

MATURA'S ROCKY ROAD TO SUCCESS

EALTA 2009, June 4-7
Turku, Finland

Introduction

This presentation will report results from a study investigating:

- ▣ Secondary school students' attitudes towards the English Matura exam
- ▣ Students' opinions about English instruction and assessment
- ▣ Matura exam impact on teaching and learning English in secondary schools in R. Macedonia

Introduction

- Matura exam in R. Macedonia—first administered in 2008
- Synergies
 - ▣ Transparency in education
 - ▣ Euro-transition
 - ▣ Educational reform
- Tensions
 - ▣ Student and teacher dissatisfaction
 - ▣ Lack of communication between test makers and all stakeholders
 - ▣ English vs. other foreign language exams

Matura concept

- Education that is student oriented
- Exams are integral part of education
- Exams are indicator of student achievement in secondary schools
- Functional connection between secondary schools and higher education

(Ministry of Education--Bureau for Development of Education, 2007)

Matura Goals

- Improve the quality of secondary education
- Control teaching curricula based on educational standard
- Easy university selection
- Inform students and parents about students' achievement through reliable and valid instruments

Projected benefits

- Better final exam quality
- Improved high school diploma acceptance abroad
- Avoided double examination (high school and college)
- Improved college selection process
- Improved quality of secondary education
- Larger database of valid and objective data regarding students' achievements from different schools

Matura structure

- Compulsory part-external
 - ▣ Macedonian, Albanian, or Turkish language and literature (depending on students' native language and medium of instruction)
- Elective part-external
 - ▣ Math, or
 - ▣ Foreign language
- Project-internal
 - ▣ Internal evaluation of a student project in a selected subject

Matura elective—English exam

□ Goals

- To communicate orally using communicative models and language skills covered in the teaching curricula
- To comprehend a written text and to respond in written form
- To communicate in written form using the communicative models and language skills covered in the teaching curricula
- Not clear whether listening is subsumed in oral communication

(Ministry of Education, BDE, 2007)

English exam structure

- Speaking
- Reading and comprehension
- Writing
- Culture (culture covered in the activities according to the countries in which English is used)

SPEAKING specifications

- Participating in oral communication
- Expressing oneself regarding a particular topic
- Expressing personal opinion, attitude, and reaction
- Using formal and informal language in everyday life
 - TOPICS: family, free time, media, music, film, sport, everyday life, environment, education, professions, jobs
 - ACTIVITIES: ask and give info, describe people, activities, processes, and places, role play, narration following pictures, thematic discussion

READING specifications

- Identifying text genre
- Skimming and scanning
- Identifying/ordering parts of text structure
- Identifying specific info in particular contexts
- Concluding using comparison
- Making difference between opinion, attitude, fact
 - TOPICS: family, free time, media, music, film, sport, everyday life, environment, education, professions, jobs
 - TEXT GENRES: newspaper article, letter, , texts of interest for students' age, tables, graphs, diagrams, literary excerpts

WRITING specifications

- Providing personal information
- Writing short notes
- Writing formal/informal texts
- Asking/giving information
- Writing a short essay on a particular topic
 - TOPICS: family, free time, media, music, film, sport, everyday life, environment, education, professions, jobs
 - GENRES: short biography, forms, informal letters, formal letters, texts related to students' age, texts (description, narration, opinion, attitude, review of book, movie, etc.)

Exam procedures and criteria

- Oral 10-15 min
 - ▣ 2 speaking items; 40 pts (20pts each)
 - ▣ criteria (vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, coherence—not weighted)
- Reading comprehension 90min
 - ▣ 50 items; 50pts (each item 1 pt)
- Writing 90min
 - ▣ 2 writing items; 50pts (25pts each)
 - ▣ criteria (spelling, vocabulary, grammar, structure, topic relevance—not weighted)

Matura Exam Use

- University enrollment (40% Matura score, 60% aggregated grades in secondary education)
- Each faculty announces what exams are needed for enrollment (e.g., math or FL, or both)
- Some believe that Matura scores are used to evaluate teachers (BDE posted school ranking)

English exam format: synergies and tensions

□ Synergies

- ▣ Test items are similar to those of other standard tests available (e.g., TOEFL PBT, FCE, or other FL high school exit exams)
- ▣ English has the same format with the other FL exams

□ Tensions

- ▣ Even though the format is the same, English is easier than other FL exams because of students' higher proficiency
- ▣ Speaking cannot be implemented because of lack of resources
- ▣ Inter-rater reliability for written part is questionable because of short rating period (10,000 exams rated in one week)

Matura implementation: synergies and tensions

- Synergies
 - ▣ Matura developed over a period of 7 years (2000-07)
 - ▣ Part of educational reforms required for Euro integration
 - ▣ Teacher accountability
- Tensions
 - ▣ Bad publicity
 - ▣ Student demonstrations
 - ▣ Lack of teacher and student involvement in decision making

Media attack

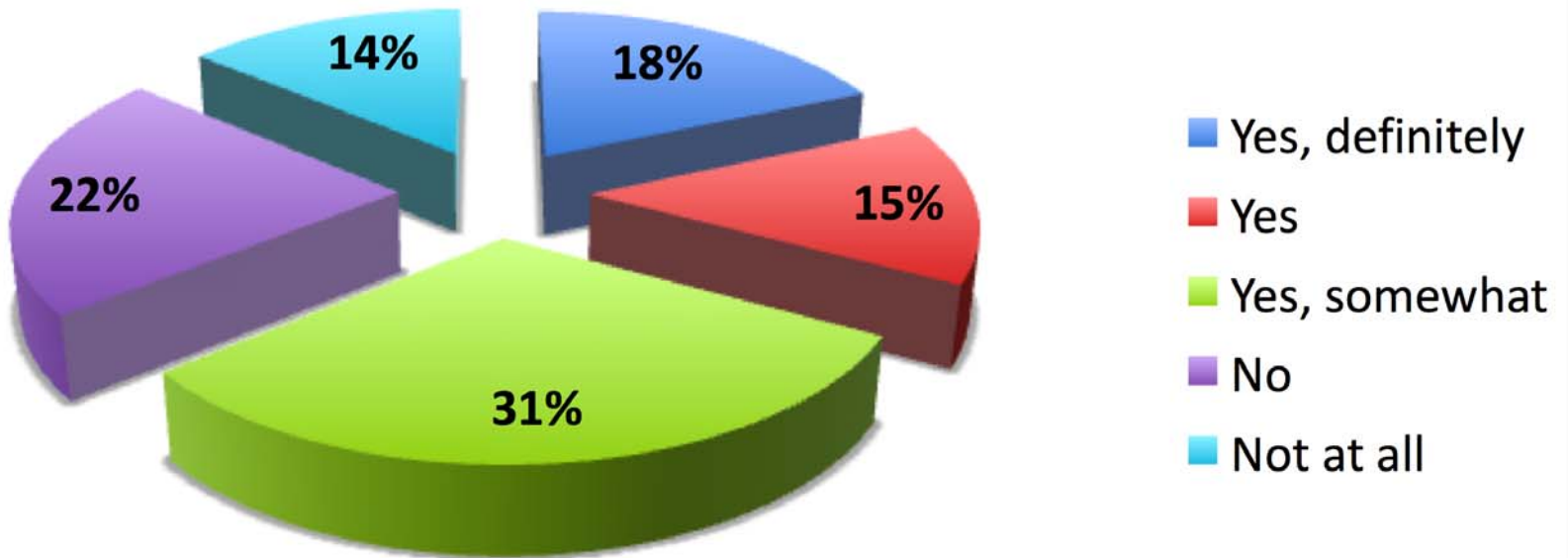
- In the past two years, the media (newspapers and TV) published negative opinions and attitudes towards Matura
- Editorials and letters in the major newspapers attacked MOE and BDE for not informing students about changes in Matura exams in a timely manner
- Instead of establishing better communication, MOE and BDE avoided further attacks by further distancing themselves from students, teachers, and parents
- The source of dissatisfaction was not investigated in a structured manner

Method

- Seventeen-item questionnaire administered in May 2009 (Cronbach's alpha= .852)
 - ▣ Items 1-6, bio data
 - ▣ Items 7-14, Likert-type items
 - ▣ Items 15-17, textual items
- Eight schools (10%) in three cities in R. Macedonia
- Participants (N=735)
 - ▣ Secondary school freshmen (N=292)
 - ▣ Secondary school juniors (N=493)

Results: Attitudes

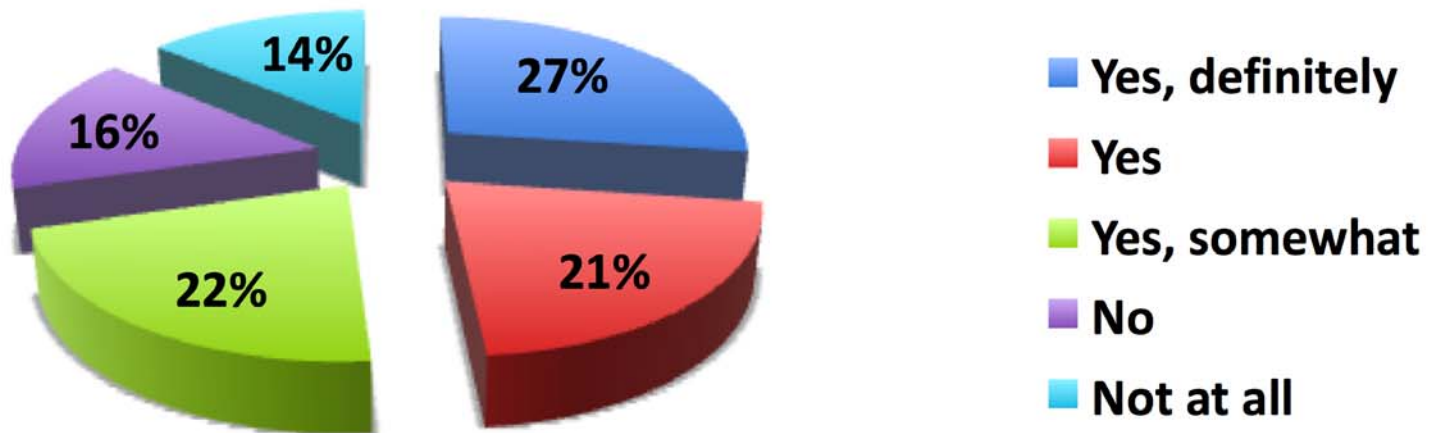
I think the English Matura exam is hard.



Despite the negative publicity, students had positive attitudes towards the English Matura exam.

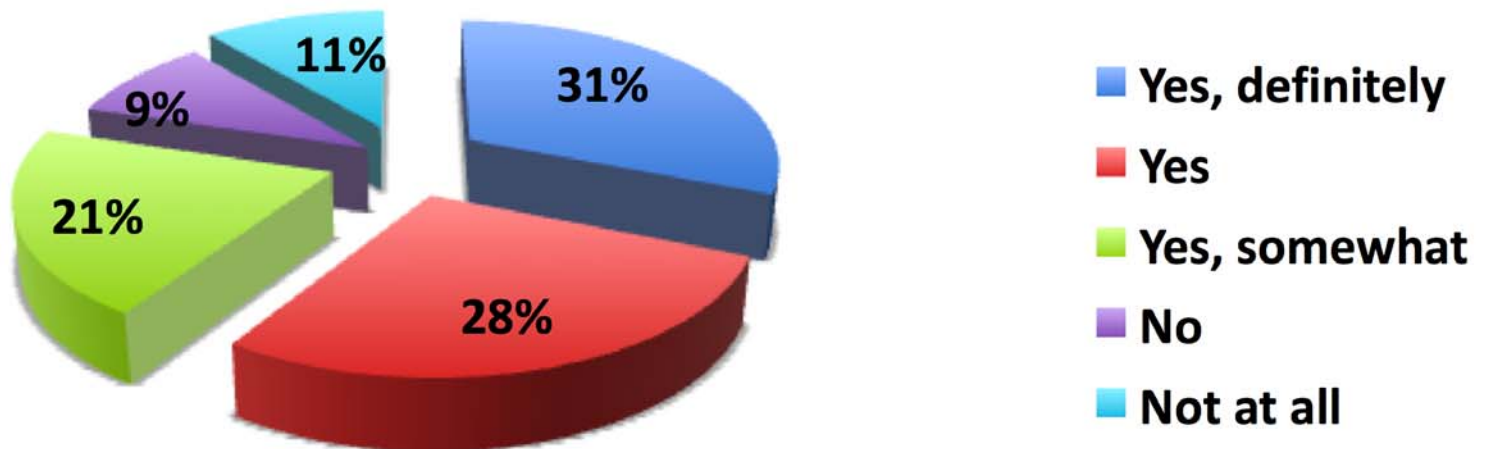
Attitudes

I am nervous when I think about taking the English Matura exam.

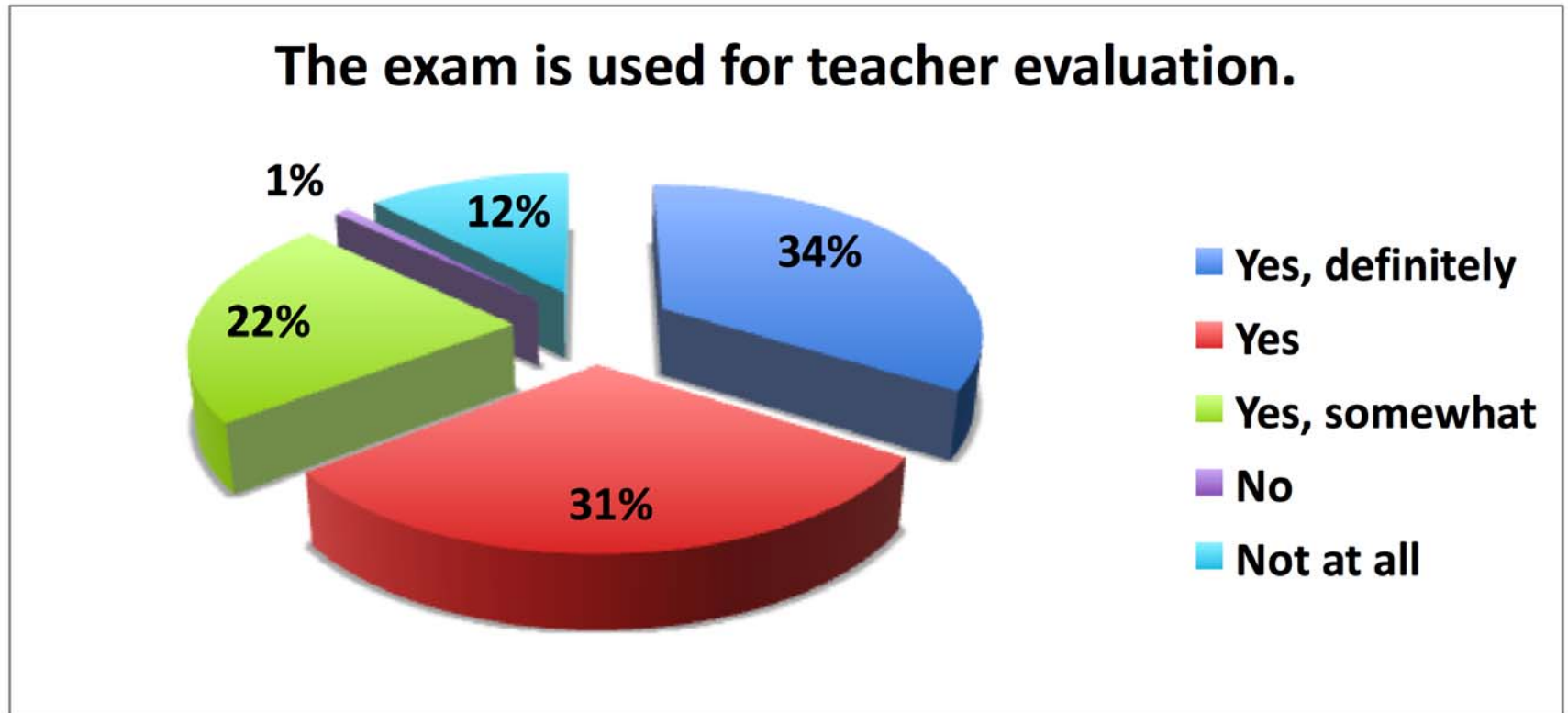


Attitudes

The purpose of the exam is establishing quality in education.



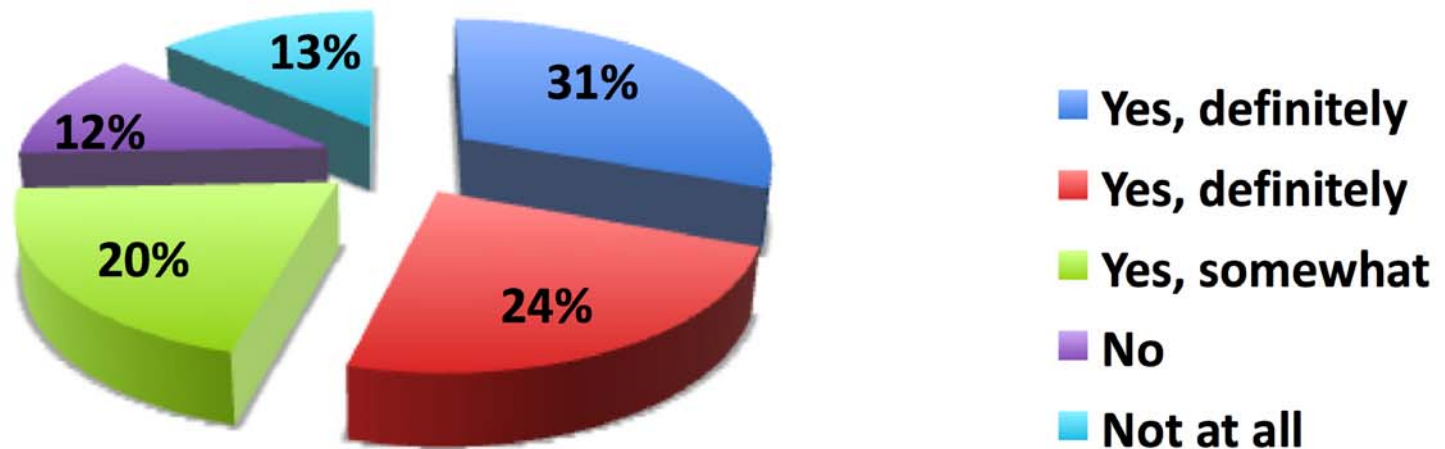
Attitudes



The BDE did not list teacher accountability as a specific goal of the Matura, but most students still believed that Matura evaluates teachers because it is an external exam.

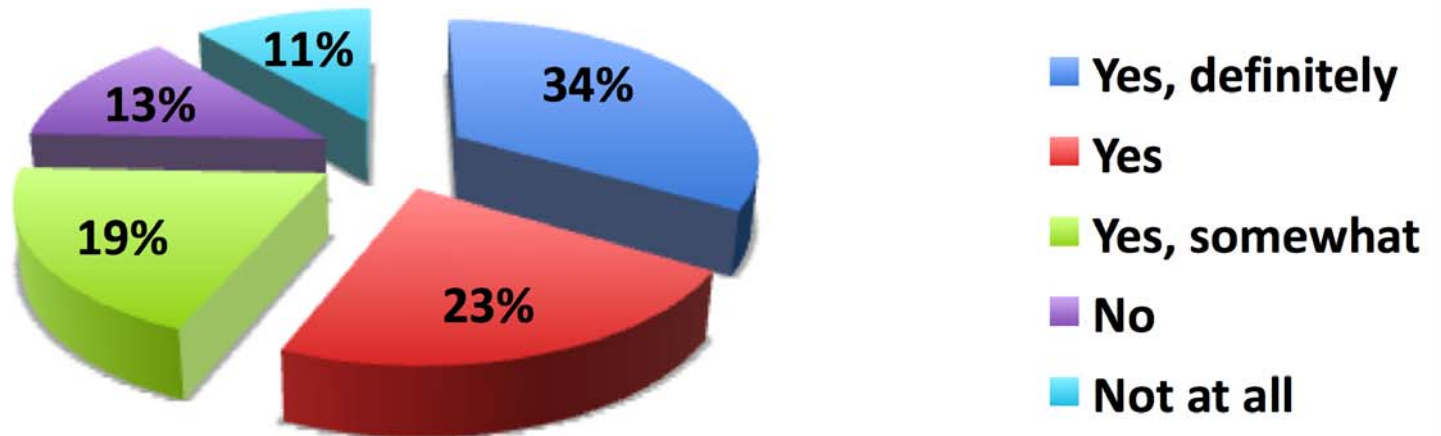
Attitudes

The exam is a good instrument for measuring students' knowledge.



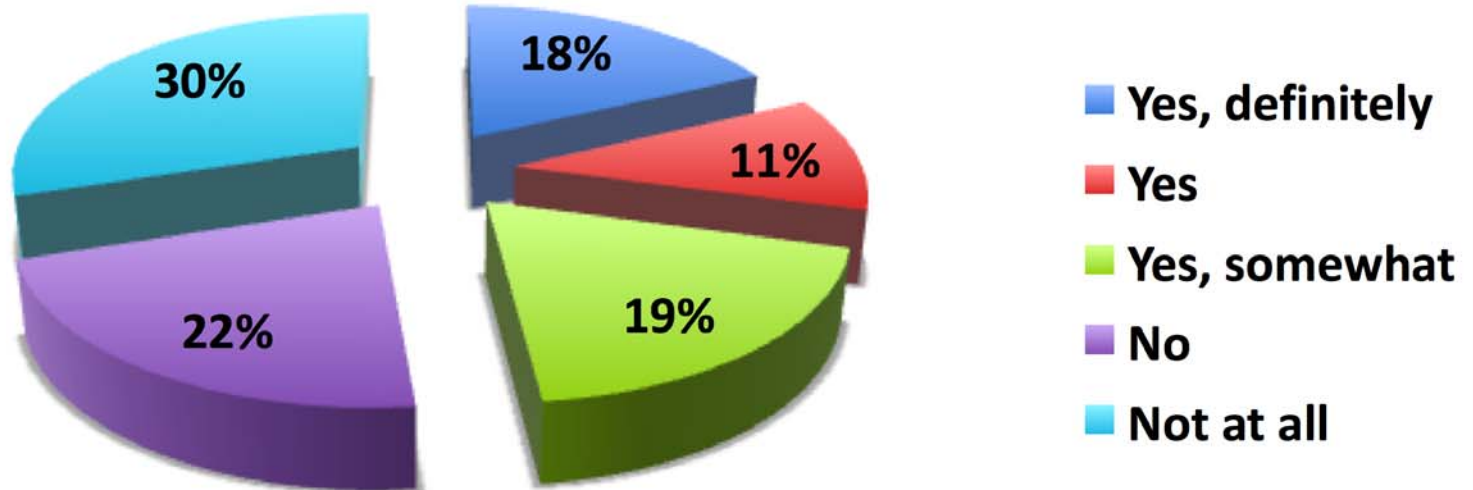
Attitudes

I think that the exam facilitates my college enrollment.



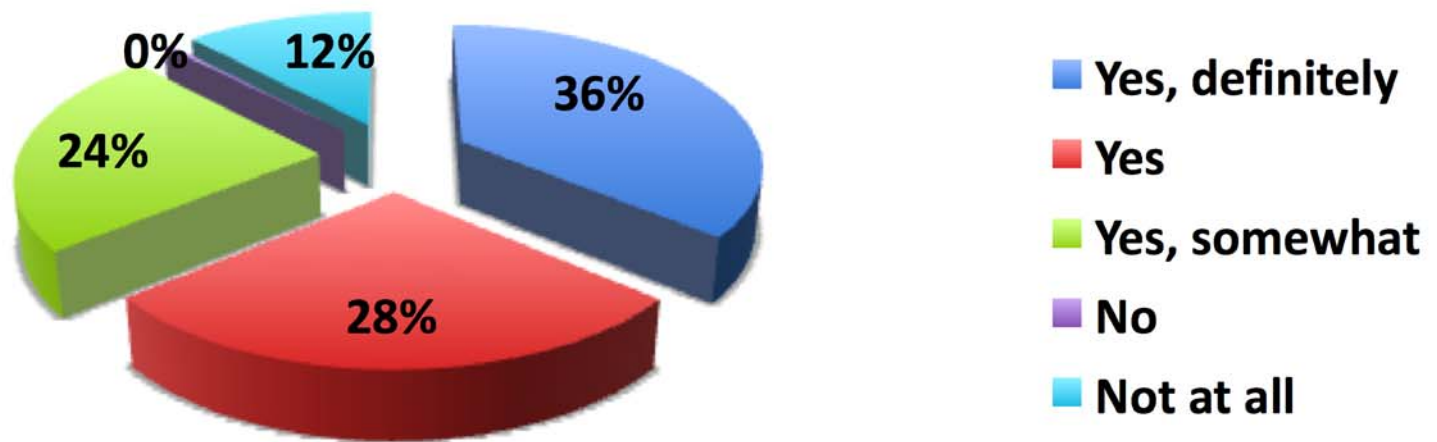
Attitudes

The exam doesn't have a purpose.



Washback

The activities we do in class are similar to those of the exam.



Comparison of skill usage

Figure 1: Frequency of Skill Use in Class—Current Year

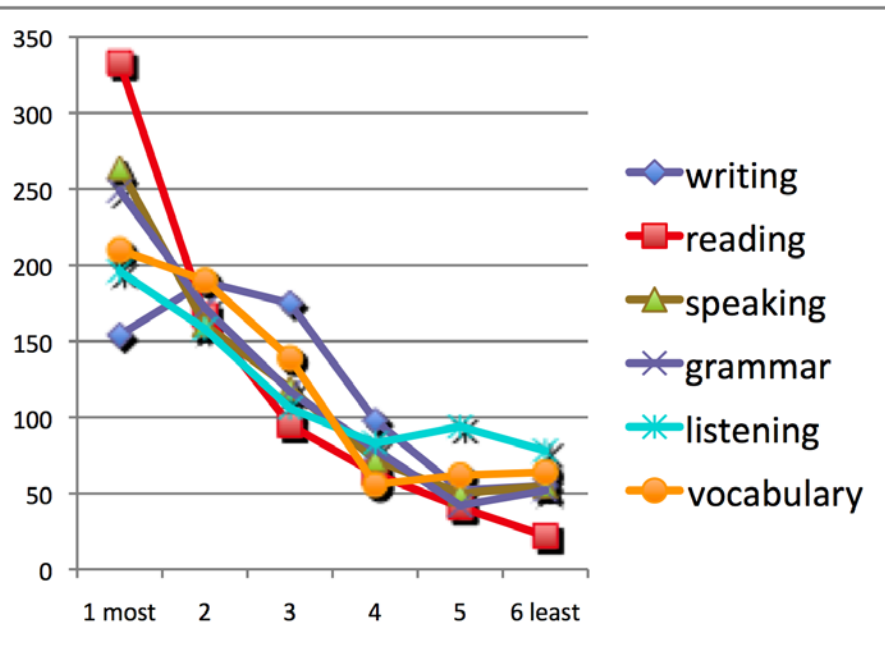
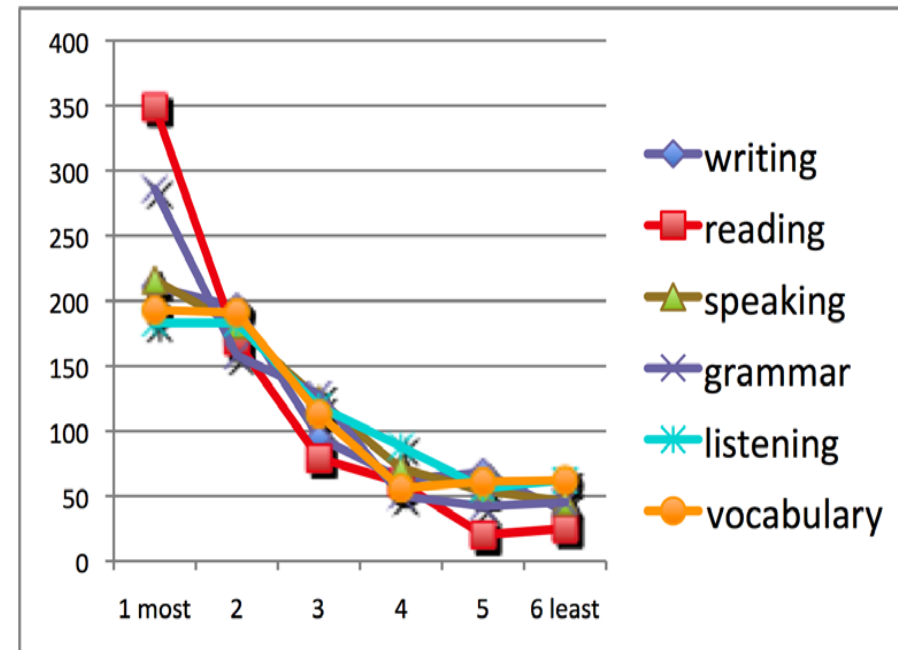
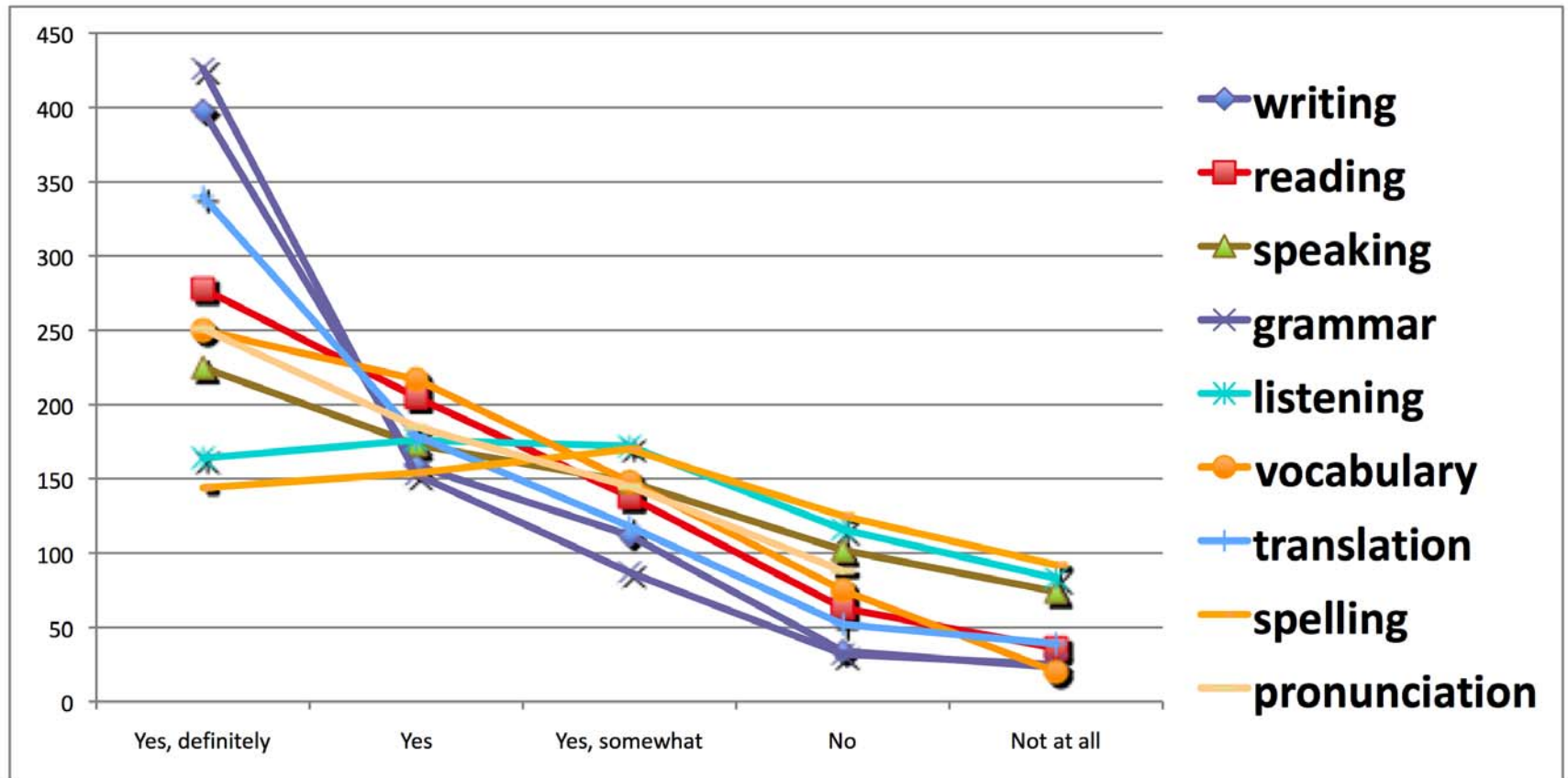


Figure 2: Frequency of Skill Use in Class—Previous Year



Skills measured in classroom assessment




Students' opinions

- “I agree that we should have the Matura exam because it helps us eliminate double evaluation from the school and the university.”
- “I think that the teacher gives us fair tests that help us show our knowledge.”
- “The Matura exam should have an oral part.”
- “I trust our teacher. She teaches us all the skills we need. I’m sure I will pass the exam.”
- “I don’t think we should have external tests. I like the tests my teacher gives us.”
- “I am very nervous when I take tests. I’m worried that it would affect my score.”

Conclusion

- Most tensions were created because of lack of communication between different stakeholders
- Students have much more positive attitudes towards the exam than expected
- The Bureau should publish research results to avoid media speculations
- The Bureau should document the Matura implementation to identify problematic areas
- The Matura has an impact on instruction



Special thanks to the Bureau for Development of Education in R. Macedonia for supporting this project.

Contact: dimovas@ecu.edu