

FROM STUDIES TO THE FUTURE – PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF GERMAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Abstrakt

The goal of this qualitative comparative study is to examine how students from the Departments of German Language and Literature and English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Tetovo describe their plans for the future, what kinds of concerns they have about education and society, and what personal, social, and cultural concerns become visible from their reflections. This paper consists of 28 reflections of eighth-semester students, aged 21 to 22, including 12 students from the German Department and 16 from the English Department. The research follows a qualitative comparative design in its analysis and pays attention to both recurring themes and differences in tone and expression.

According to the study, many students from the German Department write methodically and intentionally, connecting their future objectives to taking on responsibility and giving back to society. As compared to English Department reflections, in which students write more directly and with more focus on mobility, opportunity, and personal growth. Both groups also describe education as an empowering experience closely linked to dignity and effort, and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. This paper, therefore, states that student reflections provide valuable insight, not only into language usage but also about the values, expectations, and concerns that shape students' views towards life after graduation.

Keywords: *Student reflections, qualitative analysis, future plans, intercultural competence, pragmatic competence, German Department, English Department.*

Introduction

The student's writing can be so much more than grammar or vocabulary. Students' texts, when asked to contemplate who they want to be in the future, what they work on, the world they live in, reflect upon their values, concerns, hopes, and uncertainties, can have personal themes woven into them as they explore these reflections. This is why, in language teaching, reflections are considered significant tasks. They push students to write, but they also make it possible to see how students think about themselves and the world around them. This article focuses upon handwritten reflections from students from the German and English Departments in the Faculty of Philology. Texts were created as part of a task given in the classroom and looked at, comparing them in this paper.

The reflections constitute a short document, but they provide useful material for qualitative analysis. They reveal what students envision when they are done with graduation,

how they make the connection between education and opportunity and the responsibility they will assume, and how they frame a future in the context between their surroundings and a broader world of potential. The analysis is framed by four key questions: What future intentions were conveyed by students? What personal, social, or economic factors influence these plans? How are students talking about education and society?

And in their writing, what intercultural and pragmatic aspects become apparent? These questions make it possible to read the texts, not just as individual reflections, but as brief report how students imagine the future at an important moment before graduation. The intent of the paper is not to draw a strict contrast of these departments, nor to emphasize the differences in tone and self-expression. Rather, it intends to identify patterns which are repeated across the texts. By comparing the reflections of students in the German and English Departments, the paper examines how language of study, academic context, and communicative style may influence the way students write about their future.

Theoretical background

Student writing in educational context often shows more than vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. When students are asked to reflect on their future, their education, or their role in society, they're also telling us things about who they are and how they view the world. Reflective texts can therefore be read as small but meaningful expressions of self-positioning. They show not only what students want to say, but also how they organize experience, express uncertainty, build hope and give meaning to education. In a way, writing is closely tied to identity, voice and social understanding.

This research is based on the concept of intercultural communicative competence developed by many researchers (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Byram, 1997). For Byram, learning a foreign language is not only a matter of learning structures and grammar correctly. It also involves understanding other perspectives, interpreting cultural meanings, and relating them to one's own experience. Intercultural competence includes openness, empathy, curiosity, and the willingness to engage with difference in a respectful and thoughtful way. It also includes mediation, meaning the ability to build bridges between people, languages, and cultural worlds.

This idea is very important for the present study because students' reflections repeatedly connect language learning with mobility, understanding, contact with others, and the wish to participate in a wider world. The writing of students in an educational setup tends to reveal more than vocabulary or grammar knowledge. When students are asked to reflect on what they are and how they perceive the world, they are telling us as much as they can about themselves. Reflective texts can thus be perused as tiny yet significant statements of self-positioning. They not only reveal what students wish to say, but also how they arrange experience, express doubt, construct hope and give meaning to education.

In a manner, writing is directly related to identity, voice and social comprehension. This research is based on the concept of intercultural communicative competence developed by many researchers (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Byram, 1997). To Byram, the idea of learning a foreign language is not merely a question of learning the structure and grammar of a foreign language in a proper manner. It also entails an appreciation of other interpretations, meaning of the culture and how they relate to the own experience. Intercultural competence incorporates openness, empathy, curiosity, and willingness to explore difference in a respectful and thoughtful manner. It also entails mediation, that is the capacity to establish bridges between individuals, languages, and cultures worlds.

This concept is quite significant to the current study as the reflection of students can be repeatedly related to the language learning with mobility, knowledge, contact with others and the desire to access a broader world. In their texts, it is possible to suppose that foreign language

study can be considered not only as an academic subject but also a means of entering broader social and cultural spaces. A similar view is presented in (Kramsch, 1993) where it is noted that language could not be detached of culture. Language is a tool that is neutral and has methods of understanding and describing reality. Thus, students not only learn the linguistic forms, but also learn the new possibilities of understanding and the new ways of relating to other people.

This concept is quite crucial to this analysis since students do not write about professions and graduation only. The other topics they write about are values, opportunities, belonging, responsibility, and change. Their thoughts indicate that learning a language is intimately related to individual values and the ways they envision their future in society. Communication competence, in particular, in the pragmatic dimension, is another concept that is important to this study. The argument that communication is not just about grammatical correctness, it is a more complex phenomenon (Canale, M; and Swain, M., 1980).

It also entails the skill to apply language in a proper context relative to context, purpose and interpersonal situation. In this light, the pragmatic context can be interpreted as the virtue of making appropriate choices on expressions, tone, attitudes, and intentions in a socially meaningful manner. This is evident in student reflection writing whereby students make wishes, criticize, praise, feel insecure, ambitious or self-confident. An example of this can be seen in the use of modal verbs, inclusive pronouns, the use of emotionally expressive language, the use of polite formulations or the careful construction of statements.

In this paper, this aspect plays a pivotal role since the two groups of students do not only differ in what they say about the future, but also in how they say it. The German Department Students are more likely to write more directly, more emotionally and in some cases more metaphorically. Lastly, the research is carried out under the prism of qualitative interpretations. As Silverman points out, qualitative should be approached with attention to wording, context and recurring patterns of meaning. Short texts may appear simple, but they often contain important information and reveal significant facts when analysed carefully (Kamberi, 2010; 2013).

This is especially true of the handwritten reflections examined in this paper. Although the corpus is small, the texts provide valuable insight into how students write about education, work, migration, identity and society. For this reason, the paper does not treat the reflections simply as classroom exercise, but as texts through which students express personal hopes, social concerns and culturally shaped views of the future. All these perspectives provide the framework for reading the reflections not only as personal statements, but also as texts in which intercultural orientation, pragmatic choices and social self-presentation become visible.

Methodology

The study follows qualitative comparative approach. The data consists of 28 handwritten reflections written by eighth semester students aged 21 to 22 at the Faculty of Philology, University of Tetovo. This research is conducted using a qualitative comparative analysis method. The data consists of 28 handwritten reflections written by eighth-semester students aged 21 to 22 at the Faculty of Philology, University of Tetovo. Twelve of this reflection were written by students of the German Department and sixteen by students from the English Department. The German Department students wrote in German, whereas the English Department students wrote in English. The texts were collected through a classroom reflection task in which students were asked to write about their future after graduation, their educational goals, and the social conditions that influence their conditions.

The study does not aim to achieve statistically generalisable results. Instead, it offers a close reading of a small but meaningful corpus. A qualitative approach was chosen because the reflections reveal differences in tone, personal perspective and underlying meaning. Although the texts are short, they offer valuable insight into how students write about education,

opportunity, responsibility, social limitations, and the future. For this reason, the reflections are treated not simply as classroom products, but as texts through which young adults express how they understand their place in relation to study, work, society and mobility.

The analysis was based on four main categories: future plans, personal, social and economic factors, perceptions of education and society, and intercultural and pragmatic competence. These categories helped structure the reading of the texts and made comparison between the two groups possible without reducing the reflections to a rigid coding scheme. At the same time they allowed room for individual nuances and differences in voice, tone and emphasis. Methodologically, the reflections were read several times in order to identify recurring themes, representative formulations, characteristic differences in tone, and broader patterns of self-presentation.

Attention was paid not only to what students expressed, but also to how they expressed themselves. This included, for example, the degree of emotional openness, the use of careful or direct wording, references to mobility and belonging, and the ways in which education was associated with dignity, personal growth, or social responsibility. In this sense, the analysis followed a qualitative content-analytic and interpretive procedure, combining thematic comparison with close attention to wording and style. The fact that the two groups wrote in different languages is also relevant for the interpretation of the material.

Tone, style and forms of self-expression are shaped not only by individual perspective, but also by linguistic and academic context in which the reflections were written. For this reason, the comparison in this paper does not treat the texts as fully equivalent, but reads them with attention to the different expressive possibilities offered by German and English as languages of reflection and self-expression. In this paper we have chosen some quotations, not as isolated examples, but rather illustrations and examples that reveal a common thread and stylistic patterns. We have also made a conscious effort not to force the reflections into overly rigid contrasts. Our goal was to preserve the unique voice and individuality of each student, while still providing a comparative interpretation of the two groups.

By doing so, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the themes and patterns that appear from their responses. The study results are limited, because it's based on a small group of students from one institution. These results give us a picture of this particular group at a specific time in their academic and personal lives. This limitation however does not lessen the value of the study. On the contrary it highlights the importance of reading student texts carefully, even if it's just a short reflection, because you can find meaningful patterns in their thoughts, feeling and how they communicate. These patterns can be really revealing even in a small sample of students. To keep the students' personal thought private, their reflections were written anonymously. The quotes used in the study are only meant for illustrative and analytical purposes.

German Department Analysis

Students in the German Department have a clear idea of what they want to achieve in life. They are modest and care about helping others. Many of them want to be teachers, translators, or work abroad. What's interesting is not just the jobs they want, but why they want them. For example, one student writes, "*Ich möchte Deutsch unterrichten, weil Sprachen Menschen verbinden.*" ["I would like to teach German because languages connect people"]. Another student wrote, "*Ich möchte Übersetzerin werden, weil es mir Freude macht, Kulturen zu verbinden.*" ["I want to be a translator because it makes me happy to connect cultures"].

In both cases, they want to use their skills to help others and make a difference. They don't just think about how they can get ahead, but about how they can contribute to society. They know that there are challenges to overcome, like family and economic problems, and limited opportunities where they live. One student wrote "*In meinem Land ist es nicht leicht,*

einen guten Job zu finden, aber ich will mich weiterbilden “[„It’s not easy to find a good job in my country, but I want to keep learning]. Another student said, *“In meiner Stadt gibt es wenig Möglichkeiten, besonders für junge Frauen* [“There aren’t many opportunities in my city, especially for young women”].

They know life isn’t easy, but they are determined to make a better life for themselves. For these students, education is about more than just getting a job. It’s about being free, having dignity and being responsible. They believe that learning makes them stronger, more independent and able to help others. As one phrase says, *“Bildung ist Freiheit”* [“Education is Freedom”]. They think that by studying, they can become better people and make a positive impact on the world. They are not naïve, they know there are obstacles, but they are hopeful and determined to succeed. Their reflections show a strong sense of social awareness and a desire to make a difference. They are not just thinking about their own futures, but about how they can contribute to their communities and society as a whole. They believe that education is key to unlocking their potential and creating a better world.

With this mindset, they are likely to achieve great things and make a positive impact on those around them. Overall, the students in the German Department have a refreshing and inspiring outlook on life. They are motivated, determined, and care about making a difference. Their attitudes towards education and their future are a testament to the power of learning and the importance of social responsibility. When talking about society, students from the German Department usually express their criticism in a thoughtful way. They mention unfairness, lack of respect towards teachers, limited opportunities, but they express this in a very calm and balanced way. Even when they want to express dissatisfaction or are unhappy about something, they express it very carefully without showing emotions.

Here we can see how they put their practical skills into use. The way they use expressions like “want”, “could”, and “would” gives us an insight into politeness, modesty, and consideration for others. When it comes to other cultures, such as the cultures in German-speaking countries, these students show empathy towards other cultures, whether when they talk about studying abroad or when they have to find themselves in multilingual situations. According to their writings, it emerges that learning a language means being present, understanding, and moving forward or progressing. Nevertheless, their connection with their homeland is very strong. A sentence like *“Ich möchte nach Deutschland gehen, aber mein Herz bleibt hier”* [“I want to go to Germany, but my heart stays here”] shows a mix of wanting to belong, of ambition and loyalty.

English Department Analysis

The English Department students have provided reflections that are quite frank and sincere about their future feelings and hopes. They desire to teach, study internationally, work in large corporations, travel and communicate to reach people of the entire world. They talk about their writing, which is all about being free to move around, make their own choices and learn new things. In the case of students in the English Department, education is a ticket to a larger world and it is a means of trying out new things, new people and new opportunities. As one student wrote, “Education is my ticket to the world,” and another wrote, “The world is bigger than our city.” They don’t just see their future as a steady job, but as a chance to have all sorts of new experiences and adventures. At the same time, they’re not ignoring the fact that life can be tough and that there are a lot of obstacles.

They express this clearly when they write about how hard it is to find a job, even with a degree, and how the system doesn’t always support young people. But instead of getting discouraged, they use those challenges as a chance to show how determined they are. They believe in themselves and their ability to make a difference. For them, education is about transformation and studying and education are a way to change their lives and the world around

them. They see education as a powerful tool that can give them a voice, open up new possibilities, and help them make a positive impact.

The way the English Department students write and how they express themselves is really different compared to their peers in the German Department. They use language that's more emotional, more imaginative, and more inclusive. They talk about understanding and connecting with people from other cultures, and they see language as a way to bridge those gaps. As one student said, *"Knowing languages means understanding people,"* and another said, *"I want to travel and learn how people live in other countries."*

For them, being successful isn't just about achieving their goals, but it's about being open to new experiences, new people, and new ideas. They believe that education should help them grow as individuals and connect with the world around them. Even though they're still rooted in their local communities, their minds are already exploring the world beyond, and they're starting to think about who they can become. They're not just limited to their current surroundings, they're imagining all the possibilities that come with being a global citizen, and that's really exciting.

Comparative Discussions

When comparing the thoughts of two groups of students, we can see some big differences in how they feel and what they focus on. But this doesn't mean that all students in each group think the same way. The students in the German Department have plans that are often very structured and connected to their community. They want to be teachers, translators, or go on to further study, and they talk about being responsible, useful, and helping others. On the other hand, the students in the English Department are more open and look to the world outside. They talk about travelling, working internationally, being independent, and growing as people.

Many of them are very direct and expressive about their feelings. But we shouldn't make too much of these differences. Both groups of students really care about education and recognise difficulties on the path to success. For all of them, education is not just about getting a job, but also about being proud of themselves, working hard, and having hope. The comparison between the two groups is helpful because it shows how students of foreign languages think about similar issues in different ways.

The table below summarizes some of the main perspectives we found out in the materials from looking at what the students wrote. It is a general overview and doesn't capture every individual student's perspective.

Analytical Category	German Department	English Department
Dominant orientation	Stability, professionalism, responsibility	Mobility, independence, global connection
Typical future plans	Teaching, translation, study abroad, socially useful work	Teaching, travel, international work, study abroad
View of education	Moral growth, dignity, responsibility, freedom	Empowerment, voice, opportunity, transformation
Social realities mentioned	Economic difficulty, family expectations, local limitations	Economic insecurity, family sacrifice, systemic frustration
Pragmatic style	Polite, restrained, carefully structured	Expressive, direct, metaphorical, inclusive
Intercultural profile	Connection, mediation, empathy, coexistence	Openness, curiosity, global awareness, adaptability

Education holds a similar importance for both groups of students from German and English Department, but they express it in different ways. The German Department Students often view education as a serious responsibility that benefits society, while the English

Department Students see it as a chance for personal growth and exploration. Despite these differences, both groups believe that education plays a significant role in shaping their future. What's interesting is that these students are open to learning about other cultures and languages, which broadens their perspective on the world.

Many of them think that language is a tool to connect with others, understand their lives, and imagine possibilities beyond their immediate surroundings. This is especially significant in a multilingual setting like Tetovo, where language study can have a profound impact on how students think about communication, community, identity and their place in the world. By studying languages, students are not just learning new words and grammar, but also gaining a new perspective on how to interact with people from different backgrounds and cultures. This can help them become more empathetic and open-minded individuals, capable of navigating a complex and diverse world. Overall, the significance of education and language study cannot be overstated, as they have the power to transform not only individual students but also the communities they belong to.

Pedagogical and Linguistic Implications

The implications of the reflections in this paper can have a larger impact not just in the academics, but more so in the teaching of languages at the university level. First, it demonstrates that reflective writing can become a useful tool in the context of classroom setting, not only in terms of enhancing the writing skills, but also in terms of helping a teacher to comprehend how students think of their future, their studies, and the surrounding world. This may enable the writing exercises to be meaningful and engaging. Secondly, the paper highlights the importance of focusing on the practical aspects of writing in language teaching.

The responses of the German Department Students tended to be polite and reserved, whereas the responses of the English Department were more direct, personal and emotional. Both of these approaches are crucial to successful communication, and they can be discussed during the classes. In our paper, we also find that the reflection of many students touched on intercultural issues, indicating that classrooms can be a place where students can think critically about the society, mobility, difference and responsibility.

When students are taught how to integrate the elements of language practice, personal reflection, as well as intercultural awareness, the language teaching process can be taken to another level, beyond technical proficiency, and help students gain a better insight into themselves and the surrounding world. This may affect their lives personally and professionally in an enduring manner. Our research indicates that reflective writing may be an effective instrument in language teaching, which can assist students to become more reflective, engaged, and effective communicators.

Conclusion

For this paper, we have collected some reflections from the students of the Department of German Language and Literature and English Language and Literature in order to highlight what students think about their future after studies, about employment, and the world around them. During the analysis, we could notice some differences between the two groups of students, particularly in the way of expressing themselves and in what they were more focused on. Students of the German department write about their future and their dreams in a very careful and more organized way, they express their thoughts on how their plans for the future may have an impact on society.

On the other hand, students of the English department express themselves in a more direct way, emphasizing opportunities, moving forward, and their personal growth. What stands out is the fact that even though we encounter differences between the two groups in the way of

thinking, we still find similarities between the two groups of students. Both groups believe that education is primary and very important, associated with hard work and respect, and it leads them on a path toward a good future. In this paper, we highlight that even in short reflections, we can extract valuable data regarding the way students think, what aspirations and plans they have, what desires they hold, what fears they have for their future, and what their expectations are after graduating from their studies.

These reflections show us how young people think about work, society, belonging, and change in their most critical time in their lives, just before graduation. These obtained data give meaning to the research of writings and reflections of students not only in the linguistic aspect and language practice, but also as a way to understand how they think about their professional future. Future research should involve even more students from other departments and their reflections should be examined, whether in writing or orally, to deepen the meaning of the research.

Even in this form, our study manages to highlight how students' written reflections can provide us with valuable data on how they communicate and what they think about the importance of their education. By seeing what students write, we can learn more about what they think and feel and where they see themselves in the future in the world. This helps us understand how education shapes them and how they see their future.

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