



VISOKO GOSPODARSKO UČILIŠTE U KRIŽEVcima

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Developing a mobile and employable graduate through LSP education in Life Sciences

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Purpose

- to provide a comprehensive view of the current situation of foreign language teaching with special reference to the Life Science higher education institutions (HEIs) in Croatia
- to reflect upon the role and value of these languages within the general life science education system
- to make a proposal of possible measures to improve foreign language teaching in the Life Sciences



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Outline

- Role of languages for specific purposes (LSPs) in the development of mobile and employable graduates in life science institutions
- Current state, position and function of LSP at 9 Croatian life science HEIs (universities, polytechnics and colleges delivering agriculture, food technology and forestry courses)
- Evaluation of the questionnaire on LSP
- Conclusion



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Globalisation - the most often mentioned phenomenon at the turn of the millennia

- It affects the whole economy and society, labour market and the tasks of the education system
- HE institutions have to prepare an efficient and successful employee for the labour market
- Successful employability of today's HE graduates depends on how well they are prepared linguistically and interculturally to enter the labour market



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- The first decade of the new millennium - considerable changes in the European higher education
- Establishing European and national frameworks
- Moving towards student-centred, outcomes based learning
- There is a shift from teaching to learning
- from a focus on course input - “what do we want to teach” to course output - “what have the students learned”
“what competences are needed in the world of work”



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The concept of LSP today

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Special Purposes arose as a term in the 1960's.

General English courses frequently did not meet learner or employers wants.

LSP is an umbrella term encapsulating a range of subdivisions:

- Language for Academic Purposes (LAP)
- Language for Business Purposes (LBP)
- Language for Occupational Purposes (LOP)
- Language for Professional Purposes (LPP)



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Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) applied a series of characteristics to resolve arguments about what ESP is.

Absolute Characteristics (3)

- LSP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
- LSP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves
- LSP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre



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Variable Characteristics (5)

- LSP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
- LSP may use a different methodology
- LSP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation.
- LSP is designed for intermediate or advanced students
- Most LSP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems



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Aspects of LSP

- LSP courses should be learner-centred
- Materials play a significant role in LSP teaching
- Course material and teaching methodology should be based on the specific professional or academic needs of learners
- Materials should be authentic, up-to-date and relevant for the students' specializations
- Needs analysis is and always will be an important and fundamental part of ESP (Gatehouse, 2001, Graves, 2000)



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The high rate of unemployment among public university graduates and the competitive marketplace call for **high quality industry-ready graduates.**

What general skills are required by employers?

- language skills
- general and current knowledge
- ability to give presentation to clients
- basic knowledge in ICT
- work exposure/experience



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Foreign language skills expected by employers

- high level of general language proficiency
- high level of vocational language knowledge
- the combination of general and vocational language
- good negotiating skills
- intercultural communication competency
- confidence and initiative in using a foreign language

Results of the empirical research indicate **intermediate level** of LSP knowledge is the most common requirement of employers.



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A Conceptual framework of employability in terms of pluriliteracy (Koo 2006)

8 literacies:

- linguistic proficiency
- communicative literacy
- culture awareness
- content literacy
- sustainable citizenship
- attitudes and mindset
- vocational literacy
- critical literacy



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Linguistic proficiency

Language proficiency in foreign languages is one of the important attributes for student's employability (Kubler and Forbes (2004))

It refers to

- abilities and skills in the use of particular languages
- the ability to apply these in appropriate contexts
- the ability to present sustained and persuasive written and oral arguments cogently and coherently



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Communicative literacy involves

- face-to-face communication
- internet
- iPod and mobile phone
- multimodal and multimedia literacy
- communication literacy



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European Commission stimulates cooperation through well-funded programmes

- to promote the mobility of students and scholars within Europe
- to advance the study of European languages
- to foster university-industry links

Communicative competences and active language skills
- essential tools for mobility and Europe-wide employability



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In the past two decades, tertiary education in Croatia has undergone a period of remarkable change and growth.

Croatian government has set the following objective concerning mobility of students:

1800 university and polytechnic students will study part of their degrees abroad each year by the end of 2020



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Survey

9 HE institutions:

- Faculty of Forestry, University of Zagreb
- Faculty of Agriculture, University of Osijek
- Faculty of Food Technology, University of Osijek
- Department of Agriculture, University of Dubrovnik
- Polytechnic Marko Marulić in Knin
- Polytechnic in Požega
- Polytechnic in Rijeka
- Polytechnic in Slavonski Brod
- Križevci College of Agriculture



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Questionnaire

72 multiple choice and open questions covering

- basic information about teaching staff
- position of LSP within the overall curricula
- syllabus design and materials
- teaching methodology
- assessment criteria
- learning outcomes that develop desired competences
- students' participation in the EU programmes
- teachers' attitudes toward LSP



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Results

- 12 teachers (M 1, F 11)
- Average age: 44
- Work experience in LSP: 5 to 32 years
- Majority of teachers teach English, some teach German, some both English and German
- Lecturers (5), Senior lecturers (5), Assistant (2)
- Degrees: BA (6), MA (4), Ph.D. students (2)



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- All HE institutions offer courses in English and German
Two offer additional courses: Italian, French and Spanish
- Number of LSP contact lessons: 90 to 240
- All institutions participate in EU international programmes
(Erasmus, Tempus)
- English - a dominant language at all HE institutions:
2454 students learn English, 614 German



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- Number of students in a group: 20 to 50
- Groups are formed based on the study course, language background knowledge
- Written and oral exam required
- Not all HE institutions require from their students to pass the LSP exam in order to enroll in next semester
- A huge discrepancy in the number of ECTS: **0 - 6**
- Most LSP teachers expect the knowledge of their students to meet the criteria for B2 level (CEFRL)



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- LSP syllabus is made on the students needs analysis (8)
- LSP syllabus is made in cooperation with subject specialists
- The traditional “staff-centered” and “knowledge-oriented” approach is slowly giving way to student-centred approach
- Case studies are still a relatively rare method in LSP teaching



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Teachers' attitudes toward LSP

All teachers agree that basic objectives of LSP courses in the Life Sciences should focus on:

- mastering basic professional vocabulary
- communication in professional environment
- independent use of scientific papers and other materials
- development of presentation skills
- mastering writing of abstracts and scientific papers
- developing speaking skills related to specific professional area



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- LSP should be taught in all 6 semesters
- The total number of contact lessons inadequate to achieve the objectives of the LSP course
- All 4 skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) are equally important
- Optimal number of students in a group: 10 – 20
- Groups should be formed according to the background language knowledge



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- The starting level of LSP course needs to be (at least close to) B2 for English and B1 for the other languages
- Both adapted and authentic texts should be used
- Students' receptive and productive vocabularies are generally inadequate
- Academic listening presents students with fewer difficulties than writing, speaking and reading



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Most teachers agree that LSP education should be harmonized

- number of contact lessons
- number of ECTS credits
- learning outcomes

Teachers disagree whether the LSP course adequately prepares students for EU programmes (LLL)

- Most of them are not satisfied with the level and intensity of international cooperation
- It is not realistic to expect that a second LSP course will be offered to their students in the near future



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Proposals for language programmes for the Life Sciences

- to further develop the language knowledge and competences which students gained during their studies in secondary education
- to develop LSP courses on the basis of students' linguistic needs
- to integrate language learning and subject matters
- Students need to become aware of the possibility and usefulness of individual language learning during their studies and after graduation
- Evaluation and assessment of LSP course need to be standardised



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Conclusion

Life science graduates should possess:

- high levels of communicative competence in at least 1 - 2 foreign languages
- intercultural competences
- an ability to learn languages in an autonomous way
- LSP courses need to be skill-oriented and learner-centred



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Should we go on with LSP in the Life Sciences?

- All Life Science institutions should offer/require all of their students to study a foreign language
- This requirement should be a condition for the receipt of public funds for education



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