

LEARNER AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT PROGRESS MADE IN AN EFL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT COURSE IN A BA ENGLISH PROGRAMME IN HUNGARY

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the factors that affect first-year university English language learners' progress, such as their motivation, their teachers' assessment techniques and the teaching process they underwent. The goal of the research was to find out how the students perceive their progress, and how teachers see their students' improvement in relation to their teaching practices. In order to gather this information, two written retrospective online questionnaire surveys were conducted. The data were analyzed by discerning patterns in the results, and by comparing the answers from the respondents. It was discovered that students were generally satisfied with the elements of the course, their language skills development and with the teaching approaches employed by their teachers, though there were some disparities in certain areas. Teachers had some shared viewpoints, and were in agreement with the students as to the methods of teaching, yet in regards to evaluating students' progress, there were dissimilarities. The results of the research provide beneficial information and guidelines which may assist course designers in modifying parts of the language practice course.

Keywords: perceptions, expectations, assessment, learning, feedback

1 Introduction

The completion of the language practice (LP) course offered in the BA programme through a Department of English at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest is one of the milestones every student in English studies must reach. All of these students must take the required language practice course and pass the filter exam at the end of the first year of studies, in order to continue their path in their chosen discipline. The filter exam aims to assess learners' knowledge of English at the B2+/C1 levels. It is taken after the completion of the two segments of the LP course in the first year, and has two parts: a written part, which predominantly focuses on the use of English, which demonstrates grammar and vocabulary familiarity. The second is an oral part, which is conducted in groups of three. Students must pass both parts of the exam to achieve a passing grade.

In this paper, data was gathered from learners in the above described situation, who have completed the LP course and have taken the proficiency exam in the 2015-16 study year. By having them complete a questionnaire, information on their opinions and reactions to the course and the exam was collected. In addition, those teachers who taught or have taught this course in the past were asked to add their outlooks on the course. The teachers have provided reports on how they teach, what materials they incorporate and how they assess the learners' progress. Taken together,

this paper aims to show how all the information collected paints the picture of the course as the student sees it, and how teachers have an effect on it. The analysis of the two together should provide the reader with enriched view on the state of the LP course at a university in Hungary. Questioning both groups is essential because the reader will learn what factors contribute to learners' perception of success and how teachers can influence these factors. The goal of this research was to find out what facets influence and help learners in the LP course. On the flip side, qualities that hinder their learning and prevent them from achieving a passing grade on the filter exam were explored. There was generally an almost 20% failure rate at the end of the year exam in May 2016. This paper, therefore, explores what the learners need in order to pass, and how the teachers can help in attaining this goal.

The specific research questions that guide the paper are what factors contribute to the performance of first-year English major students in the BA and teacher training programmes at the BA filter exam, how do students see the role of factors influencing their performance at the BA filter exam, and how do Language Practice (LP) teachers see the factors influencing their students' performance? The questions aim to achieve a better understanding of the LP courses, and how the perceptions of both the students and teachers contribute to the students' development.

2 Research background

2.1 Factors affecting learning success

In the classroom, a little world exists, where students sit on one side of a desk and the teacher on the other. Teachers often do not sit, but rather stand as they talk, explain, illustrate, depict, exemplify, and use many other manoeuvres to help the learners understand the material at hand. Because students have varying learning beliefs, the teacher must also adapt his/her methods to appeal to learners who have a favourite method of meeting new information. Strategies, as defined by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) are "special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). The certain behaviour that a learner uses when he/she meets with new facts can be justified by how the learners "perceive and interpret their experiences and ... the way individuals think and reason ... learning strategies are special ways of processing information" (p. 1). O'Malley and Chamot also state that "strategies are learned and may become automatic, and ... may influence learning in a positive manner" (p. 2). Being aware of these facts, the teacher can now adapt his/her methods by offering different routes to the path of understanding.

Numerous research articles have dealt with the question of teaching approaches and learning success. Christison and Krahnke (1986) conducted a study with foreign students in an ESL (English as a second language) setting in the USA. They wanted to find out how these students perceived the language programme they attended, how this programme dealt with the language skills areas, what the students thought of their teachers and how the language was used in educational situations. They found that students were enthusiastic about the courses offered, but raised doubts about some of the areas of skill development. The students pointed out that the teacher's personality was a key aspect in their learning experience. The researchers add that "teachers were positively rated more on their ability to make something comprehensible and the

personality traits supporting a positive affective atmosphere than on their technical abilities” (p. 74). An exceptionally important finding was that students “expressed the opinion that natural interaction with native speakers in class [...] and out of class [...] was the most valuable means of learning a language” (p. 69). According to the researchers, these facts prove that the teachers’ personality and the atmosphere in the classroom are major contributing factors to the success of language learning.

Another researcher, Kuo (2011) reported similar findings in her article on EFL learners in Britain. She found that learners’ interaction with each other was not very helpful in developing and improving their own language skills, especially if those students’ skills were poorer than their own. Kuo pointed out that learners “draw on their own needs (to practice) and wants (to know people of different cultures) when acknowledging what they like about talking to their partner” (p. 284). Further, she noticed that “group dynamics would influence learner performance of classroom interactive tasks and in turn shape learner perception of classroom student–student interaction” (p. 285). Most notably, Kuo attested to the fact that learners “acknowledged that they tended to be more articulate and willing to participate in lessons where the teacher was ‘friendly’ and ‘interested’ and could build up an interactive atmosphere” (p. 286).

These articles together provide the reader with a clear picture of what learners of English need and demand in the classroom. A teacher that can support a relaxed and interactive mood sets the stage for successful learning for the students.

2.2 Students’ perceptions of their learning

The previous paragraphs confirm that the tone set by the teacher has a potent effect on the learning process of students. This awareness was verified by Devlin (2002) and a team of researchers. Together they developed the Perceptions of Learning Environments Questionnaire (PLEQ) to gather information on students’ views on their learning situations. Devlin discovered that although the PLEQ is thorough, it still may not reap extensive enough evidence, especially regarding learners’ own contributions to their learning methods. The solution was to incorporate more detailed questions about learning, and thus gain better insights into the learning processes. Like this study, the PLEQ provides “information about what the teachers are doing, and from the students’ point of view...whether the students believe teachers are transmitting their knowledge” (p. 292). Devlin ascertained that the improved PLEQ (II) that was piloted in her study provided “indirect indications of where students perceive responsibility for their learning lies” (p. 299), and that they do “report a perception of personal responsibility” (p. 299). Devlin concluded that if students were given the opportunity to do so, they would indicate their involvement in their own learning (p. 299). This finding is significant because this study also specifically asks students about their teachers’ performance, and also how the students see their progress in the course and the exam.

2.3 Teaching methodologies

2.3.1 Approaches to teaching grammar and vocabulary use

The LP course offers learners the chance to improve and build on the capabilities they bring with them. When it comes to grammar, students' skills are refined and specialized in the area of academic language use. Regarding vocabulary, the accuracy and range of the words and expressions used are further honed, so that by the end of the course, students can recognize and manipulate the language according to the objective. These are the skills that are tested at the filter exam.

Concerning the teaching of grammar, Ellis (1992) posits two major questions: Should we teach grammar at all, and if we should teach grammar, how should we teach it? Krashen (1982), as quoted in Ellis, has argued that "formal instruction in grammar will not contribute to the development of 'acquired' knowledge, the knowledge needed to participate in authentic communication" (p. 232). In response to this supposition, Ellis maintains that "grammar-teaching does aid L2 acquisition, although not necessarily in the way in which teachers often think it does" and that "formal grammar teaching has a delayed rather than instant effect" (p. 232).

For teachers in the LP course, the idea of teaching grammar is to help the students embrace the structures in a way that they can use them in everyday communication. To achieve this, teachers give learners opportunities to practice the structures in a controlled way, such as using the exercises in the textbook, then proceed to a more communicative situation. Ur (1988), as cited in Ellis (1992), describes the practice of grammar as "a series of exercises [...] whose aim is to cause the learners to *absorb* the structure [...] or to *transfer what they know from short-term to long-term memory*" (p. 233). Ellis continues to explain the practice of grammar, saying that "communicative practice entails various kinds of 'gap' activities which require learners to engage in authentic communication" (p. 232), while at the same time remaining mindful of the rules they used in the process.

This process, as we shall see, is not as easy as it may seem. The study by Evans and Morrison (2011) demonstrates this problem. They set out to examine the learning experiences of students who were studying for their degree in English in Hong Kong. This longitudinal study explored the language learning problems they faced, particularly in the very first term. Evans and Morrison's study revealed that the hurdles students encounter most often are from simply comprehending what is required of them, and adjusting to the specialist vocabulary their professors use in the lessons. They discovered that writing was the most problematic of the skills the students needed to master (p. 391), with academic style, cohesion and grammar listed as the main obstacles. Further, Evans and Morrison found that participants from Chinese-medium schools had the most difficulty in comparison to those students from English-medium schools. Regarding speaking skills, these students lacked the confidence to be able to speak fluently and accurately, and cited the deficiency in vocabulary as the root of their struggle (p. 394). This paper also focuses on first-year students, and few of them come from English-medium schools. They face similar challenges as their peers in other countries.

2.3.2 Approaches to teaching speaking and listening for communicative purposes

Language teachers nowadays have implemented a communicative and interactive approach. Teachers design activities that incorporate the grammar and vocabulary elements required of the students, while maintaining a collaborative feeling among the learners. This notion was studied by Hawkey (2006), who conducted an impact study in Italy which investigated differences in the perceptions of learners and teachers after major educational reforms according to the CEFR (Council of Europe Framework of Reference for Languages (2001)) were introduced. The study aimed to examine the processes of learning and teaching in the PL 2000 (Progetto Lingue 2000) courses. Hawkey found two noteworthy differences: firstly, that “students see grammar exercises as more prominent [...] in their classrooms than do the teachers” (p. 246) and second, that the “students appear to perceive pair work as less prominent” (p. 246), in other words, ranked lower in importance. Regarding pair work, Hawkey ascertained that CLT (communicative language teaching), which is supported in the PL 2000 courses, “motivated teachers to seek pair-work activities relevant to the communicative needs of their students” (p. 248). However, students’ perception of pair work was the opposite: the activities were frequently interrupted or drifted from their original intent (p. 248). Hawkey’s research is useful in that it supports the idea of providing learners with opportunities to develop their speaking skills using pair work and interactive activities. However, the research revealed that teachers were inadequately prepared to balance the practice of language skills with communication activities. As a result of such research, more teachers now construct their planned activities using a much more functional balance of the language skills and communication.

2.4 Motivating students

There are many students who thoroughly enjoy learning a language and do so without too much difficulty. Taking the LP course is a source of both intrinsic (wanting to learn English) motivation and extrinsic (needing the credit) motivation. The lessons are conducted entirely in English, with some groups being taught by a native speaker. The learners are expected to comply with these conventions and speak only in English during the lesson. Hearing the teacher communicate his/her ideas in English motivates the learner to do the same, to react and respond in English. This was shown in Kuo’s (2011) report on EFL students. Kuo stated the teacher was an indispensable source of language contribution and provided useful feedback to the learner. Further, teachers must acknowledge the uniqueness of their students by taking into consideration the social dynamics in the classroom (p. 289). Kuo’s findings are relevant to this paper in that she examined students from different language backgrounds and considered the techniques teachers use during the lessons.

2.5 Teachers’ perceptions of teaching

Just as every student is different and brings with them their own personality and character, so too the teacher adds their own personality to the classroom dynamics. Profiting from successful activities as well as overcoming difficult situations, the teacher learns from each passing year. This phenomenon is validated in Szesztay’s (2004) article. She surveyed school teachers and examined

the ways they know what to do, how they reflect and act all while they are teaching. Using the data she gathered through interviews, she discovered ways in which these teachers reflected during their work, and what influenced their instantaneous decisions. After examining those teachers' insightful accounts of their experiences, Szesztay found that "reflecting in the midst of action is a movement of the mind that may or may not be accompanied by verbal thought" (p. 132). Further, after one teacher reflected on her experience, Szesztay learned that "there are moments when knowing and doing in the classroom are not seamlessly united" (p. 132). Regarding the question as to what precipitates such immediate reflection for teachers, Szesztay discovered that these instances are often brought about when new or unanticipated events happen in the classroom. With regard to the aftermath of such incidences, Szesztay expresses that such responsive teaching methods can have a significant value for all teachers aspiring to improve their perceptive skills. This aspect in turn plays a contributing role in this paper, where the aim is to find out more about how teachers grapple with the difficulties of teaching mixed-level students, and how they motivate their students, while at the same time challenge them and still be sensitive to their needs. Although Szesztay questioned teachers of all school subjects, her findings are applicable and supportive of research for language teachers.

2.6 Assessment for learning

During their education and training, new teachers learn that it is important to remember not only what to teach (the objective) and how to do this (the methodology), but also how to assess the performance of the students after they have carried out the desired task. For the student, receiving feedback plays a central function in the learning process, in particular the quality and timing of such feedback can affect the student-teacher relationship. Giving feedback is a key feature in assessing students' performance and is essential for the learner to learn from the assessment. Irons (2008) points out that teachers must be aware that feedback can and does have an effect on learners' motivation, both intrinsic (wanting to learn) and extrinsic (needing to learn) (p. 2).

Teacher education nowadays involves the knowledge and practice of assessment techniques, which can be either *formative* or *summative*. Formative assessment, as defined in Irons (2008), is "any task or activity that provides feedback for students about their learning....it does not carry a grade that is used in a summative judgment" (p. 7). Teachers accomplish this by using formative feedback, which is "any information, process or activity which affords or accelerates student learning based on comments relating to either formative assessment of summative assessment" (Irons, 2008, p. 7). Taken together, they are a strong and potentially rewarding tool for students.

Summative assessment, on the other hand, is defined by Black & William (1998), (as cited in Chappius, 2015) as a form of assessment that is "used solely to make a judgment about level of competence or achievement" (p. 5) and often "takes the form of a symbol letter grade or number" (p. 6). At the programme level, for example, summative assessment is useful for determining whether the student has met a standard or a certain level of knowledge. However, in the classroom in general, summative assessment does little to help learners understand where they made the

mistake, what the options for improvement are and how they can go about learning from these mistakes. These latter points are the essential idea behind formative assessment.

One valuable tool that is becoming more popular is encouraging learners to assess their own work as well as that of their peers. Student self-assessment is an essential component in self-regulated learning, where the learner has the possibility to use his/her own motivation and strategic efforts to achieve an identifiable goal. According to O'Malley and Pierce (1996), self-assessment "promotes direct involvement in learning and the integration of cognitive abilities with motivation and attitude toward learning" (p. 5). They carry on to say that such students "collaborate with other students in exchanging ideas, eliciting assistance when needed, and providing support to their peers" as well as "construct meaning, revise their understandings and share meaning with others" (p. 5). Finally, "learners monitor their own performance and evaluate their progress and accomplishments" (p. 5). Such a convention, however, necessitates more effort on the part of the teacher. In addition, the changing standards of student learning and teaching mean that teachers must understand the reasons for these new parameters and above all, how to link assessment with instruction (p. 6).

3 Research Design and method

The research questions guiding the study were:

- (1) What factors contribute to the performance of first-year English major students in the BA and teacher training programmes at the BA filter exam?
- (2) How do students see the role of factors influencing their performance at the BA filter exam?
- (3) How do Language Practice (LP) teachers see the factors influencing their students' performance?

In order to answer these questions, a questionnaire survey was conducted with first-year students and their teachers in the LP course.

3.1 The participants

3.1.1 The students

The questionnaire was addressed to all students that had completed both segments of the LP course and had taken the subsequent language proficiency filter exam in the 2015-16 study year. Ninety-two of the 362 students to whom the request was addressed responded.

The age distribution of the students shows a clear pattern, with most (87%) being between the ages of 19 and 21. Students outside of this range are very few, with five students aged 22, and only one student each in an atypical age group (less than 19 and over 23). The majority of the students (86%) were female. Nearly all of the students who answered this questionnaire were either BA English major students or teacher trainee students. The remaining 4% were BA in other languages, such as Chinese or Italian, or were studying in an English minor programme. Regarding their native language, 91% of participants were native speakers of Hungarian, while 5% were Chinese, and 2% were Russian speakers and 1% each were Turkish and French. A large number

of students (23%) have been studying English for 10 years; at the same time, there was a more even distribution of students who have studied for 9, 11 and 13 years (10-11% in each). Any longer or shorter study time than these were more seldom, with less than 5% in each year group. Ninety percent of students took the Hungarian Advanced School Leaving exam, while the rest took other types of exams, such as IELTS or their country's state exam.

As to why the students chose a particular class for the course, a clear division between two choices is obvious: most chose their class because the scheduled time was suitable (54%), with having heard positive things about the instructor (41%) coming in a close second place. The remaining options –thinking it might be easy and wanting to be with friends, though also selected, occupy a mere 4% together. Concerning the ambitions of the students partaking in the course, 76% stated that they wish to improve their *vocabulary*, followed by improving their *grammar* with 69%. Third place is *pronunciation* with 40% and *academic writing* with 27%. Among some of the other submissions are *speaking skills* and *fluency* which encapsulate 6% together (see Figure 1 below).

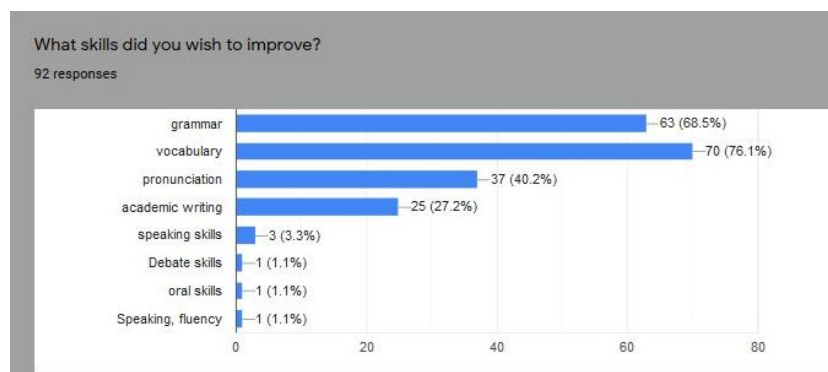


Figure 1. Students' demands at the start of the course. The order of items reflects the order of the questions

3.1.2 The teachers

There were 12 teachers who taught this course in the 2015-16 study year. However, the questionnaire was sent to an additional three others who had taught it in the past, and not necessarily in the past year. Their experience and expertise in teaching LP continue to have value for the purposes of this paper. Of these 15 teachers, 10 responded to the form. Half of them have been teaching it for about 10 years, two for about 20 years, and one each for three, eight and 15 years.

3.2 Designing and administering the questionnaires

As mentioned earlier, this paper is a description of qualitative data gathered through a questionnaire. *Multiple choice* and *check-box* questions were employed to save time, and also to make the results easier to analyze. Sometimes it was unavoidable to ask *open-ended questions*, as they often pertained to suggestions and ideas from the respondents directly about very specific

issues. With reference to *operationalization*, *yes/no* and *check-box* questions were also added, relating to specific elements of the assessment methods of the course. This included the methods of feedback from the teacher section as well. Specific response options were provided, but space to add other ideas were included too (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 246). Concerning *survey bias*, opposing options were incorporated, so that the respondent can provide an answer that is not predisposed to a preferred response.

Once the questionnaires were complete, an expert in qualitative research established *face and content validity*. The expert verified that the questions in both questionnaires were easy to understand, precisely worded, adequate for the purpose, and reflected the underlying concept to be measured (Bell, 2010, p. 120).

After all the questions were composed and organized, the questionnaires were piloted. Students who had taken the LP course in the 2014-15 study year were invited to take part. All the participating piloting subjects had passed the filter exam. The participants completed the questionnaire and offered their feedback via e-mail. Some of the questions were rephrased and sections and sub-sections were added to provide a clear overview of the survey.

3.3 The questionnaires in detail

3.3.1 Questionnaire for the students

In order to look at learner perceptions in a language learning context, a questionnaire was designed that aimed to not only outline the straightforward details of the students, but also to provide the reader with the principal information about what the students learned, how they learned it and their perceived results of this learning process (see Appendix A).

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first provided the framework for the study. It included information about the course, their teacher and the forms of assessment in the course. The second part sought to garner more in-depth information about the learners' opinions on the course, their teacher and the exam. Participants were also asked about the ways they were motivated, evaluated, on what basis marks were given, and about ways their teacher gave them feedback in the course. In addition, the learners were asked to offer suggestions for improvement on elements of the course, the teaching strategies used by their teacher and also the evaluation techniques that they think would be useful and beneficial for them. Since the course is closely tied with the filter exam, it was important that their views on the exam were examined as well. First, the questionnaire asked whether the LP course helped them to prepare for the exam, and how well they were prepared when they sat for it. Further, some questions were put forward to find out whether the exam accurately represented their knowledge of English, and their perception on how precisely the exam demonstrated their understanding.

3.3.2 Questionnaire for the teachers

Much of the success gained in the course is thanks to not only the conscientiousness of the students, but also the hard work of the teachers who teach them. The paper seeks to find out more about how the teachers approach the course, what kinds of practice and tasks they provide their students and the forms and methods of feedback they offer.

First, general details regarding the course was sought, what the teacher thinks the aims of the course should be, and whether the book, Michael Vince *Language Practice for Advanced* that is specified in the course description, is adequate for this purpose. Next, the teachers' teaching and assessment methods, the kinds of exercises they present their students, how they keep track of their students' progress, and on what basis they award marks were investigated. Seeing as how the course generally entails grammar and vocabulary, questions were asked about the equipment and supplementary materials they use to achieve their objectives.

In the final section of the questionnaire the teachers' own perceptions about their work was examined, including questions about their expectations about themselves and their students, and also features of their teaching that they believe brought about success in the learning process of their students (see Appendix B).

3.4 Data collection and methods of content analysis

The questionnaire in this study was a written retrospective online feedback form, as the participating students and teachers have already attained the experience in question, and it was the easiest to reach all 362 students and 15 teachers. Data gathered with such a questionnaire produces qualitative research results, which in this case, can best be analyzed using grounded theory, which consists of "systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). After a thorough examination of the information, certain repeated elements began occurring, and so a pattern emerged. These patterns are then further grouped and categorized. As more data is gathered and scrutinized, these patterns then form a concept, which in turn will contribute to formulating a theory. The theory that this paper endeavors to establish will help the reader understand the learning process the student undergoes, starting from the learning setting and the skills they bring with them to the classroom.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Student questionnaires – key information gathered

Many of the answers presented themselves in an observable pattern. However, the scope of the article does not allow for every piece of data to be discussed. Only information that is most relevant and may contribute to discussing issues and improvements to the LP course will be presented.

4.1.1 Their teacher

This part details the students' opinions about their teacher, and the qualities the students feel they possess. The top three features that were checked were *prepared*, *patient* and *understanding*, each having over 70%. Secondly, other features included *encouraging*, *punctual* and *organized*, each with over 50%, and thirdly being *practical* (47%). Other opinions contain *demanding*, *wasteful with time and resources* and *dominant* with between 10% and 20%. Some added other features (7%) include being *creative*, *easy to follow*, *funny*, *boring*, *helpful* and *supportive*.

Some students pointed out that their teacher was somewhat *demanding*, and although this feature was included as an aid against bias, in that it was meant as a negative quality, one student insisted that he meant it in a positive sense. Two others agreed. *Demanding* can mean that the student finds the teacher's requests titanic in nature, and feels that the teacher is hard to satisfy. The student in this case believed that demanding means rigorous and strict, where the teacher demands attention, effort and hard work from the student. These attributes of the student lead him/her to success in learning the material at hand, and that not involving the student in the learning process with the required amount of focus and concentration will inevitably lead to failure on the part of the student, and in some way, the teacher as well.

4.1.2 Tests and assessment

Seventy-five percent of students stated that test writing was an important component in the course, and that 98% had in-class tests; 97% of which were written in nature, 32% were oral and 12% was listening comprehension. Regarding the question of homework, over 60% of students said that they had marked homework tasks. Grades in the course were overwhelmingly awarded on the basis of *tests and quizzes* (92%), with *effort and participation* and *homework assignments* coming in second (66% and 57% respectively). Forty percent also checked *attendance and punctuality* as contributing factors in their grades, and one student stipulated *presentations* as an element as well.

When it comes to assessing learners' progress in a course, the most popular method is usually in the form of a test. Although some students maintained that they were not required to write tests, it is an inescapable component in education. In fact, the LP course offers students the opportunity to develop good exam taking skills, which includes working on their own, reviewing what they have done, and using reference tools. LP teachers are encouraging exactly those attributes that leads to autonomous learning (Harmer, 2015, p. 421).

4.1.3 Feedback methods from the teacher

With regards to receiving feedback for their performance, students said that 86% of the feedback was *oral*, with *gestures* (72%) and *written evaluation* (35%). One percent said there was not any feedback. Students claim that feedback was given *often* (41%), *all the time* (32%), and *sometimes* (21%). Infrequent cases showed that feedback was *rarely* (4%) or *never* (2%) given.

For the teacher, the definition of feedback includes such features as helpful information, such as corrections, though it can also mean a form of praise for a task well done. In any case, the purpose of feedback is to give the learners information and observations about his/her performance that will help them. Correcting mistakes, for example, is no easy task for the teacher. The timing, the method and the item in question all have to be considered, and usually all in a split second. As this issue is explored in this paper, it is definitely useful for the teachers to inform themselves of their teaching behaviour (Harmer, 2015, p. 158).

4.2 Learner perceptions

This section of the questionnaire aimed to gather information about the learners' opinions and the way they see their learning process and success, or lack thereof. First, they were asked about their expectations of the LP course, and what skills they expected to improve by taking this course. Eighty-nine percent said that they expected to improve their *speaking and fluency skills*, with *listening*, *reading* and *writing* following (38%, 29% and 25%). Other expectations, such as *improvement in vocabulary and grammar* made up nearly 10%.

It is interesting to note that these data present a somewhat contradictory interpretation: when learners were asked what they *wished* to improve in taking the course, the majority stated that grammar and vocabulary were at the top of the list, with pronunciation in third place, and only two students indicated speaking skills. However, here they seem to *expect* the opposite. It appears that their perceptions of their skills that are weakest were mainly grammar and vocabulary, and they feel they needed the most improvement in them. On the other hand, they also expected to develop their speaking and fluency skills simultaneously.

Then the participants were asked about specific ways they had benefitted from taking the course. By far, the two most popular choices were *increased vocabulary skills* and *better grammar* (67% and 61%). Close second places are *I can communicate better with others*, *better pronunciation* and *speaking in longer sentences fluently* (48%, 44% and 39%). *Improved listening skills* and *writing skills* rounded out the table (16% and 11%). Yet there were two learners who flatly stated that they had learned nothing. This phenomenon is further attested by the responses to the question of improving as much as they had hoped. Forty-five percent of learners said that they had improved *somewhat*, while only 26% said they had improved *very much*. Some learners stated that they had improved just *a little* (19%) or *not at all* (11%). An additional question regarding whether students had the chance to develop their English as they had hoped also provides interesting results. Forty-four percent said they developed their language skills *quite a bit*, while a much lower 20% declared *absolutely*. Thirty-two percent showed some doubt with their answer *somewhat*, and 5% indicated that they felt that they had *not developed at all*.

In retrospect, a pattern is emerging. First, students wished to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills, but expected speaking and fluency skills enhancement in the course. After finishing the course, students stated that the main benefits they gained were improvement in grammar and vocabulary and that speaking confidence is a close second place. From this revelation, it can be asserted that students' perceptions of their skills *before* taking the course in

comparison to the time after finishing the course, are fairly level, in that they managed to achieve what they had anticipated.

In the space given, students volunteered some thoughts as to what they deemed useful in the LP course. Quite a large number of students (41%) claimed that *oral exercises*, including presentations, discussions and pair work, comprised the most useful part of the course. Second place (24%) is the amount of *grammar practice* that was provided to them. Other elements, such as *vocabulary practice* (12%), *listening comprehension* (6%), *writing* (5%) and *reading comprehension* (2%) were also mentioned, with some students simply stating that the amount of *practice* of all of these in general was the most important to them.

Concerning not useful aspects of the course, 13% of students chose not to respond to this question at all. In contrast to the information in the preceding paragraphs, some learners stipulated that some of the same items from above were not useful, such as written homework, including course book use and grammar exercises, confirmed by 23% of respondents who actually responded. Despite the previous question, a further 21% here claimed that every feature of the course was useful. Fourteen percent supported that speaking, including small talk and listening, were not useful for them. They claimed that expressing personal opinions and group work were ‘irrelevant’ to their learning. Eight percent of respondents disapproved of the use of video, music and songs in the lessons. In spite of this opinion, some of them also simultaneously expressed their appreciation for the pleasant distraction it caused in the lesson. Five percent claimed that grammar and vocabulary practice was unnecessary, as they already knew most of the material offered in the book. The use of games and of presentations were each rejected by 4% of the respondents. These students stated that games were ‘childish’ and that although they were ‘necessary and fun,’ they were not useful. Regarding presentations, some students said that it was already a component of another course, and therefore was impractical here.

With regard to time and effort requirements on the part of the students, there were some surprising results. It is noteworthy to see that two-thirds of the students claimed that *some* and *not so much effort* was necessary for them to complete the course. This appears to be somewhat peculiar, as it would appear that most students felt that a minimal effort was sufficient. This picture is further exposed in the next question, where the largest number of respondents said that they spent *less time* on this course compared with their other courses. This claim was followed by the two answers *just as much* and *a little more*, which together seem to indicate that the course did not prove to be much of a challenge to them.

From the students’ point of view, however, there were data presented in the survey which may shed some light on the phenomenon shown above. In question 31, which asked about hindrances to success in the LP course, over half the students indicated that they had *too much other coursework*, which is a likely possibility. Second place is the space given to *other* options, which included statements such as being *too lazy*, or *too personally unmotivated* to do better than was necessary. One student wrote that *frequent illness* was to blame and another blamed the *group members*. The picture is now much clearer: students did indeed spend less time and effort on this course, but it is evident that it was not only their doing – many had extenuating circumstances that led to their disappointment.

Regarding motivation in the course, more than half the students state they simply *wanted to learn more English*, thereby showing intrinsic motivation. Following this group is the next largest group, that of *wanting to pass the filter exam*, which in this case is extrinsic motivation. Although the course is not specifically advertised as an exam course, but rather as a course designed to provide the learner with ample opportunity to observe and produce as much high-level language as possible, the inevitable consequence afterwards is the triumph at the filter exam. Without credit in the exam, the learner cannot proceed to many second-year courses. The LP course, therefore, is a preparatory period that is compulsory for students at this university. That is an extrinsically motivating factor. Other examples of intrinsic motivation are *wanting the highest marks*, and *wanting the teacher's feedback* for their performance, each chosen with 8%.

Concerning the teachers' motivating methods in the classroom, the largest group made it clear that the *pleasant atmosphere the teacher created* in the classroom was the most inspiring aspect for them. Second place selections were the *opportunities to earn marks*, and *allowed to improve a disappointing mark*. It is apparent that learners were ambitious in their learning if they had the necessary chances to achieve their goals of fulfillment.

As discussed earlier, the teacher plays a central role in the classroom, and is a principal motivating factor. Over 80% of respondents confirmed this fact. It was clear that the *atmosphere* that the teacher created and nurtured had the ultimate effect on learner success. Another important influence was the amount of *positive feedback* the teacher gave. To sum up, the encouragement and support the teacher showed the learners were also leading factors in learner success.

Teachers were not the only source of motivation, however. After looking at the comments made by learners about how group members motivated or restrained their performance, some thought-provoking truths emerged: the atmosphere was accepting and friendly, their mates were talkative and supportive, their group members didn't laugh when they made a mistake, spoke English better than they did, and gave them feedback. All of these sincerities were evidence for teachers' efforts in establishing a comfortable, welcoming and empathetic learning environment.

Regarding the filter exam, students were asked how well they thought they *would perform* after completing the LP course. Students were not very optimistic with the prospect of achieving high marks on the exam. More than half opted for the conservative estimate of performing *moderately well*, as seen in Figure 10 in Appendix B.

Twenty-three percent, in comparison, were more enthusiastic in this respect. This could be a result of hard work on their part, or over-confidence. In contrast, three percent said they would put in a *terrible* performance, which could be an honest confession that they either did not dedicate enough time and effort as they should have, or that they were simply over-pessimistic in their view. In variance to the above information, the students were asked how they *actually* performed. The numbers were surprisingly similar. The most significant difference was that the number of students who thought they would perform *moderately well* actually decreased (58% to 48%), and that those who thought they would perform *very well* increased (from 23% to 29%). This could be due to the few students performing better than they had hoped, with one exception performing worse. These students said they had worked very hard and put forth their best effort.

When asked about the best ways to prepare for the exam, the following information was collected. An overwhelming 85% of students asserted that *practicing from the book* was the best way to prepare for the exam. Other significant responses were *practice with others in a group* (63%). The results are illustrated in Figure 2 below:

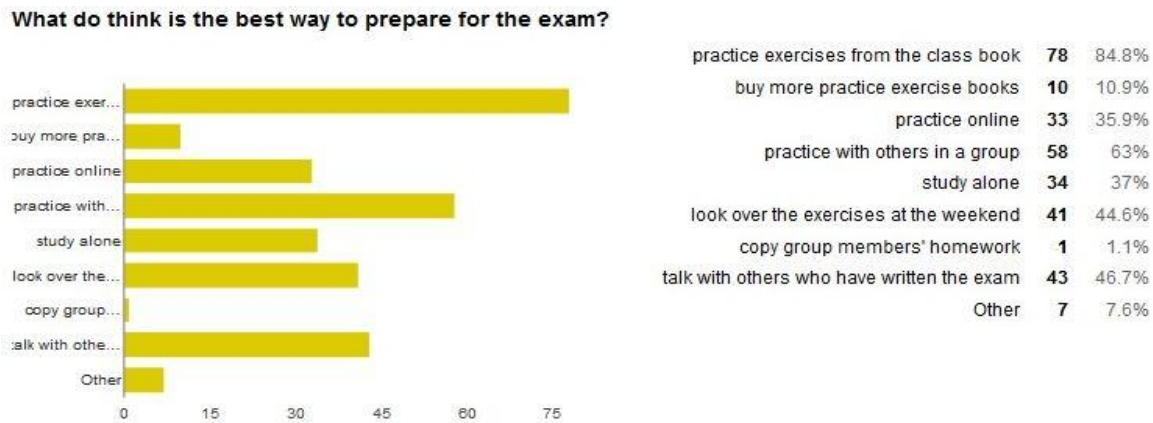


Figure 2. Students' opinions on the best ways to prepare for the exam. The numbers in bold indicate the number of students who selected that answer, and on the right are the percentages of the total

Another question asked the student specifically how the course prepared them for the filter exam. The vast majority of the students (77%) declared that the course helped explicitly by familiarizing them with the question types to be found on the exam. Second place (62%) was that the course helped them to understand what will be asked of them. Third place was a near draw between three features: allowed to ask all questions in the classroom, opportunity to answer those questions and pointing out all the exceptions to the rules (44%, 44% and 40%). The final most significant feature with 54% was the amount of practice they were given. This feature was mentioned in the benefits section of the paper, where learners expressed their delight at having the chance to practice plentifully.

About learners' perceptions with regard to assessment in the course, the question was posed as to what the learner believes to be the best way to judge their progress in the course. The results can be seen in Figure 3 below.

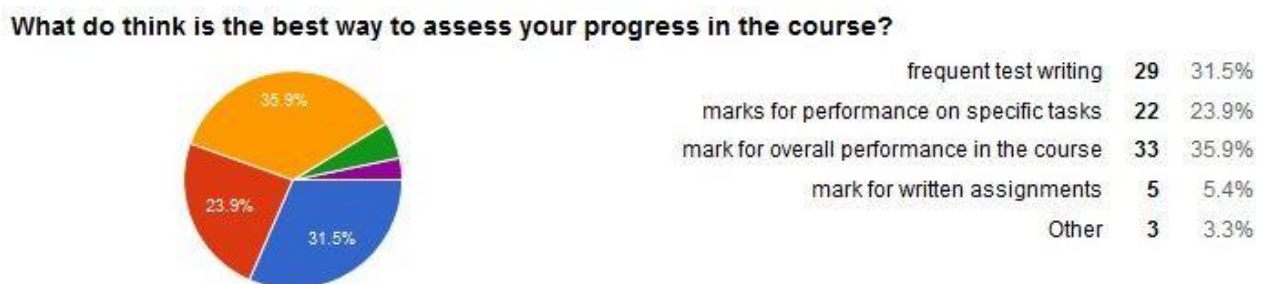


Figure 3. Student perceptions of evaluation for performance in the course. The numbers in bold indicate the number of students who selected that answer, and on the right are the percentages of the total

For *other*, two students wrote that oral feedback in front of the group was a more effective way of assessing learners' progress than simply receiving a mark on a task. Since 36% of the learners checked that overall performance was the most definitive means of marking them, it is likely owing to the probability that they felt that they can compensate for their weaknesses if their general accomplishments are taken into account, and not just a single component.

Concerning self and peer assessment methods, over 70% of students said they had the chance to assess themselves, and nearly 60% assessed their peers. When it came to assessment in general, nearly 60% of learners said that assessment did not cause any anxiety in the classroom, and that evaluation by the teacher was a motivating factor (80%). With all of these particulars taken together, 92% of the students surveyed proclaimed that the mark they had received for the course was appropriate.

With regard to the methods of feedback from the teacher, students were asked about the most helpful feature in their teacher's feedback. Correcting mistakes came out as the most understandable item (45%), closely followed by encouragement to perform more (30%). Pointing out mistakes without making corrections was chosen with 14%. It appears from this latter detail that learners wanted to know where they made their mistakes, but at the same time, they seemed to know or sense where they went wrong, but wanted to find the source of the error on their own, without much help from the teacher.

Subsequently, students were asked about the most encouraging method of feedback their teacher used. The largest group (36%) stated that one-to-one oral feedback was the most encouraging, with 23% each for test results and group oral feedback. Nineteen percent insisted on written comments on an assignment. The last choice was validated because some students stressed the need for seeing where the errors occurred and their corresponding corrections. These students praised this method as being more 'personal and eternal' because the teacher not only corrected them, but also provided valuable positive feedback for their work.

4.3 Teachers' perceptions

The following portion of this paper details the teachers' point of view in selected areas. These areas are the most relevant to teaching and have a definitive influence on learner success.

Regarding the perceived aims of this course, seven teachers stated that the predominant goal of such a course was to *develop and improve* the students' language competence and proficiency. The remaining three teachers indicated that the course provided an opportunity to address problems and gaps in students' understanding and provided practice in all areas of language knowledge. Four teachers also specifically pointed out that the course prepared students for the language proficiency exam, in addition to the other points.

When teachers were asked about how they motivated their students, they had some fascinating philosophies. Three teachers emphasized that they chose topics that captured their students' attention and talked about issues that interested the students. By showing a genuine interest in them, teachers were pleased to see that they often asked questions that led to thought-

provoking discussions. Four other teachers stated that they offered many interactive communicative exercises in the structure of discussions to ensure that everyone was 'involved' at all times. Two teachers expressed that game-type activities, particularly for grammar and vocabulary practice, were especially effective. In addition, a simple prompt in the form of a picture, short video, a story or riddle or puzzle worked well in stimulating animated conversations.

Concerning the teachers' assessment methods, six teachers said they gave regular grammar and vocabulary tests, as seen in Figure 6 below. Additional means of assessment included essay writing, and oral tasks such as presentations, debates, and informal conversation. One teacher added a portfolio that was assigned to students to be submitted. Most of the respondents also stated that effort and participation of the students deserved acknowledgement as well, and that the learners' preparedness did not go unnoticed either.

Some teachers pointed out that the use of tests constituted only a portion of the final grade; the rest stemmed from the learners' overall performance in the lesson. The tests were marked together, allowing self and peer evaluation. All of these elements combined represented the final grade of the learner.

Regarding the question about the forms of feedback teachers gave, 80% said they gave oral feedback, and 70% responded with nods and gestures. Supplementary manners of feedback, such as class oral feedback and one-to-one conversations were provided by 30% of the teachers.

Concerning the expectations teachers had of themselves, most teachers reported trying to meet the needs of the students. One teacher achieved this by having the learners fill out a questionnaire and conducted class discussions early in the semester in order to get a better idea of their language level, and their strengths and weaknesses. Another teacher stated that motivation was a major factor in getting the learner to focus and learn. Influences on motivation included being 'dynamic, entertaining and useful,' and that the teachers aimed to achieve a balanced course. This is in accord with the literature about teachers striving to provide a communicative and interactive learning framework, while simultaneously providing enough language skills development.

The last question in the survey invited the teachers to share their opinion on what aspect of their teaching brought about the most success in the course. By far, most teachers answered that developing good personal connections and relationships with the students, both between student and teacher, and also between the students themselves. This is achieved by taking into account the group dynamics and making the learners feel welcome. Establishing a positive rapport, where students 'learn without noticing they are learning' created a very optimistic setting in the classroom. Genuine interest and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher fostered respect and engagement among members of the group. Another contributing factor was the 'strongly structured and methodical nature' of the course and their teaching style. The teachers believed that when students know what is expected of them, they can prepare and perform the requested tasks better, leading to 'active involvement' by the learner, which the teacher achieved through 'regular testing' and by providing 'clear expectations.'

4.4 Learner and teacher perceptions – exploring the connection

With regard to how often the teacher gave feedback, half the teachers claimed that they gave feedback *all the time*, 40% said *often*, and the left over 10% said *sometimes*, as Figure 7 above illustrates. There was a conspicuous difference in viewpoints regarding whether feedback was given all the time: students claimed that feedback was given *all the time* only 32% of the time, in sharp contrast to the teachers' 50%, and that teachers' 10% for *sometimes* also differs from the rating of the students (20%). This detail means that teachers were in no doubt that they gave feedback more often than students perceived. Teachers maintained that they *always* gave feedback, which is unlike what the students stated, that of occasions where feedback was *rarely* or *never* given.

From the above numbers, it was apparent that students perceived the amount and frequency of feedback from the teachers differently than the teachers themselves. The only similarity between the two groups of respondents was the verification of feedback being given *often*: both groups answered with 40%. How often and how rarely remains a point of contention. Reasons for this may be that if the teacher gave a neutral or slightly negative indication, then the student perhaps did not acknowledge this sign as conferred feedback. It is also possible that if the student awaited a certain type of feedback, for example, written comments on an assignment or praise for a task, and the teacher simply placed a check mark on the paper or nodded in response, then again the student may have misunderstood the teacher's reaction.

A parallel is recognizable between the teachers' and learners' perceptions regarding assessment schemes. Learners, in the previous sub-section, believed that marks should be awarded for overall performance and test results, as was similarly evident with teachers' beliefs. However, learners also indicated that they requested marks for specific tasks, whereas this differed from the teachers' interpretation: teachers drew on several items of contribution from the learner, and granted marks for more of an inclusive assortment of completed tasks. This is a distinct assertion that teachers were more competent in judging the quality and extent of a learner's language skills, and could therefore make a more qualified and expert appraisal of the learner's performance.

In addition, there was another corresponding aspect between teachers' and learners' perceptions, this time regarding methods of feedback. Teachers said that they gave mostly oral feedback to their students. This fact is supported by both teachers and learners, they appear to be in harmony.

Concerning the teachers' perception of themselves, there was an intriguing match. It was a curious outcome that one teacher expressed the hope to create a 'trusting environment' while being 'demanding' at the same time. This assertion was mentioned earlier, when the learner expressed his view on his 'demanding' teacher. This remarkable coincidence sheds light on the perception of teachers in how they see themselves. Obviously, they did not consider this to be a negative term, but rather as a quality they strive to develop in their work. This was in accordance with the learner's perception of their teacher.

With regard to the course book, *Language Practice for Advanced*, 44% indicated that it was appropriate for the course, while 34% said that it was *somewhat* appropriate. Similar figures

(36%) were produced for the question of whether this book was an adequate resource for exam preparation. This is in stark contrast to the responses of the teachers, who claim that the book is a ‘useful resource,’ but is ‘limited to exam preparation’ and is ‘non-communicative.’ Further comments are listed below:

- *This is a self-study book. It is not designed to serve as course material. Also, it provides one sentence rules with one model sentence*
- *Exercises tend to be predictable and insufficiently challenging*
- *The absence of exercises to develop speaking skills*
- *It’s OK, but some of the practice exercises would benefit from a clearer, longer, more life-like context. I miss some motivating, interesting texts*
- *The book has a simple structure and the level is about right for this target group. It’s got good (rich) texts and the grammar sections are minimal in explanation and varied in terms of practice.*

There is some disparity among students and teachers concerning the book. Generally speaking, both agree that the book is suitable for the course, but at the same time, it has its shortcomings. Some teachers chose to not use this book and instead opted for their ‘own stuff’ as it ‘focuses better on the specific problem areas for Hungarian students,’ and so the teacher selected only the most suitable material from the book. However, students in the meantime have purchased the book, and thereby made a financial investment; they were disappointed when it was not utilized during the lessons. Moreover, if that student wanted to learn more grammar and the teacher focused too much on communicative exercises, then the learner was again frustrated. As was demonstrated earlier, students pointed out that if too much emphasis was placed on exercises from the book, then it merited criticism for wasting class time when the student could have done those exercises on their own. Some teachers also agreed with this assertion. The truth is inconclusive. The best solution for teachers and students appeared to be a healthy middle ground, where the book was not totally neglected, and communication exercises were included as well.

4.5 How teachers help learners – passing the test

With reference to the research questions, the factors that have the greatest influence on learner success in the LP course are the learning materials that the teacher offers, including grammar and vocabulary, and communicative activities. In addition, the extent and variety of the practice tasks assigned, such as gap-filling worksheets, written worksheets and short discussion topics in pairs, also had a tremendous impact. Lastly, the guidance and feedback given by the teacher, which involved the instructions, guidelines and reinforcement given to the learners who work out the delegated task, were also important. The teachers, relying on their many years’ experience teaching this course, were fully aware of the required skills the learner needed in order to achieve a passing grade on the language exam. Some teachers have amassed a large collection of practical material that they had designed specifically for the purpose of improving the language proficiency of their students and, judging by the low failure rate, have proven their methods and means to be effective and valuable.

The students, in turn, have shown themselves to be in agreement with their teacher's established routines. The results of the study have revealed significant information on how the learner perceived the above-mentioned elements of the course. One of the factors that deserves attention was the sorts of feedback the teacher gave them. The learner has made it apparent that they need regular and clear reactions to their contributions during and after the lessons. Because of the urgency of the language exam, students endure quite some burden and worry throughout the duration of the course. As a consequence, they called for both spoken and written correction and advice on their participation. Although such demands were not uniform, in that some learners asked for written, some spoken, others one-to-one or as a group, the main factors that influenced their performance in the course was the nature of the teacher-learner relationship.

The teachers, consequently, are absolutely aware of the phenomenon described above and harmonize fully. They see these factors as having a compelling influence on their students' performance. Teachers have clearly stated that a positive rapport and good relationships between them and between the learners themselves are especially vital in achieving a balanced and productive tone in the classroom. As Harmer (2015) points out, "students think their teacher is a good teacher [...] they trust the teacher to be even-handed, and they know they will be listened to with interest" (p. 114). Scrivener (2012), as cited in Harmer, says "being welcoming and encouraging and remembering positive things about the students" (p. 115) promotes good rapport. Zhang (2006), also cited in Harmer, makes an appealing argument: "eyes talk. We should show, by our facial expressions [...] and by the way we pay attention to our students, that we are fully engaged in what they are saying and doing" (p. 115). Finally, Harmer concludes that teachers "are (or should be) facilitators – helping their students achieve their goals, whether by coaching them, teaching them or tutoring them" (p. 117).

5 Conclusion

5.1 The findings

In conclusion, it fair to say that the course directs students to develop exam taking skills, such as independent study and using available resources. The teachers' function is to boost the behaviours that lead to self-sufficient learning. Learners' perceptions can appear as an off-centre picture, where their perceptions of their skills may differ from the learning expectations they profess. In the course, they focused on speaking activities, yet sought grammar and vocabulary practice. In the end, however, both the learners and their teachers were satisfied with the progress they made on the whole.

When asked about useful and less useful elements in the course, some of the answers were very similar. This is a result of some students wishing to focus on grammar and vocabulary, and others on speaking and communication. The filter exam has both components: a written and a spoken, and both are imperative. Whether the teacher spends more time on one or the other is a matter of choice, but neither is overlooked and the end result is effective and fruitful. Most students expressed their satisfaction in having the chance to practice everything in language learning. When asked about what hindered their learning, some students candidly admitted that they were lazy and

personally unmotivated to work harder. The answers were varied, but the results show that external factors also played a role.

This study has shown that the teacher is a crucial individual in the learning process in the classroom. Their main functions are to motivate the learners and to foster a positive and interactive atmosphere. Through their reactions to students' input, teachers provide constructive feedback that aids the learner in improving and persevering in their studies. Moreover, in terms of corrective feedback, learners want to know where they made their mistakes, yet seek to make the corrections themselves through the guidance of the teacher.

Written comments are a helpful source of lasting positive assessment. Regarding feedback, it is urged that teachers communicate regularly with their students so that not only the learner is in touch with their progress, but also the teacher: teachers in this way learn more about their teaching methods. Furthermore, teachers are adept in evaluating the merit and degree of learners' skills, and therefore award grades on a wide-ranging scale. Students and teachers have proven to be in agreement on this concept.

With regard to perceptions, students see their teacher as a 'demanding' individual and remarkably teachers share this view of themselves. They have proven that this is not a negative term, but a positive one, that both have come to value. Another point of agreement is the course book: teachers and students share the opinion that the book is appropriate for self-study, yet continue to require its regular use in the lesson. A good balance between the use of supplementary communication activities and grammar exercises from the book is shown to be beneficial for all.

5.2 Pedagogical implications

The most noteworthy lesson that resulted from this paper is the learners' perception of the feedback they received from their teacher. The data indicated that students sometimes misunderstand the reactions, or lack thereof, of their teacher, by answering they received little or no feedback. Teachers, on the other hand, claimed that they always gave feedback when it was appropriate to do so. Although both groups may be correct in their stance, it is important for the teacher to understand that sometimes the learner may not recognize their subtle reactions. Some useful tips to avoid such awkward misinterpretations are: firstly, feedback should be aimed towards a specific goal. In other words, comments or criticism should point toward identifiable input from the student. In this way, the learner will be aware of the teacher's reaction to his performance.

Another leading idea is the timeliness of the given feedback. It should be granted at the right moment, so that the learner can connect his input with the reaction of the teacher. Some students also pointed out that they appreciate feedback when it is positive in nature. For the teacher, this means some creative solutions may be necessary. Feedback should be given in a positive way, pointing out the good qualities of the contribution and offering alternative solutions. This technique ensures the learner does not feel affronted if what they said was incorrect. When giving feedback to the whole group, as was also pointed out by the respondents, the advantage is that

students will not be singled out, and that if the feedback is carefully planned and well-administered, it will be received in a confident and welcoming manner.

A final implication that would aid teachers is the remarkable observation by students and the teachers themselves about the quality of being demanding. Both regarded this characteristic in a positive light, in that such a feature was by no means disheartening or frightening to the student. Learners asserted that they wanted, in fact demanded, that their teacher urge them to put forth their best effort, and to really spend the time and energy completing the required tasks. Although some students may complain that they had no time, or had forgotten or neglected to do their homework, those students who did indeed do their utmost received the coveted passing grade in the exam. These students in turn thank their teacher for the ongoing encouragement and support that they had received.

In summary, it is always a good idea for teachers and students to discuss processes to be used in a course. The teacher can find out about the preferences of the students and the students can understand the rationale behind the teacher's practices. This arrangement works wonders in creating a stress-free learning environment.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Language Practice Students

Giving feedback for the language practice course

* Required

Background Information about you

1. Age *

2. Sex *

Mark only one oval.

Male

Female

3. Which programme are you in? *

Mark only one oval.

a. BA English

b. OTAK

c. Erasmus

d. Other:

4. What is your native language? *

5. How many years have you been learning English? *

6. Which school leaving exam for English did you take?

Mark only one oval.

a. Hungarian Advanced School Leaving Exam

b. Other:

About the course

7. You chose this particular class for the course because:

Mark only one oval.

a. the scheduled time was suitable

b. you heard positive things about the instructor

c. you thought it might be easy

d. you wanted to be with your friends

8. What skills did you wish to improve? *

Check all that apply.

a. pronunciation

b. academic writing

c. vocabulary

d. grammar

e. Other:

About the teacher

9. Was your teacher: *

Check all that apply.

a. punctual

b. prepared

c. patient

d. understanding

e. encouraging

f. demanding

g. hard to understand

h. practical

i. wasteful with time and resources

- j. organized
- k. dominant
- l. discouraging
- m. Other:

About the assessment in the course

10. Was test writing an important component in the course? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

11. Did you have in-class tests? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

12. In what ways were you tested? *

Check all that apply.

- a. written
- b. oral
- c. listening comprehension
- d. Other:

13. Did you have any marked homework tasks? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

14. On what basis was your grade in the course awarded? *

Check all that apply.

- a. homework assignments
- b. tests and quizzes
- c. effort and participation
- d. attendance and punctuality
- e. Other:

About feedback from the teacher

15. What forms of feedback did you receive from your teacher for your performance? *

Check all that apply.

- a. written
- b. oral
- c. gestures (nods, smiles, etc.)
- d. Other:

16. How often did the teacher offer you feedback? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. all the time
- b. often
- c. sometimes
- d. rarely
- e. never

Learner Perceptions

Your opinions

About the course

17. What expectations did you have about the LP course when you started your studies? *

Check all that apply.

- a. improvement in speaking and fluency
- b. improvement in reading comprehension
- c. improvement in academic writing
- d. improvement in listening comprehension
- e. Other:

18. In what ways did you benefit from taking this course? *

Check all that apply.

- a. increased vocabulary skills
- b. better grammar
- c. better pronunciation
- d. able to speak in longer sentences fluently
- e. improved academic writing skills
- f. improved listening skills
- g. I can communicate better with others
- h. Other:

19. In terms of your own development, did you improve as much as you had hoped? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. very much
- b. somewhat
- c. a little
- d. not at all

20. To what extent did you get to develop your English the way you hoped to? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. absolutely
- b. quite a bit
- c. somewhat
- d. not at all

21. List a few elements of the course you thought were very useful for developing your English: *

22. List a few elements of the course that were not very useful: *

23. How much effort did you have to make in the course to fulfill the requirements? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. a lot
- b. some
- c. not so much
- d. very little
- e. none

24. How much time did you spend preparing for this course compared to your other courses? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. a lot more
- b. a little more
- c. just as much
- d. less

25. What motivated you the most in the course? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. I wanted to get the highest marks in the group
- b. I just wanted to learn more English
- c. I wanted to make more friends
- d. I want to pass the exam
- e. I want the teacher's feedback for my performance

f. Other:

26. In what ways did your teacher motivate you? *

Check all that apply.

- a. made a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom
- b. provided lots of opportunities for earning marks
- c. allowed you to improve a disappointing mark
- d. gave you lots of positive feedback for your work
- e. set limits on the number of attempts to rewrite a test
- f. set strict deadlines for assignments

g. Other:

27. How did your group members motivate your performance?

28. How did they restrain your performance?

29. How did your teacher CATCH your attention and interest in the course?

30. How did your teacher KEEP your attention and interest in the course?

31. What held you back from being able to do your best in the course? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. too much other coursework
- b. daily long distance traveling
- c. employment besides studies
- d. family obligations
- e. personal reasons
- f. Other:

32. Was the required book (Vince, *Advanced Language Practice*) appropriate for the course? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. absolutely
- b. somewhat
- c. a little
- d. not at all

33. Was the book useful in preparing for the exam? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. absolutely
- b. somewhat
- c. a little
- d. not at all

34. What other supplementary material did your teacher use? *

Check all that apply.

- a. computer
- b. internet
- c. CD player
- d. books and pictures
- e. Other:

35. What would you have liked to use that you think would have been very useful? *

About the Language Practice exam

36. How well did you think you would perform at the exam? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. very well
- b. OK
- c. not so great
- d. terrible

37. How did you actually perform at the exam? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. very well
- b. OK
- c. not so great
- d. terrible

38. Did your exam grade reflect your knowledge of English as you see it? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. very much
- b. somewhat
- c. not at all

39. Do you think the exam gave an accurate representation of your English language knowledge? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. somewhat
- c. no

40. How accurately did the exam demonstrate your skills? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. very accurately
- b. accurately
- c. not so accurately
- d. not at all accurately
- e. Other:

41. What do think is the best way to prepare for the exam? *

Check all that apply.

- a. practice exercises from the class book
- b. buy more practice exercise books
- c. practice online
- d. practice with others in a group
- e. study alone
- f. look over the exercises at the weekend
- g. copy group members' homework
- h. talk with others who have written the exam
- i. Other:

42. How did the course help you to prepare for the exam? *

Check all that apply.

- a. gave me lots of practice
- b. showed me the question types that will be on the exam
- c. pointed out all the exceptions to the grammar rules
- d. helped me to understand what will be asked on the exam
- e. allowed me to ask all the questions I had in the classroom
- f. gave me the opportunity to try and give answers to the questions
- g. Other:

About the teacher

43. What did you like best about your teacher? *

44. What did you like the least about your teacher? *

About the assessment in the course

45. Were you given enough opportunities to use and show your language skills? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

46. Were you given enough opportunities to earn marks towards your final grade? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

47. Were you given a second chance to improve if a mark was disappointing? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

48. What do think is the best way to assess your progress in the course? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. frequent test writing
- b. marks for performance on specific tasks
- c. mark for overall performance in the course
- d. mark for written assignments
- e. Other:

49. Do you find assessment by the teacher motivating? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

50. Do you find the assessment stressful? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

51. Did you have a chance to assess yourself? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

52. Did you have a chance to assess your group members? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

53. Do you think the grade you received in the course was appropriate? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. yes
- b. no

About the methods of feedback from your teacher

54. What was the most encouraging method your teacher used to offer you feedback for your performance? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. test results
- b. group oral feedback
- c. one to one oral feedback
- d. written comments on an assignment
- e. written evaluation on performance
- f. Other:

55. What did you find the most helpful feature in your teacher's feedback? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. correcting the mistakes
- b. pointing out mistakes but giving no corrections
- c. requesting you to do the work again
- d. encouraging you to perform more
- e. suggesting that you work with another group member
- f. Other:

56. Was there anything discouraging in your teacher's feedback? *

Mark only one oval.

- a. no
- b. yes

57. If you answered yes, what was it?

58. As a student, what types of feedback do you find the most useful and practical? *

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire for LP Teachers

Feedback form for Language Practice Teachers

* Required

About the course in general

1. How long have you been teaching the LP course? *

2. In your opinion, what are/should be the aims of such a course? *

3. Did you find the Vince book adequate as a resource? *

Mark only one oval.

- mostly yes
- mostly no
- Other:

4. Provide reasons for your answer above.

5. What supplementary materials do you use besides the Vince book? *

6. What other materials do you think would be useful in the course? *

About your students

7. What was the average size of your group(s)? *

Mark only one oval.

- less than 10
- 10-12
- 13-15
- 16-18
- more than 18

8. What was the gender distribution in your group(s)?

Mark only one oval.

- more males
- more females
- males and females more or less evenly distributed

9. What was the language skills distribution of your students? *

Mark only one oval.

- fairly evenly distributed
- somewhat mixed

o very mixed

10. What would you say was their language level upon starting the course? *

Mark only one oval.

- o very high - They didn't need much preparation for the end-of-year proficiency exam
- o high - They needed only a little preparation
- o not so high - they needed some preparation
- o low - They needed a lot of preparation
- o very low - Their passing the exam looked doubtful even with a lot of preparation

11. What did the students need the most improvement in? *

Check all that apply.

- o speaking
- o reading
- o writing
- o listening
- o Other:

About your methods

Your teaching methods

12. What is your general approach when starting your lesson?

13. What types of practice do you provide your students? *

14. What kinds of exercises do you assign during the lesson? *

Check all that apply.

- o watching a video
- o reading
- o writing
- o discussion and speaking activities with group members
- o Other:

15. How much, if any, homework do you give? *

16. How did you adjust to the learning style or study culture of your students? *

17. Did you need to teach study skills in general? *

Mark only one oval.

- o yes
- o no

18. What changes did you have to make in your planning of the lessons, for example, activity types, and why?

19. How did you motivate your students during the lesson? *

Your assessment methods

20. How do you assess your students' progress? *

21. Do you give any tests? If so, what kinds? *

22. Do you give any longer term assignments, for example, project work? *

Mark only one oval.

- o yes
- o no

23. If yes, what were these assignments?

24. How do you keep track of your students' progress? *

25. On what basis do you assign marks for your students' performance? *

Check all that apply.

- o test results
- o effort and participation
- o preparation for the lessons
- o Other:

26. What forms of feedback do you offer them about their performance? *

Check all that apply.

- written
- oral
- gestures (nods, smiles, etc.)
- Other:

27. How often do you give your students feedback? *

Mark only one oval.

- all the time
- often
- sometimes
- rarely
- never

About teaching the course

28. What part of the course do you like to teach best? *

Check all that apply.

- grammar
- vocabulary
- collocations
- listening for information
- speaking and conversation
- pronunciation
- academic writing
- reading comprehension
- Other:

29. Provide reasons for your answer above. *

30. Which is your least favourite part and why? *

31. What aspect of language practice do you spend the most time with and why? *

32. How do you balance focusing on elements that are important for the exam and those that are important for the students' development? *

33. What equipment do you use during the lessons? *

Check all that apply.

- computer
- internet
- CD player
- books and pictures
- mobile devices
- Other:

About your perceptions

34. In terms of teaching, content and methods, what expectations did you have of yourself at the start of the course?*

35. In what ways did you meet those expectations? *

36. What were your expectations of the students at the start of the course? *

37. In what ways did your students meet your expectations by the end of the course? *

38. Was there any expectation that you had to decide to give up? Why?

39. Looking back on the course what would you have done differently? *

40. What aspect of your teaching do you think brought about the most success in your course? *