level of the prospective employees that apply for job posts and the need for more ESP training. Most employers think that it should primarily be the responsibility of universities to provide training in foreign language skills by and large because the HEIs are seen as a reliable partner in terms of quality control and assurance as well as raising the awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages among the students and helping them to have a serious approach to it. Employers stated the need for acquiring mastery in another foreign language among the prospective employees for the purpose of doing business in various sectors.

In addition, new developments within the system of higher education require additional efforts to restructure the system of FL teaching. The increased need for internationalization of our universities, which includes study programs or courses that will be organized in English, as well as numerous mobility grants, require additional efforts aimed at strengthening the position of foreign languages at the university level.

For some time now, students already have 13 years of learning general English (or another foreign language, but to a much lower extent) during their primary and secondary education. This means that attention at the university level should be paid to the language for specific purposes. However, the notion of LSP is not always clear to non-linguists who see it as learning of a proper terminology for a specific profession, rather than acquiring the skills necessary to use the language in academic and professional settings.

Therefore, the ReFLAME team is planning to develop new curricula and syllabi for all the study programs at the University of Montenegro. The number of semesters and the number of classes per week will be defined based on a needs analysis that the ReFLAME team will do, taking into account objective and real needs for LSP for each study program. The team will also propose introduction of a second foreign language where necessary. The goal is to make LSP syllabi an integral part of the study programs that will clearly reflect the academic needs of students as well as their professional needs once they go to the labor market.

Our plan is to produce a comprehensive document that will contain the findings of the survey carried out within the ReFLAME project and presented in this paper, as well as syllabi for each study program. This will be done parallel to discussions within the University to raise awareness among the management staff of the University and individual faculties about the need to incorporate foreign languages into their curricula.

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**NASTAVA STRANOG JEZIKA STRUKE NA UNIVERZITETU I POTREBE TRŽIŠTA RADA:  
TRENDOVI I PERSPEKTIVE U CRNOJ GORI**

U radu su predstavljeni ključni rezultati istraživanja koje je sprovedeno u Crnoj Gori sa ciljem sticanja uvida u trenutno stanje na polju nastave stranih jezika struke i potreba studenata, zaposlenih na univerzitetu (akademskog i neakademskog osoblja) i poslodavaca. U tu svrhu, pripremljen je i distribuisan onlajn upitnik koji je popunilo ukupno 1 985 učesnika iz pomenutih ciljnih grupa. Takođe, sprovedeno je i onlajn dijagnostičko testiranje engleskog jezika među studentima prve godine na tri univerziteta u Crnoj Gori sa ciljem upoređivanja ulaznog nivoa znanja sa očekivanjima nastavnih planova i programa. Rezultati upućuju na izraženu potrebu za dobrim vladanjem stranim jezikom struke za akademske i profesionalne potrebe, opšte nezadovoljstvo stepenom znanja stranog jezika struke kandidata koji konkurišu za radna mjesta, osim engleskog, potrebu vladanjem još jednim stranim jezikom struke, potrebu za osnaživanjem nastave stranog jezika struke na visokoškolskim ustanovama u Crnoj Gori koje poslodavci doživljavaju kao ključnog partnera koji može osigurati kontrolu kvaliteta nastave stranog jezika. Rad se zaključuje preporukama za planiranje programa i nastave stranog jezika struke na visokoškolskim ustanovama u Crnoj Gori.

**Ključne riječi:** strani jezik struke, potrebe tržišta rada, univerziteti, Crna Gora.