
EXAMINATION OF THE CZECH LANGUAGE FOR PERMANENT RESIDENCE WITH FOCUS ON VIETNAMESE APPLICANTS

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The Examination of the Czech Language is a milestone on the path to gaining permanent residence in the Czech Republic for many non-EU residents. In this paper, the Language Examination is regarded in its formal, contentual, and contextual aspects from an experience-based perspective. In the beginning, the topic of administration and language methodology regarding crucial points in preparation and processing of the Exam is emphasized. The requirements of Czech and European language policy (from which the Examination is derived) are mentioned, and specific attention is paid to the oral section of the Exam as assessing the most significant language skill – speaking. In a later section, the set of the statistical data of the Exam and its results are analyzed where research findings amplify these data. The results show some unfavorable outcomes among a highly variable success rate. Testing and evaluation of the Exam are framed in the linguistic and socio-cultural context, and the potential of the Exam specifically for the integration of the Vietnamese applicants behind the monitored data and processes is illustrated. The lack of systematic language learning was detected as the main limitation of integration and overall perception of the importance of the exam among these foreign residents.

Keywords: Czech Language Examination, Czech Republic, Integration, Language Policy, Vietnamese

INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic (CR) has been an almost homogenous country since its establishment in 1993, and its population of immigrants and ethnic minorities has been quite low until recently, especially in comparison with its “Western” neighbours (e.g. Germany or Austria). This situation began

to change in the 1990s, followed by a growing number of immigrants in the new millennium and the number of registered foreigners (including the citizens of other EU countries) reached over half a million. The introduction of the *Examination of the Czech Language for Permanent Residence in the CR* (the Exam) was a targeted, necessary reaction to this changing situation. It was also one step towards the implementation of the common European language policy (after the Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004), according to which the respective residence status (Long-term stay, Permanent residence, and Citizenship) of foreigners in individual countries of the EU correlate with the various levels of required language knowledge.⁽¹⁾

Inspired by the language integration experience of other European countries, the levels of examinations of Czech as a second language correspond to the scale of foreign language knowledge according to the *CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (COE 2001). CEFR emphasizes a communicative approach to language (Milanovich 2002).⁽²⁾ Based on the testing of four main language skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking, the aim of the Exam is to determine whether the applicant for permanent residence in the Czech Republic has or has not reached A1 level.

Since 2013, the author of this paper has collaborated with the *National Pedagogical Institute (NPI CR)*, the state administrator of the Exam, and has participated as a member of its team in all parts of the preparation and organization process in different roles: as a tutor, methodologist, author of

1 The report concerned with individual European countries in the Eastern-Western geopolitical separation. For the region of Eastern Europe, it states that “language proficiency tends to be required for acquisition of citizenship rather than for permanent residence, as was already the case in 2008, and ten states have adopted measures relating to the acquisition of citizenship [...] Only three make permanent residence conditional upon language proficiency. These are Estonia, which has required level B1 from its Russian minority since 1995, Lithuania (2003) and the Czech Republic (2009)” (COE 2011, pp. 17–19).

2 As the author says, „communicative language testing evolved out of a shift in language teaching/ learning theory and methodology away from a predominantly structural focus towards one that emphasised the importance of language in use [...] The main focus of this approach is on language in practical use, as it serves the daily personal needs of an adult living in a foreign country“ (ibidem, p. 1).

the speaking tasks, and an examiner. Different questions arise from each perspective and every improvement or change in one area influences the others – and not only in positive ways. In my opinion, after more than a decade of implementation, a certain critical reflection of the Exam is warranted. So far, there is no existing complex study concerning the Exam for Permanent Residence.

In the first part of this paper, I introduce the Exam with a focus on both form and content, illustrated from the perspective of administration and language methodology. These perspectives are crucial in the preparation and processing of the Exam. As was mentioned above, the Exam is clearly defined in the binding documents at both national and European levels, making the Exam specific for the purpose of residence in the Czech Republic, while also keeping it linked to a general description of CEFR. In the second part, attention is paid especially to the oral exam as the most significant and problematic exam for the Asian speakers. The Model Exam shows types of tasks and principles of evaluation. In the third part, the available statistical data of the Exam and its results are analyzed in various ways. The results vary according to the individual test centers or candidates' origin and are developed into the feedback and research findings which amplify the data.

In the conclusion, the process of testing and evaluating the Exam is framed into the (applied) linguistic and sociocultural context. The potential of the Exam for the integration of Asian residents is one of the crucial questions in this paper. However, without the collective research involving the various aspects of integration (linguistic, cultural, educational, or institutional including the examination and other official requirements) some of the questions might remain partly unanswered.

1 FORMAT OF THE EXAM

1.1 LEGAL ASPECTS

The Exam was initiated by an amendment to the existing legal act (Zákon 1999). In January 2009 it became a compulsory legal condition for obtaining permanent residence in the Czech Republic. A foreigner can apply for

that permit after a five-year residence in the territory of the CR based on a visa for a stay of over 90 days, permit for a long-term stay, or a special legal regulation (if an asylum, complementary or temporary protection was granted). The obligation to pass the examination does not apply to citizens of the European Union. Also, some of the third-states residents are not requested to prove their language knowledge because of their age, health condition, etc. Each applicant who has successfully passed the examination shall receive a *Certificate Proving the Knowledge of the Czech Language at the A1 Level* (Nařízení 2016).

It is clear that for Czech authorities the currently set A1 Level is not appropriate. Since 2009 the periodic requirements to raise the level to A2 have appeared. The whole updated version of the Exam at A2 Level has been already completed and it will be introduced at the end of the year 2021.

1.2 REFERENCE LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe (see above). It was initiated by the Council of Europe in the 1990s as a way of standardizing the levels of language exams in different regions. Many exams are mapped to the CEFR. Its main aim is to provide a method of learning, teaching, and assessing which applies to all languages. In 2001, the European Union Council recommended using the CEFR to set up systems of validation of language ability. The six reference levels are becoming widely accepted as the European standard for the grading of an individual's language proficiency. The CEFR categorizes learners into three broad divisions with six levels: *A1*, *A2*, *B1*, *B2*, *C1*, and *C2*. For each level, it describes a learner's expected proficiency in the various domains of language use: reading, listening, speaking, and writing (COE 2001).⁽³⁾

3 Foreign language users can develop various degrees of competence in domains or sectors of social life. More specifically: "It seems that an outline framework of six broad levels gives an adequate coverage of the learning space relevant to European language learners for these purposes. [...] When one looks at these six levels, however, one sees that they are respectively higher and lower interpretations of the classic division into basic, intermediate, and advanced. The scheme therefore proposed adopts a 'hypertext' branching principle, starting from an initial division into three broad levels – A, B and C" (ibidem, pp. 21–31).

However, for testers, textbook authors, and teachers, the specification set out in the CEFR may appear excessively broad. Work has begun on drafting language specific reference level descriptions. For the Czech language, four levels have been developed by researchers: A1 (2005), A2 (2005), B1 (2001), and B2 (2005). They set the reference framework and standard for Czech as a foreign language. A1 Level (Breakthrough or Beginner) is the lowest level of the language ability. It represents the rudimentary language skills performed when a student participates in the most common everyday conversational situations concerning himself/herself, his/her place of residence, property, relatives, and interpersonal interactions when visiting public institutions and health care facilities, ordering food and consuming goods and services, obtaining accommodation, orienting oneself, or when traveling by public transport (Hádková – Línek – Vodičková 2005).

Another publication specifies the descriptive demands and language means of the Czech language for A1 and A2, as general set by the CEFR (Cvejnová et al. 2016). The description can serve as the basic framework for the development of the examinations for immigrants and as auxiliary material for their teachers. The main aim of the Description is to define the specific language content of the Exam to ensure the repeatability and reproducibility of results and adapt this examination to the language needs of immigrants.⁽⁴⁾

1.3 METHODOLOGY OF THE EXAM

The methodological support is the appropriate theoretical framework for the Exam testing (Cvejnová et al. 2008). Exam A1 (its preparation, organization, and evaluation) is based on principles common for all pre-tested certified exams: validity, reliability, and maximum possible objectivity. It is standardized using clear and (pre-)defined rules. The candidates know

4 *Register of the Lexical Units of Levels A1, A2*, the important part of the publication is a separate appendix which summarizes all the relevant lexical units (words, phrases, collocations, syntactic structures) alphabetically assigned to A1 or A2 levels, available in print and interactive online format. It is possible to search the register with a specific term or according to entered criteria (ibidem, pp. 220–310).

the test format, including the evaluation criteria and the test order and rules. The testing institution provides training test kits of each section, model task types, and other detailed information. There are strict requirements for authors and examiners, the character and the form of the test, the organization, and assessments. The individual tests routinely adapt to the standards set by the *Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)*. As a result, users of the exams can be confident that the language assessments meet specified professional standards (ALTE 2017).⁽⁵⁾

The NPI ČR also runs a registry of examiners from all test centers to which testing institutions must report all personnel changes in their teams of examiners. Although, not all testers are appropriately motivated, growing attention is being paid to the proper training of every examiner. The members of the examination committee must complete the *Training for Examiners of the Czech Language Exam for Permanent Residence* guaranteed by the NPI and become certified. This training is periodically repeated and updated (Nařízení 2016). Since 2017, the e-learning course in Moodle consists of eight modules and requires about 70 hours of individual study in eight weeks. The aim of the training lies both in increasing the qualification of examiners and in standardization of the exam results (NPI ČR 2012–2021).⁽⁶⁾

1.4 PREPARATION OF THE CANDIDATES

Exam A1 itself is not based on any specific training program, it only certifies whether the candidate is at A1 Level (CEFR) in four language skills, or whether he/she has not reached this level yet. The state institutions do

5 ALTE has established a set of common standards for its members' exams which cover all stages of the language testing process: test development; task and item writing; test administration; marking and grading; reporting of test results; test analysis; and reporting of findings. The standards ensure fairness across the entire examination process, from initial test development to final presentation of grading (ibidem).

6 The teachers must prepare themselves for examinations so that they can consistently evaluate the language performance of the exam, according to the intentions of the authors, and that their assessment within the individual testing centers is not very different. The course should limit the discrepancies of the individual examiner to the necessary minimum and set the fair conditions for the candidates (ibidem).

not ensure free courses of Czech for foreign residents. The preparation for the examination is voluntary and mostly individual. The model version is available on the website of the exam and includes an interactive model test (NPI ČR 2021d).⁽⁷⁾ Recently, NPI has also put several educational videos for foreigners on its own YouTube channel. In addition to information about the Exam, there is also a set of videos dealing with everyday situations at A1 and A2 Levels (such as the housing or medical difficulties a foreigner might face). The viewers can easily train themselves in these situations and see the typical phrases, gestures, or habits *in situ* (NPI ČR 2021c).⁽⁸⁾

Nevertheless, offering the regular courses for this exam is limited mostly to NGOs such as the *Center for Integration of Foreigners (CIC)* in Prague and test centers which provide only brief consultations. No short-term or long-term courses have been developed to support exam preparation. This seems to be one of the major deficits of the entire exam organization. With the absence of special preparation, some applicants make a considerable effort to get the tests in an alternative way. Candidates are more likely to solve problems by multiple attempts rather than by preparing properly for the Exam. Another dimension of minimal interaction of candidates with educational institutions before the exam is a kind of social exclusion based on limited access to education at or before the time of examination.

1.5 CANDIDATE'S PROFILE

Currently, the required A1 Level is sufficient to obtain a certificate issued for permanent residence in Czechia. However, it is likely not enough for foreign residents to use it for professional purposes corresponding to their education, knowledge, or experience. Achieving this level only allows them the minimal language skills for “survival” in the Czech society. In fact, the A1 Exam only adapts the selection of communicative situations, existential-

7 The set of information about the Exam is easy to access and understand. There are nine language mutations of the webpage in the most spoken migrant languages in the CR (ibidem).

8 There are over 70 short *Instructional videos for Czech as a Second Language* available on YouTube on topics related to courtesy in social interaction, accommodation related problems, visiting the public institutions, healthcare in case of emergency, etc. The level A1 or A2 (CEFR) is clearly marked in the video title (ibidem).

lly crucial at certain moments, which foreign residents in Czechia are to face very early on.

Furthermore, A1 Level users cannot extract the basic grammatical rules of the inflected language, placing emphasis on isolated phrases. Their grammar knowledge allows them to reach their communicative goals only in the few situations they are expected to need. This difficulty is particularly compounded by the wide usage of the substandard variety of Czech by native speakers, which can deviate immensely from the literary grammatical conventions. At least 75 (up to 125) teaching hours are needed to achieve communication competence at Level A1, but for some users, it takes even longer (Cvejnová et al. 2008, pp. 12–14).

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE EXAM

There is only a limited number of legal entities authorized to carry out the exam: namely the regional public schools that officially administrate certified language state exams and the *ILPS: Institute of Language and Preparatory Studies of Charles University in Prague*.⁽⁹⁾ It seems that there are two tendencies in administration: on the one hand, the Exam should be widely accessible in most of the regions of the CR and should include a higher number of testing institutions; on the other hand, with tens of testing centers the stronger tendency to standardization is hardly enforceable and thus the number of them has been decreasing.

New policies of the implementation of the Exam come from an attempt to ensure the same conditions of examination at all schools authorized to provide it. At the same time, a highly functional logistical test system was developed to ensure that the Exam shall take place in the entire territory of Czechia regularly at the same time, and the dates and relevant versions of the Exam are set centrally by the *Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports*. The roles in the organization process of examination are given

9 ILPS as the only university facility in the Czech Republic can run the Exam. The list of authorized exams centers was limited and the legal conditions for exam centers became stricter since 2016. The schools might be inspected by *Cizinecká policie (Immigration Police)* and *Česká školní inspekce (Czech School Inspection)*, and in a case of repeated failures the authorization is revoked.

(school director, pedagogical guarantor, organizer, invigilator, interviewer, and evaluators) and e-learning for all members of the committee was introduced (Nařízení 2016).

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE EXAM

The examination, which takes about 1.5 hours in total, consists of a written and an oral part. The written part verifies the candidate's skills in reading (comprehension), listening (comprehension), and writing. The oral part verifies the candidate's ability in various communicative situations. The written examination takes approximately 75 minutes (25 for reading, 35 for listening, and 15 for short writing). The remaining 15 minutes comprise the oral examination.

For each part of the examination, the candidate can acquire a maximum of 20 points, with 12 points in each (60 %) as a minimum for success. If the candidate successfully passes all subtests of the written part, he/she is given an interview in the oral part of the exam on the same day. Failure in each of four parts means a paid repetition of the entire examination. Further repetitions are unlimited; it is only necessary that the candidate does not repeatedly take the same version of the Exam (Škodová – Cvejnová 2016, pp. 9–14).

1.8 FORMAT OF THE ORAL EXAM

Speaking skills are tested in an oral interview following the written test (on reading, listening, and writing skills). The oral examination focuses on pronunciation, range of vocabulary, appropriate use of language functions, and the ability of the candidate to interact in model situations. It also evaluates the degree of use of grammar and thus the overall linguistic understanding realized in speaking. It is an individual exam, the oral interaction takes place between the candidate and the examiner who can re-formulate or repeat the tasks. The main test materials are pictures and cards as image stimuli for the candidate's responses. The communicative situations in dialogue are indicated and initiated by the interviewer. The interview takes about 15 minutes and has a fixed scenario. The examina-

tion committee consists of one interviewer and two evaluators (Cvejnová et al. 2008, p. 78).

The oral part of the exam tests a candidate's ability to realize a basic communicative intention and phonetics. After the candidate's self-introduction, he/she answers the examiner's questions related to the candidate and a set of materials (cards), versions of which are prepared for each candidate. The oral exam consists of five tasks with different test aims. They assess the candidate's ability to:

- provide basic information about himself/herself based on the questions asked (Task 1);
- read the number (amount) correctly (Task 2);
- give the information about a day of the week and a time of the day (Task 3);
- respond appropriately to the communication situation based on the picture input (Task 4);
- formulate reasonable questions to find out the required information (Task 5) (Škodová – Cvejnová 2016, p. 91).

1.9 MODEL EXAM TASKS

In task 1, an examiner subsequently asks a candidate a set of six questions which require short, open answers. The card with questions is not shown to the candidate; he reacts to the audio input only. The questions can be repeated.

In task 2, there are two parts, both dealing with a quantity to be read by the candidate. Two separate cards (a train ticket and a receipt) are given to the candidate with a simple question on its price.

In task 3, the card which represents one page of the daily schedule is given to the candidate. It consists of two pieces of important information: the date and time of the language course. It might be answered briefly by the day of the week and the exact time (the month is not required).

In task 4, the candidate immediately responds to the situation that is captured in the picture (the model situation which is written on the card takes place at home). The ensuing questions asked by the examiner repre-

sent a guideline for the candidate's answers: *Who is in the picture? What is the problem? What does his/her mother say?*

The last task, task 5, is a role-play dialogue. There is a set of four informative sentences that are read by the examiner and simultaneously shown, written on a card, to the candidate. The card also includes the question words to form the appropriate questions related to the information: object (*What?*), time (*When?*), place (*Where?*), duration (*How long?*), frequency (*How often?*), and quantity (*How much/old?*). The lines on the left and right sides of the card are disarranged so the candidate must be truly aware of the actual content of the sentence told to him/her at that moment.

1.10 EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each evaluator can assess the candidate in the oral exam with up to 20 points and a minimum of 12 points as a passing grade.⁽¹⁰⁾ The most important part of the performance, the so-called realization of communication intention, includes content adequacy (reasonable answer, description, question, etc.) and language adequacy (no major errors leading to misunderstanding or preventing the achievement of the communication goal). Tasks 2–3 represent only the correct reading of the numeral. In other tasks, the answers must be slightly more complex, but the candidate still does not have to use more than a few single words or very simple sentence structures. Finally, if the speech is understandable, the candidate must be rated by 1–3 points for the phonetic realization.

The evaluators can easily follow and grade the whole interview in the evaluation sheet just after the examining of each task; only phonetics and compensation strategies follow as a complex evaluation. After the interview is

10 Sixteen points for realization of communication intention, three points for phonetic realization and one point for compensatory strategies. If the candidate does not achieve eight points for communication, the compensating and phonetics are not evaluated, and he/she fails. The use of compensatory strategies might be not necessary during the exam and thus the candidate gets the point even when not using them. However, in case the candidate does not understand, and he/she does not attempt to clarify it, he/she does not receive a point (same in case he/she is unresponsive or his respond is completely inadequate). The evaluation in phonetics depends on to what extent is the pronunciation deviated out of the norm and complicates the clarity of the candidate's speech.

over, a mean is calculated from both evaluators' sheets, or extra time may be allowed for evaluators to consult and come to a common decision. In case of disputed results, the guarantor may come to a final decision (NPI ČR 2016).

2 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The following section will analyze some important data acquired from the annual statistical materials of the last 12 years compiled by the NPI ČR administration (NPI ČR 2021b). It is possible to look at these statistics from different points of view and to selectively scrutinize various factors. Since May 2016, only the test data and results indicating the numbers of successful exams are available, not the number of individual foreigners taking the exam. This analysis mainly concentrates on the development of the number of tests conducted over time, selected data comparison between the individual sub-periods (such as the number of examinations carried out), as well as relevant data valid within one sub-period only.

2.1 LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

Since the introduction of the Czech Exam for Permanent Residence in the Czech Republic in September 2008, the number of candidates has fluctuated in both directions. Initially increasing until 2012, the number of test takers declined rapidly until recently, with the only growing trend in the last months of 2020. For example, there were almost 10 000 (exactly 9868) successful candidates in the half-year period of May – October 2012, but in the periods of equal length in 2019 and 2020, all numbers were below 1 500 (max. 1 428). The higher numbers of candidates in the previous years might have been caused by the fact that many foreigners had been living in the Czech Republic for some time and they decided to further “legalize” their stay. Slightly growing numbers can be expected due to economic growth and the need for new human resources, even though the Czech immigration laws are becoming some of the most restrictive in the whole European Union and public opinion and politics correspond with this anti-immigration attitude.

The categorization regarding the nationality of the candidates gives us a relatively clear picture of three major countries of origin, followed by others with much lower numbers. For the whole testing period, 56 % of the successful candidates were Ukrainians, followed by Vietnamese (17 %) and Russians (10 %). The exact cumulative number of all passed exams for the two-year periods of 2012–2014, 2014–2016, 2016–2018, and 2018–2020 are shown in Table 1. The total number of candidates is closely tied with the socio-economic and demographic factors that are commented on in the conclusion.

Country	Data as of end of the year below			
	2014	2016	2018	2020
Ukraine	33 065	36 744	38 977	40 736
Vietnam	8 156	10 214	11 897	12 513
Russia	4 512	5 954	6 764	7 551
TOTAL	53 720	62 199	67 103	72 633

Table 1 Total exams passed according to the country of origin
(NPI ČR 2021b)

2.2 ANALYSIS OF TEST CENTERS DATA

In the sub-period 2016 to 2017 (Table 2), there were 32 centers actively testing foreign residents. Two centers in Prague, *Language School of the Capital City of Prague* and *ILPS (Study Center Prague-Albertov)*, examined almost half of all candidates. In general, Prague Region has by far the highest numbers of candidates. The average success rate was, similarly to other sub-periods, 59 %, with a higher rate in the above-mentioned TOP 2 centers in Prague (64 % in comparison to 54 % for the remaining 14 centers). The variation of this item for individual test centers in half-year term is 63 % and it varies from 21 % to 84 %. Such an extreme variation of success rate in individual test centers is highly undesirable. Concerning requirements of administration same as standardization of the tests as a methodological issue, this trend runs counter to improvements in the Exam towards the standards of ALTE.

TEST CENTER	Number of Exams	May 2016 to April 2017			
		Passed	Failed	Passed (%)	Failed (%)
The Language School of the Capital City of Prague	1157	813	344	70 %	30 %
ILPS, Study Center Prague- -Albertov	1376	790	586	57 %	43 %
(State) Language School Brno, Kotlarska	226	171	55	76 %	24 %
ILPS, Study Center Prague- -Krystal	206	157	49	76 %	24 %
(State) Language School Karlovy Vary	238	80	158	34 %	66 %
Regional Education Center and Language School, Pilsen	294	65	229	22 %	78 %
TOTAL 16 TEST CENTERS	5238	3024	2214	58 %	42 %
TOTAL ALL CENTERS	5787	3335	2452		

Table 2 Numbers of exams and success rates according to test centers
(NPI ČR 2021b)

Within the analyzed period, we might observe significant growth of Exams performed in *ILPS, Study Center Prague Hostivar* (tripled), and *Karlovy Vary, State Language School* (doubled). By contrast, there was a significant decrease in Exams performed in other test centers (see below). However, these changes have not dramatically influenced the success rate and we can state that there is no covariance of data between the number of exams and success rate. The higher numbers of exams at individual test centers do not lead to average or “desired” success. There is no common trend and changes are often a result of internal efforts by schools. Out of that comparison, we can just state that some test centers (with all their specifics and rates) have some potential to become more or less relevant in the total statistics of the Exam.

TEST CENTER	May 2016–October 2016 (H1) and November 2016–April 2017 (H2)						
	Exams Total	H1 Exams	H1 Ex. passed %	H2 Exams	H2 Ex. passed %	Difference between H1–H2	
ILPS, Hostivař	194	44	73 %	150	61 %	106	+241 %
School Karlovy Vary	238	79	34 %	159	33 %	80	+101 %
School Tábor	159	124	62 %	35	77 %	-89	-72 %
School Písek	197	121	53 %	76	39 %	-45	-37 %
TOTAL 16 CENTERS	5238	2524	56 %	2714	53 %	190	+20 %

Table 3 Major changes in the number of exams taken
(NPI ČR 2021b)

When going back to the success rate, one must inevitably ask *what causes such a high variation*. Many different factors can be potential reasons for this. The productive skills such as writing and speaking tend to be evaluated with a high degree of an individual attitude of the testers. I had the opportunity to observe this trend as a tutor as well as an examiner, and my opinion is that current training for examiners is not sufficient for them to adapt to the required standards. Individual shortcomings of the testers are also common, and subjective attitudes and potential for error are inevitable and cannot fully disappear from the evaluation. More serious are the failures at the institutional level, and in the case of an important Residence Exam, these factors should be eliminated to a minimum, as the consequences can reach far beyond the topic of this paper.

2.3 ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Table 4 displays the total number of successfully passed exams during the last three sub-periods in 2019 and 2020. As in previous years, there is a dominance of Ukrainians, Vietnamese, and Russians. They are also members of the largest national minorities in the Czech Republic (excluding Slovaks).

Country	Long period of Examination (9/2008-12/2020)	7-12/2019 (H2)	1-6/2020 (H1)	7-12/2020 (H2)
Ukraine	40 736	421	364	542
Vietnam	12 513	152	102	518
Russia	7 551	195	159	530
TOTAL	72 633	1 092	899	1 427

Table 4 Exams passed according to the country of origin
(NPI ČR 2021b)

The short-term decrease in total numbers, particularly of Vietnamese applicants, might be caused by administrative reorganization, as there was an introduction of new versions and more difficult legal conditions of the Exam (including the absence of the previously problematic schools). However, the deterrent effect of the new versions seems to be overcome and the numbers appear closer to the previous standard. The temporary interruption of examinations in the first half of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic also played a significant role.

In the methodological work, pre-testing is one of the most important means of feedback about the individual task items. We also analyze entire exam sets and parts of the exam in process and functional retrospective. In general, productive skills such as writing and speaking are more problematic for the candidates, resulting in a lower success rate. Additionally, there are differences according to the country of origin. For candidates speaking Slavic languages (Ukrainians or Russians), writing is the hardest part, though still

with a success rate of over 80 percent. For non-Slavic candidates such as Vietnamese represented in Table 5, speaking seems to be the most difficult part of the Exam with the success rate of just 72 % (followed by the listening comprehension with 77 %). The comparison of the success rate of three groups of candidates at the individual exam parts can be seen in Table 5.

Country	Year 2020			
	Reading	Listening	Writing	Speaking
Ukraine	95 %	97 %	85 %	83 %
Vietnam	84 %	66 %	81 %	46 %
Russia	100 %	100 %	98 %	96 %
Total	91 %	86 %	83 %	70 %

Table 5 Success rate in the individual Exam tests
(NPI ČR 2021b)

The basic reason for the success rate difference is self-evident: it is caused by the distance of the L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (Czech as a second language), determined by the Slavic or non-Slavic origin of the candidates. For deeper analysis of the success rates in the above-mentioned table it is important to look separately at the format of every part of the Exam and its evaluation criteria. In Task 1 of the writing test, for example, the candidate must fill in few words: a name or an address into the given form (such as a form at the post office). In Task 2, he/she has to write a simple text, SMS or e-mail, to the extent of 20 words with the given picture input (e.g. picture with a vocabulary of a shopping list). The writing tasks and their evaluation at A1 Level represent rather the ability to rewrite and organize the information from the given input into a form or a short text. These tasks are still easier to learn by heart which is the learning approach common for Asian learners.⁽¹¹⁾ By contrast, the speaking exam is easier for

¹¹ Spontaneous and rather unpredictable speaking interaction or listening comprehension is more difficult. The results show that in writing Vietnamese are just slightly below the average. For listening and speaking, the success rate goes more below the average rate of all candidates (ibidem).

those who can easily understand and react in the common situations such as many Ukrainian candidates.⁽¹²⁾

2.4 SPEAKING TASK 1 EXAMPLE

At the secondary level, one should also focus on each of the tasks in the oral exam. The individual test items are compiled into the micro-sets (task level, where each micro-set has an ID number) and then into the whole exam set (each set forms a unique of the Exam variant). All levels show quite a high variation, but not all are discernible through the statistics. I concentrate on a newer version, but some items on the right side of the charts below might have been in use for quite a long time (since 2015). In the charts below, there is an average success rate in various micro-sets. It shows here only the first and most significant task.

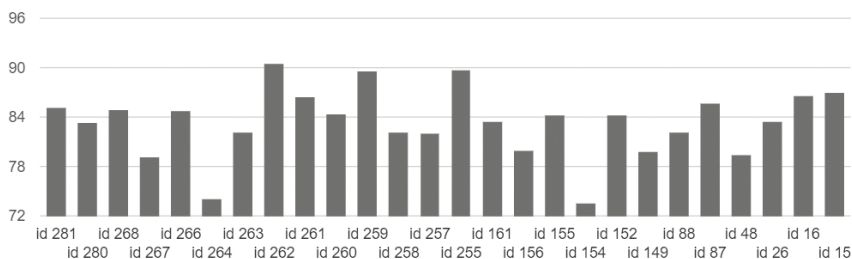


Chart 1 Percentage success rate in Task 1
(NPI ČR 2021a)

The non-desirable extreme values are mostly reflected by their regular replacement. For the following short analysis, I have eliminated the values of IDs that have not been sufficiently examined (less than 70 evalua-

¹² Writing test relates to some problems. There are candidates to whom the written communication in Czech is not so common (manual laborers). Errors in written text are getting more obvious and they are often caused by so-called “false friends”, different syntactic structures or declension patterns in seemingly similar Slavic languages. Last, switching of different writing systems (such as Cyrillic in case of Russians or Ukrainians) to the Czech alphabet is not always automatic and absolute even with knowledge of the English alphabet.

tions). The variation scales resulting from the individual tasks results are following: Task 1–16 % (74–90.5); Task 2a–14 % (80.4–94); Task 2b–16 % (74.5–90.2); Task 3–7 % (92.9–100); Task 4–9 % (91.4–100); Task 5–17 % (78.3–95). The highest variety appears in the tasks requiring open answers (Task 1) or questions (Task 5; NPI ČR 2021a). All the chart data can also be seen in relation to the origin of the candidates and in the later research analyzed with regard to the problematic items for each language group. The potential of these statistics lies in their interpretation and potential utilization for various purposes regarding the Exam itself as well as language courses or textbooks tied to the Exam.

3 CONCLUSION

The Czech Language Exam for Permanent Residence has been administered for more than a decade. After a period of first-hand experience with the project, I believe there is an objective need for reflection on the exam and its administration. In this paper, I introduced the Exam with a focus on both its formal and content-related aspects. At first, I looked at the matter from the point of administration and language methodology. These perspectives are crucial in the process of the preparation and administering of the Exam. Later, I paid attention particularly to the speaking exam as the most significant one of the four tested language skills. Ultimately, I analyzed the available statistical data of the Exam and its results. The conclusions drawn through analysis of this Exam lead the study in two directions: first, to reflect on the process and its results, and second, to highlight the broader context, especially the socio-cultural consequences.

3.1 PROCESSUAL PERSPECTIVE

The Exam (and its format) is limited in many ways, principally according to its administrative purpose. Thus, the Exam is primarily a language evaluation of the candidate based on the testing of his/her language skills. Then, based on his/her evaluation, it serves as a determination of whether he/she has reached the A1 Level (SERR) needed to pass the Exam, and

is thus entitled to obtain Permanent Residence in the Czech Republic. The procedural or administrative aspects of the Exam come to the foreground from the perspectives of both the authorities and the candidates. However, seen from the viewpoint of methodologists and testers, there are more specific details and the whole background of the process to evaluate.

On the one hand, the Exam in its newer versions reflects the previous deficiencies to meet the requirements of ALTE (even though the administrator as a non-member of ALTE is not obliged to do so and this decision is only voluntary). The Exam is linked to the documents of European language policy, mainly CEFR, and is easily comparable in its degree to any other exam in the common European scale of language ability. Another Referential Description was compiled specifically for this Exam and has helped to establish its solid parameters. The legislative and organizational framework was also amended and updated to eliminate the institutional or individual faults to a minimum, which has hopefully created fairer conditions. Further training of examiners has increased the objectivity of evaluation and has helped them to understand the high importance of the Exam.

On the other hand, it still seems that the educational and institutional environment is rather unwelcoming to the migrants and quite distant from the real needs of the candidates. The state and institutions have partly failed in their communication, deeper social insights, and preliminary work with the target group. In effect, the gap between foreign residents and Czech authorities has not diminished recently (Schebelle – Horáková 2012, pp. 37–41). Emblematic of the low state effort is the inability to organize any effective language training or other preparation for the candidates. With the lack of institutional preparation, the Exam does not represent significant obstacle for obtaining Permanent Residence owing only to the low level and allowance of unlimited repetitions, and therefore is not a reliable metric of determining the real Czech language knowledge of immigrants.

Additionally, going up one difficulty level to A2 Level will not improve the knowledge of the Czech language among foreign residents unless it is adequately and effectively supported by appropriate training. The Exam does not attract the real interest of applicants for language integration into

Czech society, and further development of examinations must take this experience into account (Cvejnová 2014, p. 349). It is apparent that the core set of issues is reaching beyond the linguistic and into sociologically relevant issues, imploring us to consider more effective and sophisticated ways of the integration of foreign residents for our future development.

In this context, the basic question is whether the Exam has enabled the language integration of migrants or not, and whether the Exam has facilitated or impeded this integration process in general and for specific foreign communities living in the Czech Republic. The related research on integration issued in the CR has been conducted and supported by the EU structural funds (Drbohlav – Ezzedine-Lukšíková 2004; Drbohlav – Džúrová 2007). As it is quite a complex problem, I will only relate the conclusion to the specific studies on language integration of adult migrants of Vietnamese origin.

3.2 VIETNAMESE IN FOCUS

The official policy of the Czech Republic links successful integration with the knowledge of the Czech language. Contradictorily, there is much less official attention paid to the mother tongue and culture of the migrants as seen in the example of the Vietnamese community in the CR. Their cultural impact on the major population is unfortunately minimal. There exist many stereotypes stemming from a lack of knowledge and understanding. Current Czech society (and most of its administration) is dominantly tied to the demands of assimilation, not unlike the situation in many formerly socialist countries.

In sum, the immigrants most satisfied with their quality of life are those for whom it is not important to live close to their compatriots and those whose knowledge of the spoken Czech language is above average. The lowest satisfaction score is tied to those immigrants who prefer to live close to their compatriots, those with university education, and those with a low income. Good knowledge of the Czech language seems to be a gateway to immigrants' satisfaction (Drbohlav – Džúrová 2007, pp. 69–70).

However, change in societal attitude should contribute to the understanding that mother tongue and target language are complementary in the integration process and should receive the same consideration and significance. As Lin says, “successful integration requires consideration on the interaction of languages and culture between migrants themselves and host community. If it is only conducted one-sided, integration has great chance of failing [...] It is assumed that the only approach to have a successful integration in societies is to maintain the linguistic and cultural diversity” (Lin 2016, p. 98). The lack of interaction and intercultural dialogue might be the reason why especially the first generation of Asian migrants refuses to come out of isolation and feel obliged to protect their community against the influence of the mainstream. In comparison, the second generation is rather assimilated and has developed separately.

It seems that the solution is in education. Thanks to long-term and quite successful schooling, the second generation of the Vietnamese has reached an equal status in Czech society. They were gradually allowed to enter the Czech education system without any major costs or barriers. Lin concluded that “the identity construction of Vietnamese and their second generation is developing reversely mainly due to two reasons: their internal cultural isolation and an education level which is supposed to be influenced by the current linguistic integration policy” (Lin 2017, p. 31). The motivation to study is much higher for young incomers than for the majority of the Exam applicants. For them, mostly one generation older, the motivation to learn the target language at their own costs is quite low, regardless of the real purpose. Full integration can only be achieved by linking the Exam with language learning, preferably for free or at minimal costs. The achievement of these goals in education planning is crucial for the further development of Czech language policy.

The administration should reflect the negative experience of the migrant communities and prevent sources of potential social frustration. The success also necessitates changes in media coverage of immigration topics. The public opinion inclines to the higher difficulty of language tests for foreigners (following the increase of the Exam to A2 Level). However,

as mentioned above, its effects might be far from the desired aims and even further from a positive change in the predominantly negative attitude towards migrants.

In the current concept of integration into Czech society, the Exam represents one of the “integration milestones”. Nevertheless, I am afraid that the problem looks different from the perspective of foreign residents with their rather negative life experiences in the host country. In a situation where the Exam is just an isolated administrative step without deeper ambitions, it cannot meet the real integration needs, and I am convinced that the application of stricter language requirements will ease the integration process only in specific or minor aspects without having a broader positive impact.

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