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## TIME TO RING ALARM BELLS? STUDENTS HAVE A SAY

### Abstract

To be able to apply their foreign language knowledge and skills properly, students need to be trained how to do it. If the knowledge of a language system is acquired, but not properly incorporated into the use of the fundamental language skills, students are not given a chance to put their real-life communication knowledge into operation. In short, knowledge without skills is not of much help in real life communication, not even in the situations which require rather receptive, let alone productive language use. Integrated language skills have long been the most advocated and vastly applied approach to teaching English. Despite this, especially bearing in mind the concept of most standardized coursebooks, practice shows that too many English language teachers still rely on the traditional grammar-translation method in their classrooms, thus depriving their students of the chances to internalize their L2 knowledge or use it spontaneously in daily communication. This paper presents the results of a survey conducted among students, aged 18+, gathered in three different educational institutions ( $N = 344$ ), which helped us look into the situation with the English teaching practices in secondary education in Serbia. The results show it is time we rang some warning bells.

**Key words:** English language teaching, secondary education, language skills, communicative competence, developing language ability

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## 1. Introduction

Language learning is based on mastering four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, which are normally acquired in this order. While listening and reading are typically considered to be receptive skills, speaking and writing are regarded as productive ones. “Although the skills are technically separate and can be assessed separately, they work together in real life because communication involves sending and receiving messages“ (Tomović 2019: 47). Therefore, we have to note that these skills interact and that it is impossible to effectively communicate in everyday contexts without using at least two of them, e.g. speaking and listening (in immediate conversations) or reading and writing (in personal or professional correspondence). In addition to that, we may find ourselves in the position to act upon a certain text we read (e.g. following instructions or directions), in which case we often need to further inquire about details or want to discuss with others the contents of what we read. Interpersonal and especially asynchronous communication often implies an exchange of written materials, which is rarely unidirectional. Therefore, in the case of foreign language learning, it is very important to focus on the productive skills as much as on the receptive ones, because learners are usually not frequently exposed to real-life situations in which they could use them. If they are not given sufficient time to practise these skills in classroom contexts, they will not be prepared to put their foreign language knowledge to use out of school. Also, many learners face the problem of not being able to practise their speaking or writing skills because of the number of students in their language classes or because the teacher believes that other skills and/or subskills are more important or easier to assess. Learning about the language and mastering its contents, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, phonology and functions, is undoubtedly useful, but without serious parallel work on the development of all the aforementioned skills, the chances of upgrading one’s language knowledge to language ability are minimal.

This leads us to the concept of integrated skills, based on various interactive techniques which emphasize that communication is a two-way process. Besides, as Brown (2001: 234) observes, one skill often reinforces another. As the most advocated approach to teaching foreign languages for many decades, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been long-established in the Serbian educational setting as well. According to the same author (Brown 2000: 266–267), its basic principles are: a) development of all forms of competence, and not being “restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence” only; b) “pragmatic, authentic and functional use of language for meaningful purposes”; c) parallel work on fluency and accuracy, with fluency sometimes taking on more importance “in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use”; and d) having students “to use the language, productively and

receptively, in unrehearsed contexts”. We wanted to check to what extent these basic principles of CLT were followed in our respondents’ schools. Therefore, we conducted a survey among students, aged 18+, gathered in three different educational institutions ( $N = 344$ ), which helped us look into the situation with the English teaching practices in secondary education in Serbia.

## 2. Research

The aim of this paper and our research is to offer a perspective on the place of language skills in the context of ELT in secondary education in Serbia. As English is taught from the first grade of primary school, it would be normal to expect that most secondary school graduates should be able to use all the language skills interchangeably and reach an intermediate level of language proficiency according to the world standards. However, the results of this research show that it is not necessarily the case. The Institute for the Improvement of Education (ZUOV) set general standards of language achievement for secondary school graduates and divided them into three levels of achievement – elementary, intermediate and upper-intermediate, which should, but do not fully correspond to similar labels and descriptors used in English-speaking countries. In the case of elementary level, for example, the student is expected to use the foreign language so as to understand spoken messages, short and simple information about personal interests and familiar content, to participate in everyday conversations, find specific information in texts on familiar topics and to be able to write about different aspects of life in immediate surroundings (*Opšti standardi postignuća za kraj opšteg srednjeg obrazovanja i vaspitanja i srednjeg stručnog obrazovanja i vaspitanja u delu opšteobrazovnih predmeta. Strani jezik 2013: 1*). The document focuses on individual skills and does not provide information about the importance of their integration, which might mislead teachers, and, consequently, learners. Furthermore, what may seem to be a satisfactory result according to these standards, with too many students at the elementary level of knowledge, based on our research findings (Janković et al. in press), would certainly be unacceptable at this level of education according to international standards.

In order to collect the relevant data and draw more specific conclusions about ELT practices in secondary education in Serbia, we used a survey that was conducted in three different educational institutions where English is taught. The survey was based on two research instruments, of which one was a questionnaire and the other a test of knowledge, here used as a diagnostic test. Both instruments were distributed at the beginning of the academic year 2017/18, upon the students’ admission in their respective institutions. The three institutions in question are: The Teacher Education Faculty and The Faculty of Philology of The University of Belgrade and The Institute

for Foreign Languages in Belgrade. The comparative analysis of the results obtained by means of both research instruments has already been presented in the above mentioned study by the same authors (Janković et al. in press).

In this study, we will focus more closely on the answers received from 344 respondents (N=344), aged 18+, who completed the questionnaire about the quality of English language teaching and assessment in their secondary education. An important fact related to the survey population is that, due to the type of school they previously finished, 70% of the participants from the Teacher Education Faculty (N=204), and 61% of the respondents from the Institute for Foreign Languages (N=33), had only two lessons of English per week in their respective schools (mainly vocational), whereas 59% of the participants from the Faculty of Philology (N=107) had 4 or 5 lessons of English per week in their secondary schools. Female respondents made up a vast majority in the survey.

According to the results obtained by means of both the questionnaire and the test of knowledge, we drew the following general conclusions:

a) The type of school (a vocational or grammar school<sup>1</sup>) and the number of English language tuition hours (ranging from two to five per week) largely influence the quality of teaching and the way in which student achievement is evaluated and assessed. Consequently, they also influence the level of linguistic competence and quality of performance achieved by students.

b) Assessment criteria are not standardized and vary considerably from teacher to teacher and from school to school. The grade obtained at the end of secondary education is not in many cases an objective or valid indicator of students' language proficiency.

c) Not all language skills are treated equally, either concerning the teaching of the English language or the assessment of students' language proficiency. As a matter of fact, some of the crucial language skills, especially productive ones, are largely or completely disregarded.

d) Many teachers still rely too much on grammar and translation, on text reading (not for communicative purposes), answering ready-made questions, retelling the texts and drills, while there is no emphasis on genuine interaction, i.e. the development of students' communicative competence.

e) In the process of L2 learning students often depend on individual approaches to mastering the language, outside of the school context. They also display a decent level of objectivity and are fairly self-critical when discussing their school grades and personal expectations in terms of their English language development.

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<sup>1</sup> Equivalent to what is known as *Gymnasium* in German-speaking and some other countries in Continental Europe.

### 3. Analysis

Let us look more closely into the results of the questionnaire itself, which makes the focal point of this paper. The questionnaire was segmented into two parts:

- The introductory part, which surveyed the following elements:
  - general sample data (gender, age and affiliation of the respondents)
  - type of school which the students previously finished
  - their English language grade in the final year of secondary education
  - their previous experience with English language learning
- The main part, which consisted of ten questions (some also including sub-questions), which helped us inspect the quality of English language teaching and assessment in secondary education, students' use of the language and their everyday learning experience. The ten questions focused on the following:
  - 1) the frequency of Serbian language use in the classroom
  - 2) the frequency of English language use in the classroom
  - 3) what the teacher used the English language for
  - 4) the diversity of activities oriented towards students' mastery of the language knowledge and the four language skills
  - 5) the diversity of activities applied in the process of assessment of students' language knowledge and ability
  - 6) students' personal English language learning interests and experience
  - 7) the grade students would use to assess their own knowledge of the English language upon secondary school graduation
  - 8) the grade they would assign to the quality of the English language teaching experienced through secondary education
  - 9) the problems they potentially had while learning English in their secondary schools
  - 10) the changes they would propose for the process of English language teaching in state schools.

The answers obtained from the students based on the above questions show it is time we rang some warning bells.

The introductory part of the questionnaire, which provides the data on the population composition, reveals that as many as 60.75% of the respondents had the highest ('excellent') grade in English in the final year of their secondary education. These are followed by 20.52% of the students who had the second best (i.e. 'very good') grade. A middle-rate ('good') grade was given to only 12.90% of the respondents and even fewer than that, only 5.27%, had a merely passing grade. As the test of knowledge

has already proved (Janković et al. in press), there is a considerable mismatch between the school grades and the level of language shown by the students.

The main part of the questionnaire gives us a more detailed insight into the students' evaluation of the quality of English language teaching behind the mentioned grades. The first two questions refer to the frequency of teachers' L1 and L2 use in the classroom. It is here already that we can see how more than half of the respondents were disadvantaged in terms of their listening and speaking skills (Table 1). If the high school EL teacher uses L1 as frequently as, or even more than L2 while teaching (which all the three groups of students reported), then the English language learners are both insufficiently exposed to L2 and deprived of opportunities to respond in L2, as it is not likely that they will use a foreign language to respond to prompts given in their native language. Due to the fact that these two skills are interconnected, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide as many opportunities as possible for the foreign language to be heard and spoken in the classroom. Otherwise, neither the teaching process nor the evaluation of students' communicative competence can be expected to yield fruitful results.

<b>344 respondents</b>	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
1. Did the teacher use the Serbian language in communication with the students?	<b>59.01%</b>	<b>27.03%</b>	<b>12.20%</b>	<b>1.74%</b>
2. Did the teacher use the English language in communication with the students?	<b>56.10%</b>	<b>31.68%</b>	<b>9.88%</b>	<b>2.32%</b>

Table 1. The frequency of teachers' L1 and L2 use in the classroom

The answers to Question 3 specify more closely what English was used for, and rather confirm what has just been stated. Table 2 presents how often the teachers relied on L2 when they were introducing new contents and addressing their students.

3. Did the teacher mainly use English to...					
	Frequency	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
a) explain new words?	*TEF <sup>2</sup>	37.74%	34.80%	19.11%	8.33%
	*FPH	43.92%	32.71%	12.14%	11.21%
	*IFL	21.21%	27.27%	39.39%	12.12%
b) explain grammar?	Frequency	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
	TEF	28.92%	39.70%	19.60%	11.76%
	FPH	40.18%	35.51%	16.82%	7.47%
	IFL	12.90%	45.16%	25.80%	16.12%
c) give instructions?	Frequency	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
	TEF	30.39%	37.74%	19.11%	12.74%
	FPH	46.72%	31.77%	14.95%	5.60%
	IFL	35.48%	29.03%	22.58%	12.90%

Table 2. The frequency of the use of English for introducing new contents

As Table 2 shows, although the students oriented to foreign languages, mainly from schools focused on humanities and social sciences, were at an advantage in comparison to the other survey participants, not one of the groups of respondents could say that 50% of them were regularly exposed to English as the language of communication on any grounds investigated in this question. What is more, the percentage of those who were rarely or never immersed in L2 for these purposes is not negligible in any of the surveyed groups. A closer look at the percentages in the above table speaks for itself. It goes without saying that certain situations in the presentation stage of a lesson require partial reliance on students' mother tongue or a parallel use of L1 and L2 (Savić Nenadović et al. 2019: 425) if we want to facilitate students' understanding of the subject matter. This may be the case, for example, when we are explaining some grammar points that largely differ from the students' native language system and require the use of metalanguage they may not be fully familiar with. However, unreasonably reduced use of the foreign language in a foreign language classroom, especially when students are being presented new vocabulary or given various instructions, will not help them to enhance the quality of the language learned or develop their communicative skills.

<sup>2</sup> \*TEF (Teacher Education Faculty); FPH (Faculty of Philology); IFL (Institute for foreign languages)

For these facets to be developed, teachers can take advantage of numerous activities during an English language lesson. Let us see if this was the case with our respondents. Question 4 delves into the quality of the teaching time used for the most typical activities in a foreign language classroom. It also provides an overall picture of a typical language class and how skills and activities are used in it.

4. To what extent were the following activities used in the classes?				
Frequency	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) Reading the text aloud	<b>200</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>9</b>
b) Translating the text	<b>133</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>21</b>
c) Answering the questions about the text	<b>196</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>10</b>
d) Retelling the text in English	<b>91</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>54</b>
e) Grammar analysis of the text	<b>49</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>79</b>
f) Reading the text quickly in order to find the main point (skimming)	<b>45</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>85</b>
g) Searching for specific information in the text (scanning)	<b>125</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>31</b>
h) Conversation about the topic of the unit	<b>189</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>
i) Conversation about the topics not closely related to the unit	<b>86</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>38</b>
j) Writing compositions	<b>45</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>88</b>
k) Writing letters and the like	<b>18</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>145</b>
l) Dictation	<b>37</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>134</b>
m) Listening to authentic speech from audio or video recordings	<b>107</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>63</b>
n) Activities mainly related to the course book	<b>267</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>
o) Activities related to the materials other than the coursebook	<b>36</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>97</b>

Table 3. The quality of skills development

Regarding each of the skills, here are the results of how often they were practised in class: as few as 31.10% of all the students who took part in the survey were regularly exposed to listening to authentic speech from audio/video recordings, although an additional 32.56% were exposed to it sometimes. Dictation is distributed differently: while 10.75% of the students were exposed to it regularly, as many as 38.95% report not having had a single dictation. In the case of speaking, here are the results that show the number of students who were regularly exposed to certain speaking activities: 56.98% report they regularly had to answer questions about the text, and 26.45% had to retell it. 54.94% regularly discussed the topic of the unit, while as few as 25% regularly talked about other topics that were not related to it. Reading seems to be in the traditional framework, since 58.14% of all the students had to read aloud regularly, and an additional 30.81% of them did it sometimes. 13.08% skimmed texts regularly, and 36.34% were asked to do scanning activities as frequently. Finally, only 13.08% were asked to write compositions, while a mere 5.23% wrote letters and other texts regularly. For the vast majority of the students (77.61% regularly, 15.98% sometimes) schoolwork depended on the coursebook exercises. It can thus be concluded that many activities were focused on micro-skills and practising linguistic forms, much rather than integrated skills, which does not contribute to students' overall performance. Apart from that, the skill which was regularly practised by many (38.66%), or sometimes by almost as many (35.17%), but definitely much more than listening and writing, is translation.

With reference to language assessment, Vilotijević (2000: 363–381) points out that the school grade often depends more on the teacher who assesses students than on the knowledge the students possess, which may put students who were assessed under stricter criteria at a disadvantage despite the better knowledge they may have. In the case of foreign language learning, we should add that being able to demonstrate quality knowledge and mastery of the language largely depends on the quality of assessment. Let us check how these processes were organized in our respondents' schools.

It is evident that assessment is based on the activities and skills analyzed in Question 4, which can be further proven after interpreting responses to Question 5. The students at all three institutions were asked to state what their teachers took into consideration when assessing them and how much they valued different skills.

5. To what extent were the following points taken into consideration when you were given grades? Circle an appropriate number next to each of the following points.	<b>1 – unimportant 5 – the most important</b>				
Level of importance	1	2	3	4	5
a) Grammar	2	5	41	107	187
b) Vocabulary	5	29	67	121	120
c) (Reading and) translation	13	42	71	101	114
d) Pronunciation	55	67	99	82	39
e) Communication with the teacher	43	50	83	82	85
f) Communication with other students	123	77	77	42	23
g) Retelling the text in a unit	52	56	72	86	76
h) Most of the stated above	14	21	101	105	54

Table 4. The quality of assessment

We can start with the finding that most of the teachers favor reading aloud, translation and grammar. Regarding micro-skills, 187 students (54.36%) state that their teachers considered grammar as the most important element of assessment, followed by 107 (31.10%) who said it was very important. Knowledge of vocabulary also seems to be valued among Serbian teachers because 120 students (34.88%) reported it as the most important element for their teachers, and almost the same number (121 students or 35.17%) marked it as very important in assessment. Regarding macro-skills, we can see that 33.14% of the students' teachers found text reading and translation the most important element of assessment and another 29.36% considered it to be important. That means that 62.5% of the respondents were frequently required to translate in class, which is alarming. On the other hand, communication with the teacher and communication among students seem to be of less importance according to the results of the survey. In particular, communication among students themselves was of the least importance in assessment (in the case of 35.75% of the respondents' teachers),

while communication with the teacher seemed to be more valued. Even though the latter result is not so bad, and teacher-student communication is commonplace in most assessment procedures, it is obvious there are still many teachers who do not pay sufficient attention to the most important goal of language teaching – communication in a foreign language.

As expected, the results of the survey tell us that grammar is often considered to be the most important aspect in the assessment of language competence, which has several downsides: language competence is not assessed objectively, students might feel frustrated whenever their overall competence is not taken into account and a strong focus on grammar can impede their fluency because they will not feel comfortable when they have to say something and will hesitate before they utter a word. Focus on grammar can also affect teaching: if the teacher considers it that important or if he/she wants to prepare students for a particular exam, fluency is very likely to be neglected. Although translating very short segments “can give very quick and reliable information on what the testee does or does not know, particularly when it involves entire units of meaning (phrases, sentences) within a known context” (Ur 2009: 40), its importance seems to be overemphasized by many teachers, to the detriment of true skills and learners’ overall language development.

Students’ personal interests in and experience with English language learning were investigated in Question 6. Their answers reveal that 58.72% of the respondents regularly rely on their English language knowledge in order to understand contents on television, in movies, shows, etc., 25.87% of them do it sometimes, 12.79% rarely and only 2.62% of them never. To communicate with foreigners, 39.53% of the participants regularly use the language, 34.88% sometimes, 22.38% rarely and 3.20% never. We found that only 15.12% of the students read literary works in English regularly, 21.51% of them sometimes, while 20.07% of them do it rarely and 33.72% of them never use English for such purposes. Quite contrarily, the media (especially the Internet) contents are read in English by approximately one half (i.e. 50.87%) of the respondents on a regular basis, by 26.45% of them sometimes, whereas 15.40% of the students are rarely interested in such activities, and 6.98% of these young people do not have such a habit at all. Reading various kinds of instructions in the foreign language is a regular practice of 29.07% of the respondents, an occasional practice of 44.77% of them, a rare experience of 22.38% of the students and completely negligible for 9.59% of them. Finally, in respect of written communication with foreigners, the frequency of the respondents’ English language use is fairly evenly distributed. Thus, 27.62% of them rely on it regularly, 25.87% sometimes, 20.93% rarely and 25.58% never use English to communicate with foreigners in the written form. This may be the case because, due to economic, socio-political or other reasons, not many of them have

been given the opportunity to establish such international contacts in the first place. Not surprisingly, the overall responses to Question 6 show that the passive use of the language, mainly by reading or listening, dominates. However, these young people do show a considerable degree of interest in active communication in both the spoken and written forms. That imposes on English teachers themselves the need to take a more active approach to teaching, especially in terms of productive skills.

As the comparative results presented in our initial study showed, there is a significant level of discrepancy between the grades students would personally assign to themselves for their English language knowledge (Question 7) or the quality of their former English language classes (Question 8) on the one hand, and the grades they were given at the end of secondary education, on the other. The students' satisfaction with their English classes at school can be described as follows: 7.56% of all the students are totally dissatisfied, while 22.38% are completely satisfied. However, we have to mention that 24.71% of them reported having problems in their English class (Question 9). The principles of reliability, validity or versatility of the ways of assessment were not closely followed, nor were the assessment criteria standardized or harmonized. Consequently, the quality of students' learning is undermined, as well as their efforts to reach higher levels of achievement, since faulty grades produce a faulty image of one's progress. Self-evidently, it is the learners' productive use of the language that is most compromised.

Despite the aforementioned findings, 73.84% of students state they had no problems during their former English language education, while the 24.71% of the students who did report having experienced some problems took a rather serious and critical stance, whether referring to their own learning or the teachers' teaching. Some of the problems they repeatedly emphasized were:

- insufficient background knowledge or language experience; hence problems with expressing oneself, with communication with others or understanding what the teacher was saying;
  - underdeveloped vocabulary and fear of making mistakes;
  - lack of clarification of the subject matter;
  - communication in class not adjusted to the majority; not all students were included;
    - poor encouragement for developing learning habits (“you won't need this”)
    - too much grammar; too little communication in English;
    - too little grammar; too much communication in Serbian;
    - discussions about irrelevant (off-syllabus) topics;
    - poor quality of teaching; uninterested teacher;

- poor teacher-student communication;
- tests included difficult tasks not formerly practised in class;
- no oral assessment at all.

One look at the very last problem stated (though by a single student – who is, after all, a representative of a whole class, i.e. a generation among many generations of students taught by the same teacher), and one cannot but ponder the quality of teaching in the school in question. Other listed problems also point towards poor work on skills development.

In line with these comments, more than half of the respondents suggested (Question 10) what kind of changes they would gladly introduce in English classes that could improve the quality of teaching in state schools. About one third (32.85%) of the participants in the survey stated there should be more communication with students in English. Apart from that, some would insist on more student-student and student-teacher communication. A number of respondents expressed their need for teacher's help and support in that respect. More practice of the kind of English used in everyday communication would also be very welcome. The students would also favour work in smaller groups and better class management (“more work, less talk” – as one student put it), with all of them being included in activities. More English per week and more innovative approaches to teaching and practical use of the language also belong to improvements the learners (especially from vocational schools) would gladly introduce. A lot of comments point to the need for more English language use in the classroom, though a number of students would appreciate quite the opposite, which obviously depends on their previous mastery of and experience with L2.

In terms of micro-skills, the respondents state there should be more work on vocabulary development, and less focus on grammar (though there were a few who would be happier if they had learned a bit more grammar in their schools). There is an obvious need for more quality work on developing all the macro-skills as well; the only thing that differs, according to these students, is the attention that should be paid to certain skills and types of activities they suggest. We have already emphasized the students' need for better speaking practice in schools. Here, we will also add their proposal for more work on students' own presentations. In the case of reading, some students (mainly, but not only, from vocational schools) would appreciate less read-and-translate work, whereas others (mostly from grammar schools) would appreciate more time spent on reading literary texts. Some would improve the work on developing their listening skill, as well. Not many, but quite a few answers pointed to the need for more practice in the development of their writing skills, especially in the forms of essays and letters.

A lot of respondents agree that schoolwork should be less dependent on the textbook, whereas some more interesting topics and extra-curricular contents should be included. Last but not least, a few said they would be grateful to see more innovative teaching methods and curricular changes. There are also those who would change the assessment criteria and others who would insist on a better teacher-student relationship. There was also a proposal for replacing irresponsible teachers. Some would change all, some would change nothing. Let us end this part of the report on the students' opinions by quoting one particular answer: "If you have a good teacher, there's nothing you should change."

#### 4. Conclusion

Communicative language teaching might be one of the highlights of the Serbian education system, but it does not always seem to be so effective in practice. According to the survey, more than 50% of the students state that their English teachers in secondary schools used Serbian too frequently as a means of communication in class. In other words, the students report their exposure to English as insufficient. In particular, their answers reveal a much greater need for quality work on the development of the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), as well as on genuine interactive communication. "Developing foreign language skills may be occurring in an artificial setting; however, the purpose and objectives of teaching them lead to the real world outside the classroom" (Janković 2010: 63). Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide an encouraging classroom atmosphere and to make sure that mutual work yields positive results.

The students' remarks generally show that they themselves are aware of numerous problems in the current practices of language teaching in Serbia and that assessment does not adequately represent their language proficiency. It is even possible to conclude that the process of assessment is inadequate, since it is not performance-based. Performance-based assessment "typically involves oral production, written production, open-ended performance [...], group performance, and other interactive tasks" (Brown 2004: 10–11), while the responses show that there are few teachers who actually focus on tasks and activities that can help them elicit language pertaining to realistic settings. Both teaching and learning are often accuracy-oriented and there seems to be little room for fluency. Regardless of the fact that communication *is* used in class, it is not frequent or versatile enough and is insufficiently represented in students' grades.

Although the standards of language teaching in Serbian state schools are not so bad at all, it can be concluded that their application is inadequate and that decision-

makers in education should focus on the implementation of standards in schools. Teachers, on their part, should do their best to help learners truly progress to higher levels of achievement in class.

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