

Students' and graduates' views on ELTE study programmes in the Czech Republic

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The opinion survey aimed at students' and teachers' views is a part of research into the standard of ELTE at universities in the Czech Republic. Apart from the survey, the research also included an analysis of current ELTE study programmes in the Czech Republic.

Sampling and characteristics of the respondents:

150 questionnaires for students and 70 questionnaires for fully qualified practising teachers were distributed, with the return rate of 62 per cent. Both students and teachers were addressed so that significant differences between the opinions of the two groups of respondents could be identified.

The students were third, fourth and fifth year students of two Faculties of Education – Brno and České Budějovice. The teachers were graduates from 10 different Faculties of Arts and Education. Most of them graduated between 1997 and 2001, which was considered important because it indicated relatively recent experience with the study programs.

The students were posed a question concerning their professional plans so as to establish whether the research was investigating the opinions of students who were keen on the teaching profession. The answers were fairly positive. Sixty-eight per cent of the students wanted to become teachers, even if not all of them wanted to teach at primary/secondary schools. Only one person said she never wanted to teach and one person said the study program was so disappointing for her that she changed her mind in the course of her studies.

The graduates were asked if they were thinking of leaving the profession. Nine said yes, 39 no and seven said they thought of doing so sometime. That indicates that also the majority of teachers were satisfied with their job.

There were seven primary school teachers, 44 secondary school teachers and four language school teachers among the graduates.

Methods:

The survey instrument applied in the study was a questionnaire composed of five-point Likert scales. Seventeen most commonly taught courses (three of them being the so-called common core courses – psychology, pedagogy and general didactics) were listed. The respondents were asked how important they considered the courses as parts of ELTE study programmes. They were supposed to choose from five options: very important, important, partly important, unimportant and totally unimportant. The first question, concerning the general importance, was followed by two more specific questions – the respondents were required to evaluate the importance of the courses for their future teaching practice and for their personal growth and development. The students were also asked how satisfied they were with the level of teaching in the particular courses. Moreover, open-response questions were

posed in the end, concerning new courses that should be introduced and any other desirable changes and improvements.

Nine hypotheses were tested, which cannot be presented here in full. The basic presumptions underlying the hypotheses were as follows: the students were expected to prefer practically oriented courses, especially those of practical language, whereas the practising teachers were expected to consider ELT methodology the most important course. Similar presumptions were made by Čáňová (2001), who discussed different expectations of three groups participating in ELTE (i.e. students, University teachers, school teachers).

Results:

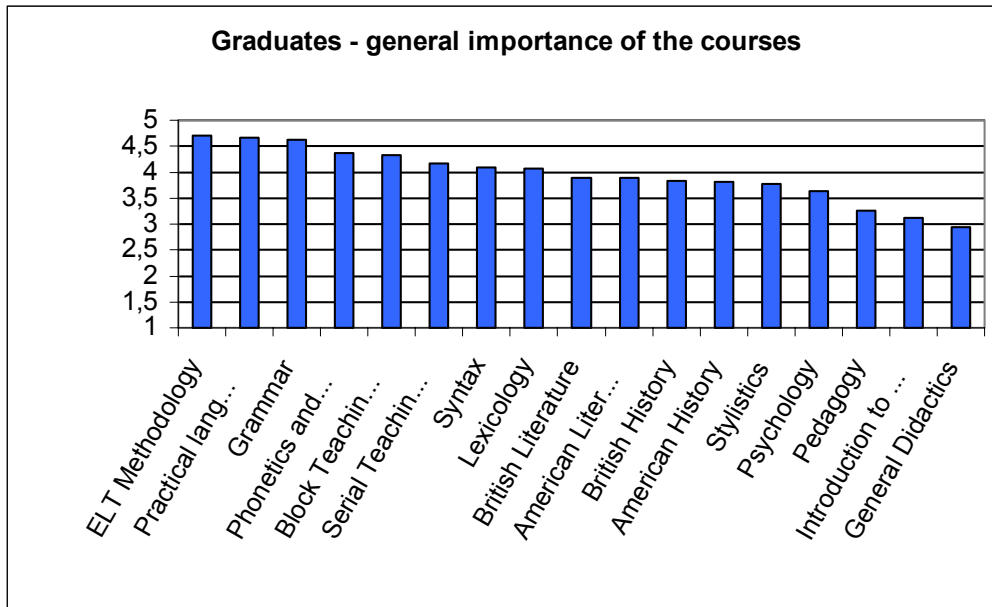


Fig. 1. Graduates – general importance of the courses

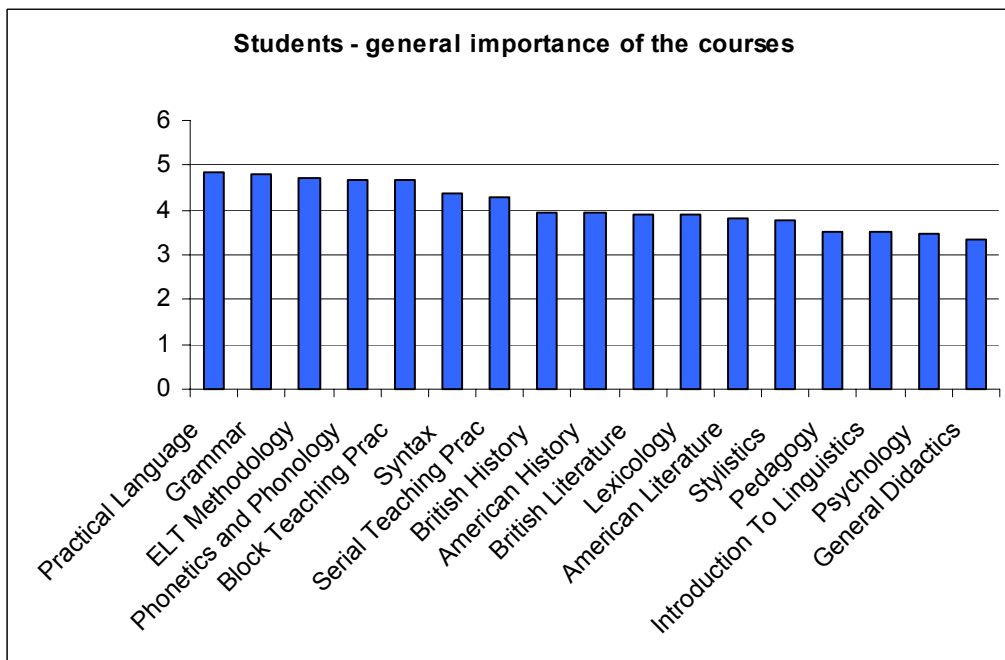


Fig. 2. Students – general importance of the courses

Figures 1 and 2 show the answers of students and teachers to the question focused on the general importance of the particular courses within the structure of the ELTE study programmes under discussion. In the student evaluation, the most important course was *Practical Language*, then *Grammar* and *ELT Methodology*. The least important was *General Didactics* – which is interesting when compared with the high score of *ELT Methodology*. The least important “English” course was the *Introduction to Linguistics*.

For teachers the most important course was *ELT Methodology*. However, the difference between *ELT Methodology* and *Practical Language* was not statistically significant. The courses representing the common core were again considered the least important ones.

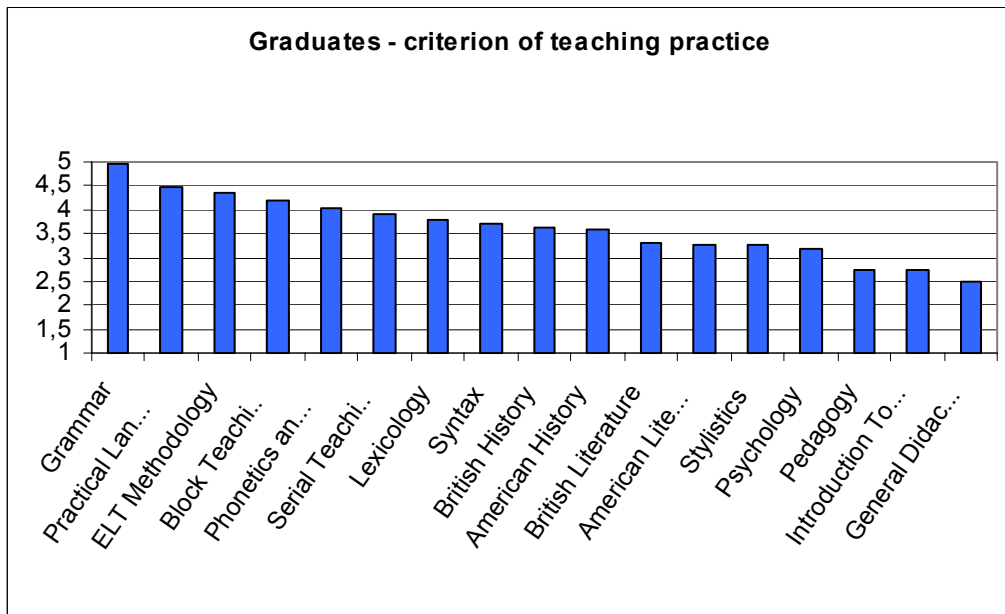


Fig. 3. Graduates – criterion of teaching practice

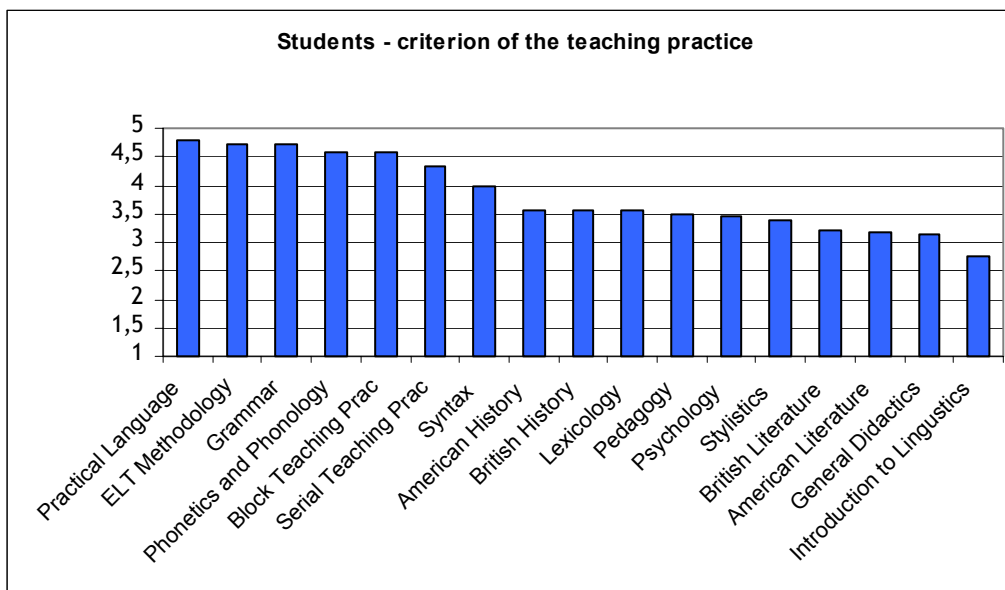


Fig. 4. Students – criterion of the teaching practice

Figures 3 and 4 refer to the evaluation from the point of view of teaching practice. The most interesting result is the extremely high score of *Grammar*, especially in the teachers' evaluation. It was the highest score altogether. It seems to correspond with the traditionally high importance attributed to grammar teaching in this country.

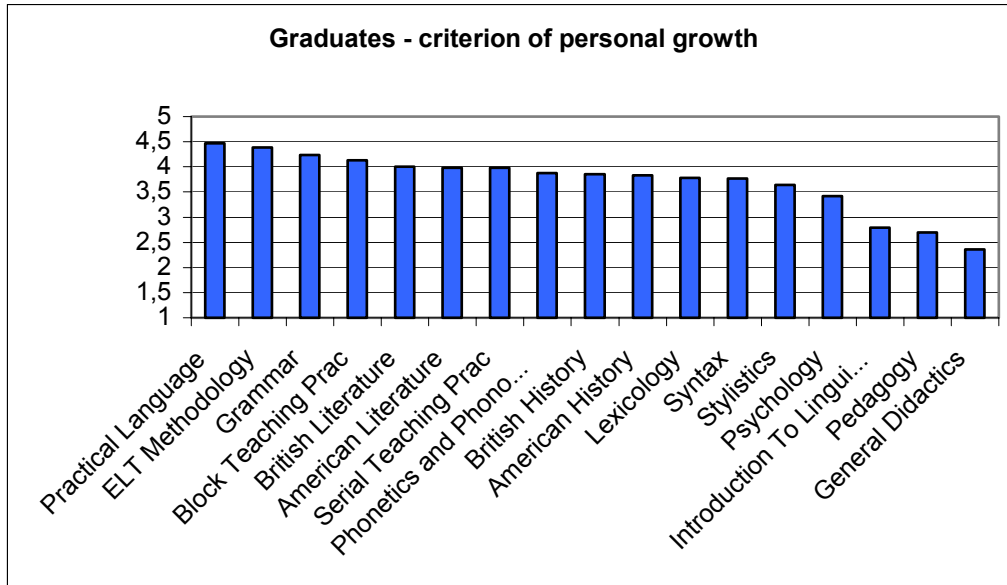


Fig. 5. Graduates – criterion of personal growth

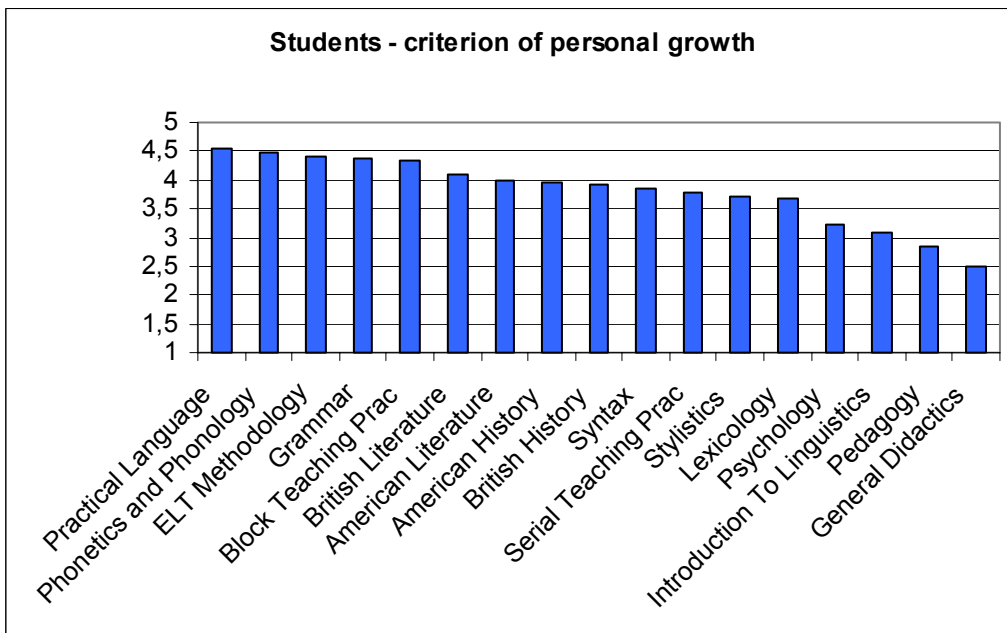


Fig. 6. Students – criterion of personal growth

The criterion of personal growth and development (Figures 5 and 6) revealed an interesting difference between teacher and student views on *Phonetics and Phonology*. For students, *Phonetics and Phonology* came second, whereas for teachers it came eighth. It could be explained by the fact that students feel more challenged by pronunciation; they compare

themselves with their colleagues and University teachers including native speakers, while teachers do not feel challenged by their pupils so much.

Students and teachers were asked to suggest which courses should be taught in the same extent and which should be reduced or increased.

Practical Language, *ELT Methodology* and *Grammar* were the most important courses for both students and teachers. Both groups of respondents were satisfied with the extent of *Grammar*, but they wanted more *Practical Language* (69 per cent of students and 48 per cent of teachers) and *ELT Methodology* (53 per cent of students, 60 per cent of teachers).

It is interesting to compare the results concerning *General Didactics*, where 33 per cent of students and 57 per cent of teachers wanted to reduce the extent and 17 per cent of students and nine per cent of teachers stated the course should become optional.

As mentioned above, the students were from the Faculties of Education in Brno and České Budějovice. In Brno *Practical Language* is taught in seven semesters and the total number of lessons in the course of study is 17. In České Budějovice it is even more – 28 lessons in seven semesters. At other faculties the number of *Practical Language* lessons is between 2 – 34 lessons in two to ten semesters. I suppose students from faculties where *Practical Language* is taught in a smaller extent than in Brno and České Budějovice could be even more radical.

Table 1 presents the answers to the question concerning changes leading to improvements in the study programmes. Only answers concerning the structure of the study programs are included. Most comments concerning the changes are suggestions of more practical language courses, more methodology courses and more optional courses.

Table 1

Suggestion	Number of students	Number of teachers
More emphasis on practical language	11	1
More optional courses	10	2
Reductions in compulsory courses	5	
Study stay in an English speaking country – compulsory	5	5
More emphasis on methodology	5	1
More teaching practice	4	
Historical grammar should be cancelled	4	
Only serial practice	3	
More specialization	2	
Serial practice should be cancelled	1	
One-year teaching practice at schools		1
Total	50	10

Table 2 presents the suggestions of new courses that should be introduced. For the sake of clarity, the courses were divided according to the competences they are supposed to develop.

Table 2

Competence	Course	Number of students	Number of teachers
Communicative	Conversation	10	4
	More practical language	10	1
	Vocabulary, idioms	4	
	Business English	3	1
	Written fluency	2	2
	Spoken fluency	2	
Linguistic	Pragmatics, sociolinguistics	-	1
Intercultural	Culture of English speaking countries	3	5
	More Br. and Am. history	1	1
	Film in ESC	1	
	Relations between cultures	1	
	Media in ESC	1	
	Legal system of ESC	1	
	Britain and EU	1	
Literary	Relations between culture and literature	1	
	Children's literature – compulsory	1	1
	Specialized literary seminars	1	
	Shakespeare	1	
Didactic	Classroom observation	2	
	Coursebooks	2	
	Alternative teaching methods		1
Common core courses	Rhetoric	3	3
	Technology, new media, Internet	4	
	Management		1
	Pupils with SLD	1	2
Other	Translation	2	1
	Intensive language course	2	1
Total		60	24

Most suggestions students and teachers made concerned communicative competence (49 per cent of students' suggestions, 29 per cent of teachers' suggestions).

Students did not suggest any new linguistics courses. Only one suggestion concerning the introduction of a new linguistics course appeared in teachers.

Implications and conclusions

On the whole, the results show that students and graduates are mostly quite satisfied with the 'English' part of their study programmes and they are less satisfied with the courses of the so-called 'common core'. It is very clear when we compare the results of *ELT Methodology* and *General Didactics*. In my opinion, the division into common core and specialized courses should be re-considered and a possibility of integration should be

investigated (see also Lorentzen 1999). The first stage of integration can be realized on the level of common evaluation, which promotes cooperation between teachers who have to prepare the common evaluation instrument. A very inspiring attempt at this type of integration in the study programme has been made at the University in Pardubice.

Most students and teachers suggest that the extent of methodology should be enhanced. It does not necessarily imply a mere increase in the number of methodology lessons per semester. I think the aim (even if it may be far ahead of us) is the inclusion of aspects of methodology into other courses (such as *Grammar, Phonetics and Phonology, Literature, Culture*, etc). Wallace (1994) mentions the coherence of different components of ELTE study programmes as the basic underlying principle of an ELTE study programmes structure. He distinguishes between synchronic coherence (among particular courses within the framework of a semester or academic year) and sequential coherence (among different components of the same course for the whole period of study).

Both students and graduates required more practical language courses. Again, the response does not have to consist in an increase in the number of practical language lessons. A solution can be found in the implementation of an individual approach manifested in the offering of optional practical language courses, which is already the case in some English departments in the Czech Republic. Also, the introduction of a compulsory study stay in an English speaking country is worth considering. It is common at ELTE study programmes in other European countries.

The surprising unpopularity of the Introduction to Linguistics may be considered an impulse for modifications in the conception of the course. The courses should be aimed at future language teachers more directly and a change of the title into *Introduction to Linguistics for Teachers* should be considered.

Generally, both students and graduates preferred courses they considered practical. However, as Trim points out, there will always be a certain tension between the poles of theory and practice 'which has to be resolved in such a way as [...] to provide students with not only professional knowledge and skills, but also theoretical and cultural depth. This depth is necessary if they are to understand unforeseen theoretical developments which affect teaching methodology.' (Trim 1998)

An insufficient orientation at future teachers is, in my opinion, the most obvious drawback of ELTE study programmes in this country. The English part of study programmes is aimed more at educating experts in the field of linguistics or literature than teachers and the common core courses do not distinguish between future language teachers and future teachers of other subjects.

References:

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