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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE OF PSYCHOLOGY: CREATING AN INTEGRATIVE BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHING STUDENTS¹

ABSTRACT: Language acquisition and learning play a special part in any child's cognitive and linguistic development. The younger the children are, the deeper insight into psychology it takes. Academic subject *Foreign language learning at young learners' age* is grounded in psychology and psycholinguistics, as one of the EMI-based² courses within the ELM programme of the Faculty of Education in Belgrade. We investigated, through focus-group interviews, our students' (N=32) experience with psychology and language teaching courses to see how they prepare for work with children. The results confirm that integrative courses largely support their personal and professional growth from academic bilinguals to responsible and caring teachers of young learners.

Key words: young learners, language acquisition, educational psychology, foreign language learning, bilingual education, EMI, academic bilingualism, English language teaching (ELT), English Language Module (ELM).

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² English Medium Instruction – the use of English to teach academic subjects other than English itself in countries where the first language of the majority of the population is not English. (<https://www.education.ox.ac.uk › research-groups › emi>) [Accessed February 2024]

PSIHOLOGIJA JEZIKA I JEZIK PSIHOLOGIJE: STVARANJE INTEGRATIVNOG BILINGVALNOG OKRUŽENJA ZA OBRAZOVANJE STUDENATA

APSTRAKT: Usvajanje i učenje jezika imaju posebnu ulogu u kognitivnom i jezičkom razvoju svakog deteta. Što su deca mlađa, tim je potrebniji dublji uvid u psihologiju. Akademski predmet Učenje stranog jezika na dečijem uzrastu utemeljen je u oblastima psihologije i psiholingvistike, kao jedan u nizu kurseva na engleskom kao jeziku visokoškolske nastave u okviru Modula engleskog jezika Fakulteta za obrazovanje učitelja i vaspitača u Beogradu. Kroz fokus-grupne intervjuue ispitivali smo iskustva studenata (N=32) sa predmetima iz oblasti psihologije i nastave jezika radi uvida koliko ih oni pripremaju za rad sa decom. Rezultati do kojih smo došli potvrđuju da im takvi integrisani kursevi umnogome pomažu da se lično i profesionalno razvijaju od akademskih bilingvalnih govornika do odgovornih i posvećenih vaspitača i učitelja.

Ključne reči: rani uzrast, usvajanje jezika, obrazovna psihologija, učenje stranog jezika, dvojezična nastava, EMI, akademski bilingvizam, nastava engleskog jezika, Modul engleskog jezika.

1. INTRODUCTION

The image of the world is rapidly changing and so are the ways of people's mutual understanding and communication. Thus, there is a growing need for "evolving profiles that value even the most partial competences in and awareness of languages and cultures" (Council of Europe 2023). University students already know that the more languages we speak, the richer we are (Janković et al. 2023: 34; Janković and Buđevac 2023: 52). Aware that early language education for plurilingual competence starts at a young age, they gladly accept new academic challenges in order to become better teachers of future younger generations.

Acquiring new languages can take place in many different ways. Children born into families of mixed ethnic backgrounds often gain knowledge of two languages simultaneously. People who move to new environments receive constant feedback from daily communication with others. University students who have a foreign language as part of their curriculum get a mark at the end of the course.

Is there something in between? Could a pre-service trainee be put in a situation to develop professionally and linguistically at the same time? What if they can master their core curriculum in two languages instead of one and thus experience bilingual education?³ Richards and Schmidt define such situations as

³ Bilingual education is "the use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 54).

additive bilingual education, which is “a form of bilingual education in which the language of instruction is not the mother tongue or home language of the children, and is not intended to replace it”, since the students’ first language is still maintained and supported (Richards & Schmidt 2010: 10–11). At university level, the authors of this paper choose to specifically name it *academic bilingualism*, as the term clearly reflects both the physical and linguistic context in which students acquire professional knowledge and skills.

Whether we are talking about the former simultaneous and successive bilingualism (Richards & Schmidt 2010: 530, 572) or the latter academic bilingualism, it is undoubtedly beneficial to students. In the time of great migrations and interculturalisation, having preschool or primary school teachers who are well trained to think and act in two or more languages must be an asset and a welcoming message for families concerned. Alongside parents, teachers are seen as crucial role models, especially at young learners’ age (Buđevac 2018: 17–18, 189). If they set a good example, the children they educate are much more likely to also develop a positive way of thinking about, or a need for multiple language mastery. Thus, early language education stands good chances of leading towards the development of plurilingual competence in prospect.

2. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AT YOUNG LEARNERS’ AGE

Due to modern social, intellectual and technological advances, the world of education itself features innovative methodological approaches. The role of the teacher has gone far beyond mere knowledge transfer and classroom management. It entails possessing a well-rounded general education, being a connoisseur of essential educational learning theories and keeping abreast of a variety of pedagogical approaches and teaching techniques. By utilising them and developing a deep understanding of their students’ age, aptitude, needs and learning preferences, teachers will be able to provide their learners with numerous opportunities and support that will lead to positive learning outcomes.

Children learn through verbal and physical interaction. The younger the learners are, the deeper insight into developmental and educational psychology it takes. Researchers largely agree (Ormrod 2004: 22) that certain critical periods are of particular importance for children’s general cognitive development and language acquisition. Carroll (as cited by Hackl 2018: 44) identifies four components relevant for foreign language learning: “phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability and associative memory”. When

they are 5 to 10 years old, children are more likely to acquire flawless pronunciation and master various verb tenses and complex syntax (Bialystok 1994a; Bialystok 1994b; Johnson & Newport 1989 in Ormrod 2004: 22).

The critical period is equally important in relation to psychological factors that guide (or hinder) learning, such as motivation, affect (Ormrod 2004: 425), and need for approval: “Many elementary school students have a strong desire to attain the approval of their teacher; at the secondary level, students are more likely to seek the approval of peers” (Juvonen & Weiner 1993; Urdan & Maehr 1995 in Ormrod 2004: 437). Little children are particularly sensitive and easily get emotionally attached to their kindergarten and classroom teachers, who become their important emotional support, both in learning and growing (Buđevac 2018: 16–17, 64). Therefore, the education of future preschool and primary school teachers must be based on a highly specific teaching methodology that takes into consideration various aspects of young learners’ cognitive, psychological and linguistic development and their learning needs and styles. Their education, thus, needs to be based on the integration of their core academic courses, co-construction of tasks and activities, mutual collaboration, reflection and self-evaluation (Janković 2022: 118–120).

3. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHER TRAINING

In order to develop a holistic approach to children, students of the Faculty of Education in Belgrade majoring in either preschool or primary school education undergo a variety of courses which set the foundations for their future work. During the first two years they all attend 6–7 compulsory and 2 elective courses in the areas of psychology, pedagogy, and/or didactics (e.g., Developmental Psychology, General Pedagogy, etc.). In the senior years of study, their core curriculum is based on subject methodologies of all content areas relevant for young learners’ education. There are 6–8 such subjects per year, some in one, some in both semesters (e.g., Mathematics Teaching Methodology I and II), with additional compulsory and elective subjects in psychology and pedagogy. Master’s students have two more obligatory courses and one more elective in the same scientific areas. These subjects are all taught in students’ L1 – Serbian.

Besides these 25+ core courses, pre-service teachers have the Pedagogical-Psychological Practicum (year I), Didactic Practicum (year II) and Methodology

Practicums⁴ (years III and IV), gradually increasing from 2 to 4 to 5+ weeks each year. Prior to their practicums, students spend a lot of time in simulations and practical demonstration work both at the faculty and in pre(schools), guided and supervised by university professors. Such a large number of hours spent in theoretical and practical preparation for and direct work with preschoolers and 7-10-year-olds gives pre-service teachers a much broader and deeper insight into the psychology, cognitive capacities and learning styles of young learners so necessary for a holistic approach to these sensitive age groups.

4. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE MODULE FOR PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION

Foreign language learning is a long-term project that takes years for one to reach proficiency. Teachers who know all the aspects of that long process will be able to set reasonable goals in front of their learners, to guide their motivation, and scaffold their learning. As learning a foreign language (FL) makes an integral part of pre-service teachers' education, it only makes sense that it should be a useful part of their professional self. Alongside (rather than apart from) a one-year general FL course and two more courses of language for specific purposes, a small number of linguistically advanced students may attend part of their core curriculum in English as their L2 after passing a standardised entrance exam. With additional 12 elective courses, i.e. a total of 15 subjects taught in English,⁵ these students have competencies to teach English to young learners if and where needed.

The essence of the duly approved and accredited English Language Module (Pravilnik, 2022) lies in its integrated courses, which make a close bond between the students' core curriculum mastered in Serbian and in English, over the five years of their university education. Additionally, this programme enables students to directly apply their FL knowledge and skills in class activities, drifting away from explicit language learning and diving into implicit and spontaneous language use. As mentioned above, and confirmed by many applied linguists and psychologists, there is an ever-growing need for making classroom learning as similar to natural language acquisition as possible. The English Language Module

⁴ Practicum: a course of study for teachers, doctors, nurses, etc., that involves actually working in the area of study and using the knowledge and skills that have been learned in a school. <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/practicum> [Accessed: December 2023]

⁵ http://www.uf.bg.ac.rs/?page_id=8

(ELM) is based on that objective, especially bearing in mind little children as the main recipients of our instruction (Janković 2010). Our students' EMI-based⁶ education finds its way into preschool groups and primary classrooms in the form of the now largely popular CLIL method (Content and Language Integrated Learning). That is why Music and Physical Education, Art and Educational Technology, Mathematics and Science, besides the core academic subjects, are blended with English classes. Led primarily, but not only, by the Faculty's English language teachers, almost all elective courses in the Module are taught by teams or pairs of experts from different academic and (pre)school content areas.

5. THE LANGUAGE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' EDUCATION

One of the integrated ELM courses is *Foreign language learning at young learners' age*. Students take it in the third year, revising and building on what they have already mastered in Developmental and Educational Psychology in their native language – Serbian, and two English language courses (for general and specific purposes). Collaboratively taught by a professor of Psychology and a professor of ELT Methodology (the authors of this paper), the course is nested in between linguistic and psychological theories and their implications. It offers our students knowledge about native (L1) and foreign/second (L2) language acquisition on the one hand and psychological theories of development and language teaching on the other. Based on English as a medium of instruction (EMI), the lectures and materials, assignments, and the exam itself are all in English.

Creating a bilingual environment for children is a complex process, which relies on numerous competencies and a wealth of teachers' knowledge. Their knowledge of psychology and competencies arising from it are just a part of the whole puzzle, but a very prominent one. It should be clear from the previous sections of the paper why it is so important for each language teacher to be proficient in psychology.

The first and foremost principle that underlies the course *Foreign language learning at young learners' age* is the holistic approach to the child (Forbes & Martin 2004). We do not only prepare future (language) teachers; we prepare

⁶ “English is no longer just the goal of learning, since it has acquired the role of medium of instruction” (Roldán Tapia 2017: 160).

professionals who nurture children's development, assist them in learning, and help them to fulfil their psychological needs, allowing them to feel safe and loved. We prepare self-reflective teachers (Buđevac et al. 2015) who are able to understand children, their way of thinking, and how the way they perceive the world changes over time. We also create a space for future teachers to learn psycholinguistics, i.e., to understand all relevant aspects of communication and its development both in the native and foreign language.

It is very important for foreign language teachers to know how a child acquires his/her own language in the first place, and how the mechanisms of learning a foreign language rely on the native language knowledge, or what crucial differences there are. Although it is difficult to roughly split the course contents into groups of topics – as they logically intertwine, for the reasons of clarity, we shall say there are three general lines of topics: a) Native language acquisition; b) Second vs. foreign language learning; and c) Supporting the child's development by providing adequate scaffolding and continual opportunities for pupils to enrich their knowledge and skills in different languages.

We strive to balance between our students' improvement in language skills and their core contents mastery. Their bilingual education is put in practice through interactive, collaborative tasks and reflections,⁷ as our aim is to offer them a model of teaching easily transferable to the world of young learners. By doing so, we aim to raise the awareness of both university students (explicitly) and their young learners (implicitly) of the power and wealth of knowledge in the modern multilingual world.

As the integration of theoretical and experiential learning is exactly what we propagate while teaching students how to organise an interactive environment for children, we are called to do the same. The research we conducted about the quality of our courses touched upon that aspect of our own teaching as well. We asked the students to reflect upon the usefulness of our psychology courses and the bilingual study programme so that we could implement further improvements if or where necessary, and make our instruction as helpful as possible.

⁷ Outes Jiménez and Ramírez Montes (2017: 48), for instance, recognise six important factors that the teacher needs to ensure for successful work in bilingual education: a) cooperative skills, b) class climate and team spirit, c) critical reflection, d) positive interdependence, e) individual responsibility and f) restructuring into small groups.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aiming to gain insight into the effectiveness of our courses in forming our students' linguistic and professional competencies, we conducted research which encompasses both their academic study and on-site learning and teaching experience. It included the English Language Module students and focused on the elective subject *Foreign language learning at young learners' age*, as well as other psychology courses and EMI-based subjects taught at our faculty. The following sections present the research details and findings.

6.1. Research methods and instruments

Our research is based on a qualitative method as we were interested in our students' opinions about their bilingual learning and teaching experience. The most convenient research instrument for such purposes was a semi-structured focus group interview. It contains 12 questions (Appendix 1) and was conducted online in English via the MS Teams platform used at the Faculty since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The students were asked to share with us their experience and/or expectations regarding the effects of our courses on the development of their knowledge and skills necessary for teaching young learners. Bearing in mind the volume of the collected answers and interview transcripts, the students' answers are grouped around three topical categories.

6.2. Research stages, sample and background

The interview was applied in four separate sessions in the period December 2023 – January 2024, lasting approximately one hour each. The participants in the study (N=32) were 28 female and 4 male respondents, i.e. most of the ELM second-year (14), third-year (5), and fourth-year (5) undergraduates, and (8) Master's students.⁸

Our research focuses on the implementation of the gained psychological knowledge and language skills in the teaching practice or preparations for it. The mentioned Practicums are organised mainly in the second semester. Prior to our

⁸ As the courses become more difficult each year, some students give up the additional EL Module, fail, or take a gap year, especially when the most demanding methodology courses are introduced.

research, only our fifth-year interviewees had undergone the full cycle of practicums, having been fully immersed in teaching activities and conducting entire lessons. Therefore, our younger students based their answers on the learning experience, simulation activities, and many hours of on-site observation of in-service practitioners at work followed up by reflective discussions. Although the second-year students have not yet attended the ELM psychology course, their expectations are considered equally valuable as guidelines for our future course organisation.

The interview questions were derived from our regular teaching practice as the psychology course in English always begins with several questions regarding our students' expectations and learning goals. Similarly, it ends with their reflections on the achieved learning outcomes and level of satisfaction with the knowledge and skills gained. These were partly broadened for the purposes of this study with their general impressions on the bilingual academic education and its effects in (preparations for) teaching.

7. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the volume of the resulting materials, our research findings and discussion are grouped around three topical categories: a) the psychological aspect of the courses; b) the linguistic aspect of the courses; c) the effects of bilingual psychology courses on our students' teaching competencies. Among the 12 interview questions, four pertain to each of the categories.

Since the students' answers were often similar, repetitive, or only confirmations of their colleagues' statements, we shall summarise them, but also accompany them with direct quotations from the interviews. If an answer is lengthy, the most relevant part of it will be presented only. The answers where the respondents offered differing views will be equally represented. For the ease of interpretation, the quoted statements will be preceded with the students' year of study and personal initials (e.g., II/A.M.). If a student made a language mistake while providing an answer, an asterisk will be used in its place.

Question group I – Questions 1, 2, 4, and 10 focus on the importance of psychology courses for teacher training.

Q.1. All respondents agree that learning psychology is important ('very important / essential / crucial / vital') for preschool and primary school teachers, because: 'it helps us to understand * child's development, behaviour, and learning processes / create effective learning environments and address the diverse needs of students /

create proper activities for children / take into consideration children's Zone of Proximal Development / build positive relationships with pupils'; 'it provides insights into * cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of children,' etc. E.g.:

II/D.Š.: *I think [...] it is the most important course next to Didactics and Methodology because I don't think that anyone can properly work with children without understanding exactly how their psychology works in relation to anything that we need to teach them.*

III/M.L.: *[...] We are going to be spending a lot of time of our day with them, maybe even more than their parents will, so I think that it is very important to just know how to be a good role model for those children since they are very young.*

V/M.P.: *We need to be aware of the children's abilities in each period of their life in order to teach them properly in accordance with their cognitive abilities. It is also important for understanding the way children think, which helps us to react to their needs better.*

Q.2. Most students' attitudes related to the comprehensiveness of knowledge acquired at the faculty are positive and reveal additional arguments in favour of the way psychological knowledge fits into it. Some of them state:

III/V.V.: *[...] It connects with other subjects seamlessly, providing a real perspective on teaching and learning. The psychological knowledge binds all of our methodological and pedagogical knowledge into a whole picture by providing us with the principles, foundations, and theories that explain the process of students' learning [...].*

III/D.B.: *If there is anything I have learned through *this three years of studies is that every single subject is connected with each other, so psychology does influence every other subject quite a lot. [...]*

Despite positive impressions about their two compulsory psychology courses (with words of praise for the teacher herself), and the additional elective course in English, several senior students still believe it is not enough for them to feel fully prepared:

IV/K.P.: *I believe that we do not have enough knowledge in the field of child psychology and I think that field is the most important. [...] Developmental Psychology is very helpful, because that knowledge was very useful for our other courses.*

V/M.V.: *After graduating, I really believe that I did not acquire enough knowledge in psychology. The subject of Pedagogical Psychology⁹ is very useful and therefore it should be deepened more, last longer, and more emphasis should be placed on it.*

Q.4. As future kindergarten/classroom teachers, the students appreciate learning about psychology in another language and perceive it ‘as an opportunity to think of the same topics from different perspectives’. They do not see the language only ‘as a tool for communication’, but believe ‘it also influences the way we approach the topics, as it allows us to read different authors, coming from different backgrounds’:

III/V.V.: *It enriches the understanding gained from the Developmental and Pedagogical Psychology courses in Serbian.*

V/M.V.: *The entire course is designed based on a conversation between the teacher and students. It thus contributes to higher quality knowledge, because we are already familiar with the topic, and we are upgrading our knowledge even more.*

Q.10. Students identified the following as psychological topics of particular importance for their teaching careers: ‘adaptation of children to kindergarten and socialisation; verbal and nonverbal communication; motivating children to learn and getting them active; the process of learning our native language; bilingualism and the influence of the mother tongue on language learning’. They would like some more topics to be added to this course in English:

II/K.M.: *I would add teachers’ role because we have to know how to behave with children and to adapt to them.*

III/V.V.: *There’s one topic that I feel is missing, and it’s how to work with different types of personalities among children. We learned in our Serbian psychology classes that there are several basic types of personalities, and I think that it would be a perfect opportunity to learn more about them and how to work with each type.*

IV/K.P.: *I would add some topics about how difficult for young learners *is the process of learning *foreign language and how we should help them to make it a more relaxed process.*

Question group II – Questions 3, 5, 8, and 12 focus on the importance of learning psychology in English as well.

⁹ Pedagogical Psychology is the former name of the Educational Psychology course held in the second year.

Q.3. The students largely agree that learning psychology first in Serbian and then in English is beneficial because: ‘we can fully grasp all terms and meanings’; ‘we already understand the concepts, allowing us to focus on acquiring the specific terms and expanding our vocabulary’; ‘it can enhance language proficiency and broaden access to international resources, research, and perspectives in the field’; ‘because of the environment that we are learning within’, etc. E.g.:

V/M.P.: *We can first learn about the basic principles of children’s psychology in our native tongue, while we can broaden our knowledge through learning it again in another language.*

One senior student thinks differently:

V/A.S.: *I think it is not important if we started learning psychology in English or in Serbian. We did start *learn it in Serbian and then later on, we studied almost the same, but more deeply into psychology, in English. So, I think it does not matter because we can also learn English through psychology if we need to.*

Q.5. Most students agree that the psychology course in English offers knowledge particularly useful for teaching English to young learners, as: ‘there are different ways of language acquisition among young learners’; ‘it’s useful to [...] learn about different theories from different countries all around the world’; ‘we learned about how to deal with potential problems that might occur’, etc.

III/V.V.: *Yes, the psychology course in English equips us, future English language teachers, with communication skills that are valuable when teaching a language. It provides a broader perspective on student behaviour and learning styles, enhancing the effectiveness of methodological conceptualisation of English language classes.*

III/D.B.: *Definitely, for the entire course, not just that we revised what we have learned so far, but also we worked on our pronunciation, we worked on our grammar, we worked on how to teach kids to pronounce certain things, we worked on a lot of stuff that could help us in the future as English teachers.*

IV/M.R.: *We discussed extensively the ways in which children develop, particularly in terms of learning two languages or being bilingual.*

Q.8. Students’ expectations regarding the psychology course in English are/were: ‘to consolidate knowledge on educational psychology [...], improve English language skills and to acquire insights that could be applied in an international educational context’; ‘to talk about [...] how we should work with children that do

not want to learn', etc. Some of them had no expectations at all, but were happy to learn from their Pedagogical Psychology professor again. Others say:

II/M.K.: My expectation is to maybe approach psychology in a different way [...] and to have a better understanding of the psychology and language learning itself.

IV/M.R.: I initially expected the English psychology course to cover the same topics as our Serbian course. However, I think we managed to have discussions on various topics related to child development, particularly in the context of language learning.

Q.12. Asked if they had additional comments related to this course, some students expressed appreciation for not having to do homework, others for the course teachers' dedication and regular helpful feedback, while some said:

IV/M.R.: The most valuable aspect of these classes, in my opinion, was the discussions, [...] as everyone has some kind of experience or knowledge to share about a certain topic.

V/T.A.: I would say that psychology supports methodology and vice versa, so I think that psychology and methodology go hand in hand, and that's why both aspects are very important for future English teachers.

Question group III – Questions 6, 7, 9, and 11 focus on the effects of the bilingual psychology course on our students' teaching competencies.

Q.6. The ELM psychology course is recognised as helpful for the improvement of language competencies necessary for teaching English. Younger students see the opportunity to expand their vocabulary, while their senior colleagues appreciate the exposure to academic English, and opportunities for discussions and written expression, as 'essential skills for effective communication in an English language teaching context'. One student does not find the newly acquired professional terminology very useful for her teaching practice, but others disagree:

V/M.P.: It helped me to understand children's way of thinking and taught me to think about my personal teaching practice, and in what way I will utilise the knowledge I have gained.

V/I.L.: Psychology is important because we will not motivate first graders the same way we are going to do with fourth graders. [...] If they are motivated at the beginning of the lesson, chances are they are going to stay motivated during the whole 45 minutes.

V/T.A.: I do think that my skills improved and that I am more competent to learn about psychology in English. And I also think when it comes to all of us at this course, that we are now able to use proper language in our classroom.

V/I.N.: *I think our proficiency in English is much better because we exercise through speaking and writing all of the homework that we do. Also, the grammar, vocabulary, our competences in working with technology [...], all of these courses helped me choose better the activities that I want to do with kids.*

Q.7. The most important teacher competencies for work with young learners they have managed to develop or are still developing are: ‘to be supportive, understanding, encouraging, and loving’; ‘competent, knowledgeable and considerate’; ‘emotional intelligence’; ‘understanding child development’; ‘collaboration with parents, effective communication, adaptability, and empathy’; ‘the ability to keep discipline in the classroom, [...] and to assess the personality of the student’.

The academic courses that have helped them acquire such skills are: Developmental Psychology, Strategies for Successful Learning, Didactics, Pedagogical Psychology, General Pedagogy; Sociology; Methodology of the Serbian Language and Literature; Methodology of speech development; subjects which are part of the EL Module. They say:

II/K.M.: *We need to have knowledge in order to teach, and then we need to have didactical and psychological knowledge. So we need proper tools for doing proper work.*

V/G.S.: *We also need technological proficiency and, of course, pedagogical knowledge. [...] We need a lot of things in order to be successful as teachers, and [...] throughout those courses and faculty..., I think we actually learned most of them.*

V/T.A.: *We also had lessons in which we were able to show our practical work. We were able to work on materials, [...] to create new materials and to present them. So I think that lessons are very different from one another, and we are able actually to use the language in all those activities.*

V/I.N.: *I think the most important one this year was flexibility [...], like adaptability to the classroom and to the kids that I teach. [...] when I am teaching English in school, ... I found that I planned one thing, and I see that something else might be a lot more effective with them, so I change that a lot. In this course (Evaluation, Assessment and Testing), we went through a lot of ideas and methods that we can use, so that's always what I kind of have on my mind when I change all those things on the spot.*

Q.9. Considering whether psychology knowledge is more practically or theoretically relevant, our respondents almost unanimously conclude:

II/D.Š.: *It is both practical and theoretical. I don't think that we can have one without the other, ... and that we cannot properly function without knowing the theory, but also knowing how to apply it.*

IV/K.P.: [...] *I think that for us, it is the most important to know how to approach children and who *should we turn to if we see that help is needed, because every child is different and special.*

IV/M.R.: *Theoretical aspects involve understanding child developmental stages and behaviour, while practical knowledge is relevant when it comes to planning activities based on this knowledge. [...] Developmental and Pedagogical psychology courses have been particularly helpful in gaining knowledge about child development, while practical application of that knowledge has been significantly shaped by the various methodologies introduced in the fourth year.*

Q.11. Always striving to improve our teaching as well, we asked the students about the quality of our own work and approach to them. The following are some of their answers:

II/M.M.: *I think that all of you are like models to us because we learn a lot from you, and tomorrow when we are teachers we will do some things *similar like you did with us, because we see how much we learned from you, and our students will learn from us in the same way.*

III/J.T.: *As a teacher you are very dedicated, you pay attention to everything that we say, we get the feedback that we need, the information and everything on time, so that we can correct our mistakes. If there is a question, we get feedback immediately, so nobody is confused.*

IV/K.P.: *I think that each professor behaves according to his own beliefs about the right way to treat students.*

V/I.L.: [...] *Your warmth and kindness is a great model because we should always be warm and kind, and make an atmosphere in which students feel free to say..., and not fear that we are going to say that something is dumb or unimportant.*

V/M.V.: *The whole module inspired me to be a better preschool teacher. I am most looking forward to your classes, because we learn a lot through interaction. You help us to have a greater degree of self-confidence when speaking and you give us a lot of advice for our future work.*

The opportunity to put their psychological, pedagogical and methodological knowledge into practice is given to our FL trainees in two methodological practicum courses: Practical Aspects of English Language Teaching I and II. While the former is based on observation, the latter is a real teaching practice test. The mandatory elements for the exam are detailed activity

and lesson plans and materials prepared by the trainee and the Evaluation Form completed by the hosting in-service English teacher upon the student's individually conducted activities and at least one whole lesson.

The feedback we receive from the hosting teachers every year confirms that our students readily face this professional challenge, are well prepared for the lessons assigned by the mentors, and apply adequate teaching methods and approaches to young learners. Therefore, we believe that our psychology course and all other courses held in English provide our students with additional knowledge and skills necessary to teach young learners with understanding, patience, and love, in whatever teaching role and context they may find themselves one day.

8. CONCLUSION

Blending academic instruction with teaching practice is an essential aspect of working with learners of all age groups. Extensive and in-depth knowledge in all areas of psychology that concern children's development and students' education in general is essential for future in-service teachers to feel more confident. By putting integrative bilingual education at university in practice, we aim to increase our students' competencies, offering them a teaching model easily transferable to the world of young learners. Also, while raising their awareness of the power of plurilingualism and the wealth of knowledge in the modern world, we train them to create specific and welcoming surroundings for children to understand and feel that knowing more languages is a gift and joy.

In our research, students of the English Language Module had the opportunity to share their experiences and attitudes related to the effects of our courses on the development of their competencies. The results are completely in line with our established objectives, showing that future teachers recognise the importance of learning psychology, articulating the usefulness of that knowledge in light of their future work with children. Their answers reveal that they are able to reflect on their learning experience from a meta-position, expressing comprehensive understanding of the role of psychological and linguistic knowledge in the process of building teachers' professional identity and competencies. The analysis of the students' answers also sheds light on their extensive and precisely articulated view on the importance of learning within multilingual surroundings, as it benefits not only their foreign language proficiency, but also their intercultural perception of course contents.

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PSIHOLOGIJA JEZIKA I JEZIK PSIHOLOGIJE: STVARANJE INTEGRATIVNOG
BILINGVALNOG OKRUŽENJA ZA OBRAZOVANJE STUDENATA

Sažetak

Usvajanje i učenje jezika imaju posebnu ulogu u kognitivnom i jezičkom razvoju svakog deteta. Što su deca mlađa, tim je potrebniji dublji uvid u oblast obrazovne psihologije. Verbalna i fizička interakcija osnovni su preduslovi dečijeg razvoja. Stoga obrazovanje budućih vaspitača i učitelja treba da bude teren na kome će ne samo učiti, već i lično osetiti svrsishodnost holističkog pristupa detetu. Takve ishode lakše će postići preoblikujući sopstvena teorijska znanja u praktične aktivnosti putem integracije, ko-konstrukcije, interakcije i samorefleksije. To je upravo cilj Modula engleskog jezika Fakulteta za obrazovanje učitelja i vaspitača u Beogradu, zasnovanog na nizu predmeta u kojima su objedinjeni sadržaji matičnih akademskih predmeta i ključnih (pred)školskih predmetnih oblasti, koje mogu da pohađaju male grupe jezički naprednih studenata na engleskom kao jeziku nastave (EMI). Utemeljen u oblastima obrazovne psihologije i psiholingvistike, Učenje stranog jezika na dečijem uzrastu jedan je od predmeta Modula engleskog jezika, koji zajednički drže profesorke Psihologije i Metodike nastave engleskog jezika (autorke ovog rada). U cilju promovisanja akademskog bilingvizma, pored ostalih, i u ovom predmetu rad zasnivamo na interaktivnosti, vodeći računa o ravnoteži između podizanja jezičkih kompetencija naših studenata i njihovog ovladavanja ključnom predmetnom materijom. Na taj način, pokazujući im kako dvojezična integrisana nastava funkcioniše u praksi, studentima predstavljamo model nastave jezika lako primenljiv i na ranom uzrastu, naravno, u okvirima dečijih kognitivnih sposobnosti. Znajući da u vaspitačima i učiteljima deca vide svoje uzore, istovremeno podižemo svest studenata o značaju plurilingvizma i bogatstvu znanja u savremenom svetu. Rezultati našeg istraživanja potvrđuju da pomenuti integrisani kursevi studentima umnogome pomažu da lično i profesionalno napreduju od akademskih bilingvala do odgovornih i posvećenih nastavnika engleskog jezika za rad sa decom ranog uzrasta.

Ključne reči: rani uzrast, usvajanje jezika, obrazovna psihologija, učenje stranog jezika, dvojezična nastava, EMI, akademski bilingvizam, nastava engleskog jezika, Modul engleskog jezika.

APPENDIX 1 – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW WITH THE ELM STUDENTS

1. Do you think learning psychology is important for preschool and primary school teachers? Why?
2. How would you comment on the comprehensiveness of knowledge you acquire during your studies at this faculty, and the way psychological knowledge fits into the whole picture?
3. Is it a good idea to learn psychology first in Serbian and after that in English? Please, explain.
4. From the perspective of a future preschool or primary school teacher, do you think the psychology course in English offers /(can offer)¹⁰ any useful and meaningful knowledge compared with the Developmental and Pedagogical Psychology you learnt in Serbian?
5. From the perspective of a potential English language teacher, do you think the /(a) psychology course in English offers any kind of knowledge particularly useful for teaching English to young learners?
6. Does the /(Can a) psychology course in English help you improve your language competencies necessary for teaching English? Please, explain.
7. Could you list some of the most important teacher competencies for work with young learners, and do you think you have managed to develop those competencies or not? Which subjects at our faculty have helped you the most so far?
8. What were /(are) your expectations from our psychology course in English?
9. Is the psychology knowledge practically or theoretically relevant, or both? Please explain.
10. Could you name some specific topics in our psychology courses that you find the most important? Are there any topics that could be added to these courses to make them better?
11. What about the way we approach students? Do you think we (your professors of the two/three psychology courses and ELM courses) offer a good model of working with students or not? Do you find the way we

¹⁰ The option used depends on the group of interviewees, as the 2nd-year students have not had that course yet.

teach you similar to the way we expect you to teach one day? (For example: are the classes interactive enough?)

12. Do you have any additional comments that you would like to share?

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