

**Secondary School Leaving Exams and Cambridge Exams in the Czech Republic: A
Comparison of English Language Levels**

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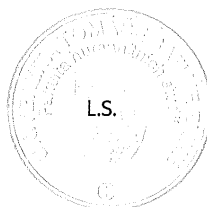
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ABSTRAKT

Tématem mé bakalářské práce je porovnání jazykové úrovně státní maturitní zkoušky z anglického jazyka v České Republice s Cambridgeskými zkouškami. Teoretická část práce popisuje Společný evropský referenční rámec a charakterizuje dílčí jazykové úrovně. Dále představuje státní maturitní zkoušku v České Republice a Cambridgeské zkoušky. Součástí praktické části je analýza jazykové úrovně jednotlivých zkoušek a následné porovnání.

Klíčová slova:

Společný evropský referenční rámec, jazykové úrovně, státní maturita z anglického jazyka, Cambridgeské zkoušky, kvalifikace jazykových schopností

ABSTRACT

The topic of my bachelor thesis is a comparison of language level of Secondary school leaving examinations in the Czech Republic and Cambridge examinations. The theoretical part of the thesis describes Common European Framework of Reference and deals with the particular language levels description, as well as the description of the Secondary school leaving examinations and the Cambridge examinations. The practical part includes an analysis of the language level of the Secondary school leaving examinations and the Cambridge examinations and their comparison.

Keywords:

Common European Framework of Reference, language levels, secondary school leaving examinations, Cambridge examinations, qualification of language skills

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INTRODUCTION

This work deals with Language testing, concretely with Czech school leaving examinations and Cambridge examinations (ESOL). The work compares the language level of these two examinations according to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The aim of the thesis is to research the equivalence among the Czech school leaving examinations (Maturita) and compare them to the language level of the Cambridge examinations, mainly to First Certificate in English (FCE). The result of the work will help us to understand the difference and give us an idea about preparation and languages skills proved by some language examinations. I hoped to learn more about a language testing and help not only myself but also the others to understand this issue. I have chosen this topic because the School leaving examinations in relation with the Cambridge examinations is a constantly discussed issue in today's world.

The thesis is divided into two parts: theoretical and practical.

The theoretical part starts with a description of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) which is the key instrument for the language testing and assessment. The first section of the theoretical part includes the basic introduction of CEFR, history and description of language levels defined by CEFR from A1 to C2. The second section of the theoretical part, the School leaving examinations in the Czech Republic, characterizes the basic introduction of the examinations, their structure and division. There are not many sources concerning this topic, which provides an opportunity for further authors. The third section of the theoretical part continues with an introduction of the Cambridge examinations ESOL and describes the particular types of the examinations (KEY, PET, FCE, CAE, and CPE) in more detail. Based on this, we can get a basic idea of a difference in content, structure and difficulty according to CEFR. The last chapter of the theoretical part is devoted to the methods of qualifying all language skills.

The practical part is based on a questionnaire and an empiric survey of the English teachers. Acquired information is based on experience of the experts in the field of language learning and assessment. It is divided into three parts. The first part is focused on an analysis of the Maturita examinations based on the questionnaire survey and interviews, The Cambridge examinations based on the questionnaire survey and interviews are analysed in the second part. Subsequently, both results compared in the third part. The primary goal of the thesis is an analysis of the English language testing according to CEFR and assessment of different language examinations and consecutive comparison. The thesis

researches the different methods and contents of preparation. Finally, all acquired information is presented in the graphs (accompanied by a commentary) which show comparison of each language level of both examinations. This part applies knowledge gained in the theoretical part.

The entire thesis has a common interest: to define and compare the language level of both examinations according to CEFR.

I. THEORY

1 COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE (CEFR)

1.1 Basic introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference is a comprehensive document which was created by Council of Europe to provide common basis for the elaboration of language syllabi, curriculum guidelines, examinations and textbooks across Europe to all foreign language learners. (Morrow 2004, 77) The Common European Framework of Reference is commonly abbreviated as “CEFR” and this abbreviation will be used in the rest of the thesis. The Council of Europe (2001, 1 - 7) classifies CEFR as the key instrument for learning languages. Foreign language learners have an objective vision about achievements in their language skills and can compare reached language skills with other learners in every stage of learning and in the whole process of learning a language. CEFR describes what language level needs to be reached to use foreign language for communication and what language skills need to be amplified to act effectively in that particular language. It is supposed to break barriers in communication among professionals in modern language fields in various educational systems in Europe. The cultural context is an integral part of the description of a foreign language level. Providing objective criteria for language qualification helps us to recognize qualifying language certificates reached in different study contexts and thereby helps us to improve mobility in Europe. The goal of creating CEFR was to achieve better unity among learners across the Europe and make teachers to co-operate.

Why do we need CEFR? The idea of creating common language reference levels was to construct a solid basis for comparing qualified language certificates and other learning materials. Another reason was to support and facilitate collaboration among the educational institutions in different countries in Europe and help students, teachers, creators of learning materials and examining commissions coordinate their efforts. Based on different functions which CEFR offers reference levels need to be coherent, transparent and comprehensive. (Council of Europe 2001, 1 - 7)

According to North, Angeles and Sheehan (2010, 6) the CEFR scale differs from other national language frameworks in two main viewpoints. Firstly, it emphasizes the competences the learner needs (pragmatic, linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic, intercultural) as a language user and it progresses the familiar but inadequate four language

skills into more complex description of activities of the learner. Secondly, it provides validated descriptors in a form “I can” of these different aspects of its descriptive scheme.

1.2 History of CEFR

The Common European Framework of References: Learning, teaching, assessment was developed between the years 1993 and 1996 by the Council of Europe, which is the oldest organization on the continent connecting Western, Central and Eastern Europe. The international working party of the Council of Europe created CEFR based on the recommendation of intergovernmental symposium Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe which took place in Rüşchlikon (near Zürich), Switzerland in 1991. The goal of developing CEFR was introducing common reference points equivalent to the common reference levels. The Council of Europe hoped that by creating common reference points language examinations and courses would have better connection and in this way they will reach the transparency and coherence, which had been discussed at Rüşchlikon symposium. (Martyniuk 2010, 3- 12) After several discussions, meeting and consulting processes, which took ten years, the official version of Framework was published in 2001 in English, French and German. Today it is translated into and published in almost forty languages across the whole Europe and it has been broadly adopted. (North, Angeles, Sheehan 2010, 7)

According to Martyniuk (2010, 3 – 12) came the first concept of the Council of Europe reference levels scale (A1- C2) from presentation by David Wilkins in Ludwigshafen symposium in 1978. This attempt was unsuccessful but put a model for the future CEFR levels which corresponded with the seven levels suggested by Wilkins and five levels created by ALTE (the Association of Language Testers in Europe). Later, between the years 1993 - 1996 two members of the CEFR Working Party added the illustrative descriptors for these levels which were supported by Swiss National Science Foundation.

1.3 Structure of CEFR

CEFR researches language skills on several levels related to speaking and writing. When speaking, a learner creates a text which is spoken and received by one or more listeners. The performance can contain loud reading of a written text, spoken text based on the learner’s notes or visuals such as diagrams or pictures, demonstration of a prepared role,

spontaneous spoken speech or singing. In written performance a language learner creates a continuous written text intended for one or more readers. An examples connected with written performance are filling in a form or questionnaire, writing an article for newspapers or magazines, creation of posters, writing messages, recording notes, recording spoken messages, writing personal or business letters. In case of the activities connected with listening skills, a language learner accepts and processes new spoken information from one or more speakers. These listening activities can contain listening to public speeches (information, warning), listening to media (television, radio, audio records, movies), listening to dialogues or listening in a role of a participant in a bigger audience (in theatre, public lectures). Another inseparable part of a language testing is reading. A learner as a reader accepts and processes a written text from one or more writers. Forms of reading contain for example reading for the purpose of orientation in the whole text, informative reading (using reference manuals), reading and understanding instructions and reading for fun. (Council of Europe, 13 - 15)

1.3.1 Division of reference levels

CEFR distinguishes six basic reference levels which are today's standard in European grading system of language proficiency. Three basic board divisions (A, B and C) are divided into six reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2). These reference levels are based on different language skills of a learner such as understanding the listening of a foreign language, reading, quality of spoken communication and quality of written communication. The lowest reference level marked as “A” stands for basic user, letter “B” marks an independent user and letter “C” stands for a proficient user. (Council of Europe 2001, 23) Every basic reference level can be further divided into more concrete levels marked with number one or two and the symbol plus.

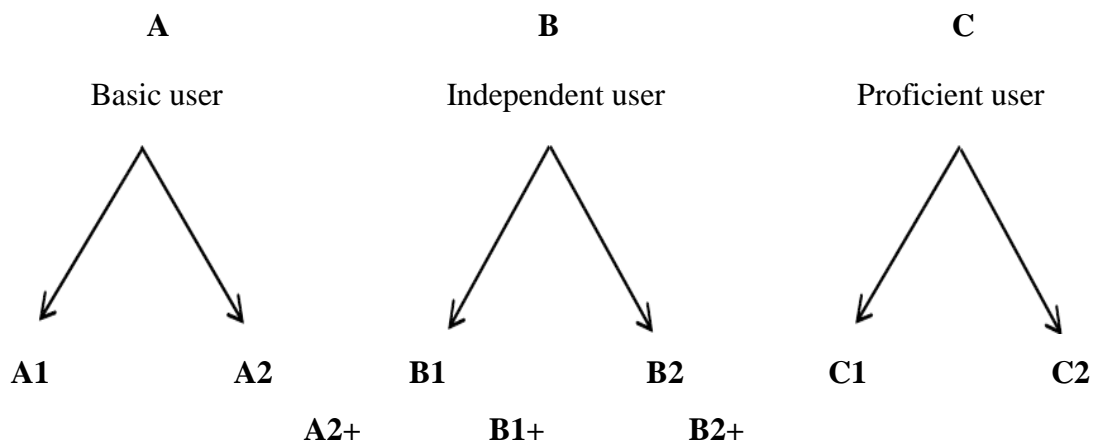


Figure 1. Nine level scale division of reference levels

Source: Data from Council of Europe 2001

1.3.2 Description of language levels due to CEFR**A1- Breakthrough**

Level A1 is considered as the lowest level of generative language use on the CEFR scale intended for beginners who understand simple sentences about themselves and surroundings (where they live, how old they are, about things they have, people they know). The group of authors North, Angeles and Sheehan (2010, 25) defines A1 level as a point where learner is able to interact in a simple way. According to the Council of Europe (2001, 24) learners are able to hold a very simple conversation with a speaker who listens patiently to them and is ready to help. They can express only simple and basic thoughts about themselves on very familiar topics by using collocations known from studying and everyday expressions.

Learners are able to fill in personal information in short forms or write a postcard. Breakthrough learners can interact in a simple way, ask simple questions and introduce themselves. Learners can join a very simple conversation without a need to rely on rehearsed phrases. (European Centre for Modern Languages 2011, 29)

A2- Waystage

Students at this level can hold short social exchanges, understand a spoken text about themselves, surroundings, work or shopping and everyday life. They are able to read simple texts such as menu in the restaurant or a short simple letter. The learners are able to interact in a simple way partly using past tense. They are capable of a short description and they can write a letter about themselves. (Council of Europe 2001, 24) European Centre for Modern languages (2011, 28 – 29) defines this level as a degree of language skills where we can find most of the descriptors which determine social functions such as using everyday polite ways of greeting and salutation, reaction to everyday news, joining very simple social dialogues, asking and answering simple questions about work and free time. Level A2 contains descriptors stating social functions and situations in everyday life for example acting in public places such as shops, banks, post offices etc.

A2+ level, a higher level than A2, (Strong Waystage) is created by a stronger performance and more active participation in spoken interactions. Ability of preservation a

monologue is much higher than at level A2. A learner is still considered as a basic user but is already closer to B1 level. (European Centre for Modern Languages 2011, 28 - 29)

B1- Treshold

Treshold level is characterized by two main features. The first one is the ability of expressing things comprehensively with pausing for grammatical and lexical preparation. Students at this level understand speech related to actual questions. They understand the texts containing feelings, they can communicate in common life situations and they can easily discuss the topics they are familiar with. They are able to narrate stories, express their feelings and write the texts about their interests or write letters using conditionals. The learner is able to hold a continuous interaction and express what he really wants to express in the whole range of contexts. The second specific feature of B1 level is that the learner is able to solve problems and unusual situations in everyday life such as making complaints, solving unusual situation in public transport, ability to join conversation about a familiar topic without previous preparation and being initiative in interactions. (the Council of Europe, 24)

European Centre for Modern Languages (2011, 28) defines a more complex version of B1 level which is B1+ different in the amount of information a learner is able to exchange with the second speaker. A student is for example capable of giving complex descriptions and detailed instructions of the situations he is familiar with.

B2- Vantage

Level B2 represents a change in content. As defined by the Council of Europe (2001, 24) a learner able to use a foreign language at level B2, Vantage understands a spoken word dealing with common problems from everyday life for example television or radio broadcasting. They can hold a fluent conversation with a native speaker in a familiar area, express their point of view and advantages or disadvantages of various options of that particular problem. B2 level is focused on an effective argument. Speakers are a natural part of a fluent and spontaneous conversation with a native speaker without imposing any strain on either party. The speaker recognizes if a conversation or vocabulary is appropriate to the situation and can understand a language also in a noisy environment.

Reading skills are comparable to speaking; learners can read modern literature, mostly prose in actual language. Written skills are already advanced, learners at B2 level

can write a detailed text describing an area they are familiar with and put a clear meaning in it. They can understand main thoughts of complicated texts including concrete or abstract topics (also technical directed discussions in their field). A typical feature of B2 level is a new degree of language awareness. If speaker becomes conscious of mistakes made during conversation or if mistakes lead to misunderstanding, the speaker is able to correct those mistakes. (the Council of Europe 2011, 24)

European Centre for Modern Languages (2010, 28) defines stronger performance than B2 which is marked as B2+ level. It is focused more on a social discourse and an effective argument. Language awareness of mistakes made in conversation continuous at B2+ level. Speakers usually use more linking words and pay more attention to coherence and cohesion.

C1- Effective Operational Proficiency

Learners at C1 level are characterized by broad communication skills, fluent and spontaneous conversation. They are able to express themselves immediately without further preparation almost effortlessly. Their lexical range is wide but if there is a gap in a conversation they are able to fill it using circumlocutions. Fluent and natural conversation can be interrupted only in case of a difficult topic. Compared to B2+, the discourse skills are much more developed and fluency on spoken language is more emphasized. The speaker at C1 level can select a suitable expression or phrase to make his conversation cohesive and well-structured. (European Centre for Modern Languages 2011, 27)

Martyniuk (2010, 6) claims that the learner at C1 is characterized by an appropriate choice of connectors, organizational patterns and almost flawless ability to communicate.

C2- Mastery

Learners at this level are highly successful learners of a language who reached the degree of precision. They are able to recognize and use shades in meaning by using reasonable accuracy, they have a wide lexicon containing idiomatic expressions and colloquialism including awareness of connotative meaning. Professionals cannot emphasize enough that learners at this level still do not reach the professionalism of a native speaker. (European Centre for Modern Languages 2011, 27)

Table 1. Common reference levels

A1	Breakthrough
A2	Waystage
B1	Threshold
B2	Vantage
C1	Effective Operational Proficiency
C2	Mastery

Source: Data from North 2007

1.4 Use of CEFR

CEFR allows two different examinations to be related to each other indirectly despite the fact that they are not exactly equal. The orientation of examinations may be various but their coverage can be profiled according to CEFR levels scale. (European Centre for Modern Languages 2011, 18)

Based on the evidence CEFR has got the major influence on language education because it is used in all educational sectors. When coordinating the aims of language education CERF is widely recognized as the primary instrument for every language level. In some countries strategic language policy documents and practical teaching materials based on CEFR have been developed. CEFR is also becoming the most reliable source for curriculum planning throughout Europe, but there are also opinions of some other countries that CEFR has rather an inconsequential influence on education at a school level. (Byram, Parmenter 2012, 1)

2 SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

2.1 General introduction to the current situation

School leaving examinations at the end of a secondary school in the Czech Republic have got a long tradition. Commonly, they are known as “Maturita examinations” and this terminology will be used in the rest of the thesis. The current Maturita examinations consist of two main parts: the state (collective) part and school (profile) part. To succeed in the Maturita examinations a student has to pass both parts. In case of a failure the examined has to retake only the part in which he did not succeed. This model of state the Maturita examinations is according to the valid legislation of the Czech Republic with cooperation of the Cermat company which provides language testing of students at the end of a secondary school. (Nová Maturita 2014)

2.2 Structure of Maturita

The state (collective) part of Maturita consists of two obligatory examinations and one optional. The first obligatory examination is a Czech language test which all students have to take and the second one is a mathematics or foreign language test. A student can choose one of these tests. There is a possibility to take one more optional examination from mathematics or a foreign language. All tests are currently only in one level of difficulty (unlike the previous years). A foreign language test can be taken from: English, German, Spanish, French and Russian. (Nová Maturita 2014) The rest of the thesis will be focused only on the English language examination.

The school part of Maturita is totally under the direction of a particular school. The management of the school determinates the requirements for all students (two or three obligatory examinations and one optional). (Nová Maturita 2014)

Below is listed an illustrative model for current Maturita examinations in the Czech Republic where two parts of the examination and detailed division of subjects including obligatory and optional examinations are demonstrated.

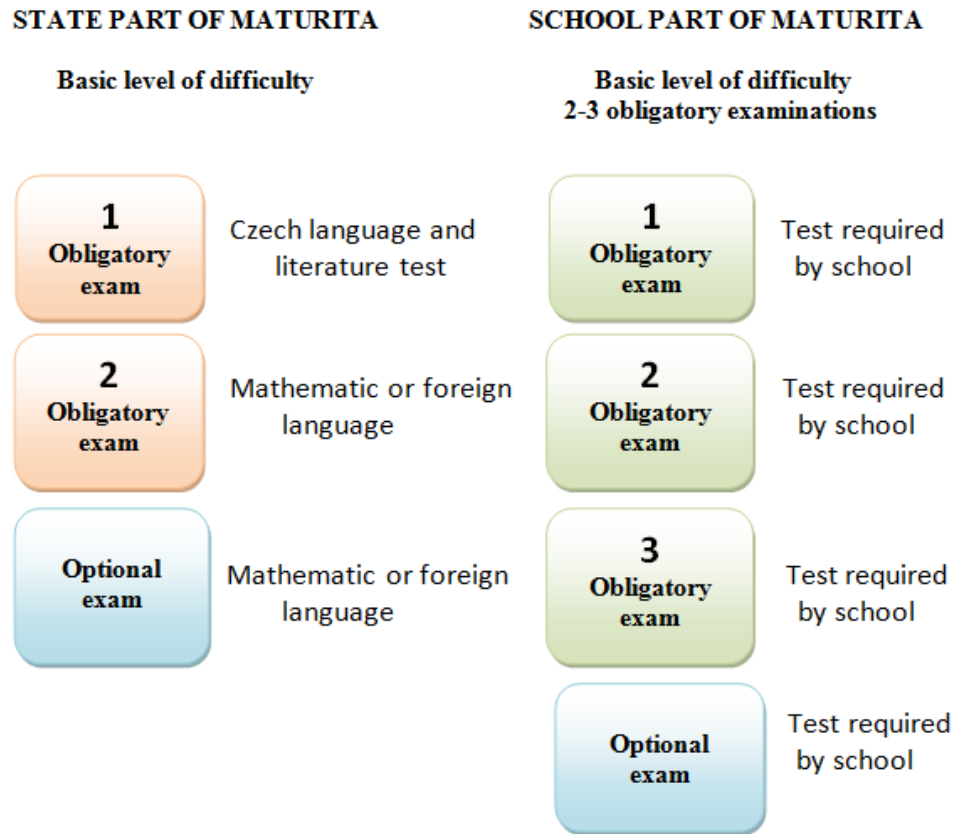


Figure 2. Model of current Maturita examinations

Source: data from Nová Maturita 2014

2.3 English language test at state Maturita examination

Each language test has got characteristics of a complex examination. This means that each language test (including the Czech language) consists of three parts: a didactical test, written test and oral test. Assessment is according to 2:1:1 scale. The reason for such complexity of the whole Maturita examination is reaching all crucial parts of language skills. The partial sections of didactical test and written test are centrally administrated and evaluated (by Cermat company) which means that the test assignment is the same for all students and examination takes place at the same time everywhere in the whole Czech Republic. (Nová Maturita 2014) This makes the examination more valuable at the level of equality of the students. The oral part is held according to a particular school, organized and evaluated by its language teachers who know their students from their previous studies. The thesis further deals only with the didactical and written part of Maturita examination which is more adequate for the comparison.

The didactical test contains of two subtests, reading and listening, which last for 35 and 60 minutes, the written test lasts for 60 minutes and the oral testing is 15 minutes long. (Nová Maturita 2014)

Nowadays, the difficulty of the Maturita examination is considered as “the basic level of difficulty”. This claim will be the subject of the survey research in the practical part of the thesis.

Little Genius

Already by the age of three, Lisa Pratt had mastered mathematics. In fact, in her first years at school she spent more time entering numbers into a calculator than reading books. Today, however, 9-year-old Lisa is interested in nearly everything. She likes to spend her time reading, playing sports, and watching the Disney Channel. Also, Lisa has done something that not many adults have: she's started her own Internet business, developing websites that help people who have trouble with computers.

(www.shortnews.com, upraveno)

8 What does the article say about Lisa?

- A) She enjoys mathematics more than reading.
- B) She uses the Internet to learn about computers.
- C) She has made websites since she was three years old.
- D) She creates websites to help people with computer problems.

Figure 3. Example of language difficulty of Maturita examinations

Source: Data from CERMAT 2013

2.4 Assessment of Maturita

The borderline for passing the didactical test is 44% of successful answers and it is evaluated according to 2:1:1 scale where reading and listening (two parts) represent the importance of 2, writing and oral test represent the importance of 1. (Nová Maturita 2014)

The written part consists of two more parts (usually a letter and an essay) with different assignment. Each part is evaluated separately according to four criteria. The final evaluation of the written part is a total number of reached points from both parts.

The four criteria for evaluation are:

1. Relevant answers to the assignment/ content of the written part
2. Organization and cohesion of the text
3. Vocabulary and grammar
4. Choice of language devices

(Nová Maturita 2014)

Every part of Maturita is assessed on the basis of counting all reached points overall. According to the total number of points (plus the oral school examination) the final mark is defined.

2.5 Preparation for Maturita

The students in the Czech Republic have been actively prepared by English teachers since the first year of a secondary school. The whole preparation lasts approximately for three years in which teachers usually cover all basic language issues. Intensive preparation begins in the fourth year in which teachers focus on revision and assurance of acquired language skills.

There are many common study materials used for preparation such as: English Result (FCE), Nová Maturita Solution, Destination, English Grammar in Use, Gateway etc. The frequency of usage of a single language material will be a part of the practical section of the thesis.

3 CAMBRIDGE EXAMINATIONS ESOL

3.1 General information

Cambridge English Language Assessment is an integral part of world's most reputable qualifications for students of English. These examinations cover all four parts of language accomplishment – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Based on these factors they can evaluate the ability of candidates to use different grammatical linking and functions in authentic life situations. Certificates from Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) are a valid proof of a concrete level of English language knowledge according to Common European Framework of References. Cambridge certificates are recognized by more than 11000 employers, institutions and universities from all over the world. (the British Council 2014) Cambridge ESOL examinations are acknowledged as a valuable language qualification accepted globally. As a result 1, 75 million people from 137 countries all over the world take the Cambridge examinations every year. (University of Cambridge 2011, 2)

3.2 Division of Cambridge examinations

The Cambridge Examinations are divided into five levels of difficulty. Level 1 is called Key English Test (abbreviated as KEY), level 2 is Preliminary English test (PET), level 3 is First Certificate in English (FCE), level 4 is Certificate in Advanced English and level 5 is Certificate in Proficiency in English (CPE). (the British Council 2014)

3.2.1 Cambridge English: KEY

Key English test is the first-level Cambridge ESOL exam which qualifies basic knowledge of English as a foreign language. University of Cambridge (2014) claims the first test is intended for beginners who can use English to communicate in simple situations. KEY examination proves that a learner has made a good start in learning a language. According to Common European Framework of References KEY examination focused on A2 level which means that it contains basic language skills using language from common life situations. Since 2007 it has been possible to take this test in two versions: written examination (paper and pencil test) or electronically via computer (computer based CB-KEY).

KEY involves four parts: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Tasks are divided into three papers, reading and writing is united in one paper. Composition of the whole examination is listed in the table below.

Table 2. Composition of KEY examination


<i>Name of paper</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Paper 1 Reading and Writing	9 parts/56 questions Reading: Parts 1–5 Writing: Parts 6–9	1 hour 10 minutes	50%
Paper 2 Listening	5 parts/25 questions	30 minutes (including 8 minutes' transfer time)	25%
Paper 3 Speaking	2 parts	8–10 minutes per pair of candidates (2:2 format*)	25%

Data from: University of Cambridge 2011, 2

As the figure shows, reading and writing part lasts for one hour and ten minutes. It consists of 56 questions divided into nine parts. Overall, it makes 50% of the final mark. Components of reading and writing are recognition and understanding of a simple sign, completing sentences (with three possible options) etc. The listening part contains 25 questions in five parts and it takes approximately 30 minutes. This part is presented as a conversation between friends or relatives. The examined has to either match the words or fill in a missing word. Speaking part takes about 8-10 minutes per candidate. Students are tested in pairs by two examiners. (UCLES 2013)

In the example below the language difficulty of KEY examination is illustrated (taken from the reading part).

THE RING AND THE FISH



Thomas and Inger, who live in Sweden, are the happiest couple in the world. Two years ago, they were on a boat a few kilometres from the beach. Thomas asked Inger to marry him and he gave her a gold ring. He wanted to put the ring on Inger's finger, but he dropped it and it fell into the sea. They were sure the ring was lost for ever.

That is, until last week, when Mr Carlsson visited them. He has a fish shop and he found the ring in a large fish which he was cutting up for one of his customers. The fish thought the ring was something to eat! Mr Carlsson knew that the ring belonged to Thomas and Inger because inside the ring there were some words. They were, 'To Inger, All my love, Thomas'. And so Mr Carlsson gave the ring back to them.

Inger now has two rings. When they lost the first one, Thomas bought Inger another one. But they think the one the fish ate is the best one.

21 Thomas asked Inger to marry him when they were on a boat.
A Right B Wrong C Doesn't say

22 Thomas put the gold ring on Inger's finger.
A Right B Wrong C Doesn't say

23 They returned from their boat trip without the ring.
A Right B Wrong C Doesn't say

Figure 4. Example of language difficulty of KEY examination

Data from: University of Cambridge 2011, 5

3.2.2 Cambridge English: PET

Preliminary English test (PET) is qualified as an intermediate English level test. Users at this level are able to communicate at work, while travelling and dealing with most of the situations from everyday life in written or oral form. PET examination focuses on B1 level according to Common European Framework of Reference. PET covers all four parts, reading, writing, speaking and listening with a use of language from real life situations which develops practical skills. (UCLES 2013) Composition of PET examination is listed in the table below:

Table 3. Composition of PET examination

<i>Name of paper</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Paper 1 Reading and Writing	Reading: 5 parts/35 questions Writing: 3 parts/7 questions	1 hour 30 minutes	Reading: 25% Writing: 25%
Paper 2 Listening	4 parts/25 questions	about 35 minutes (including 6 minutes' transfer time)	25%
Paper 3 Speaking	4 parts	10–12 minutes per pair of candidates (2:2 format*)	25%

Data from: University of Cambridge 2011, 2

In reading part the examinee has to understand different kinds of short texts such as instructions or a communicative messages, has to be able to find precise information in a longer, factual text and answer questions to express an opinion. The inseparable part of PET is focused on grammar skills which are tested through filling gaps in sentences with pronouns, modal verbs, prepositions etc. The writing part consists of writing a short letter on given topics (about 35-45 words) and an informal letter or a story (about 100 words). The listening part consists of seven short texts from everyday life (radio announcement, exchanges in shops) and a longer monologue or a dialogue recording. Compared to KEY test, the speaking part is more complicated at PET examination. Not only general conversation in pairs but also a description of a picture is a part of the PET examination. (UCLES 2013) Below is demonstrated an example of the writing paper containing grammar tasks:

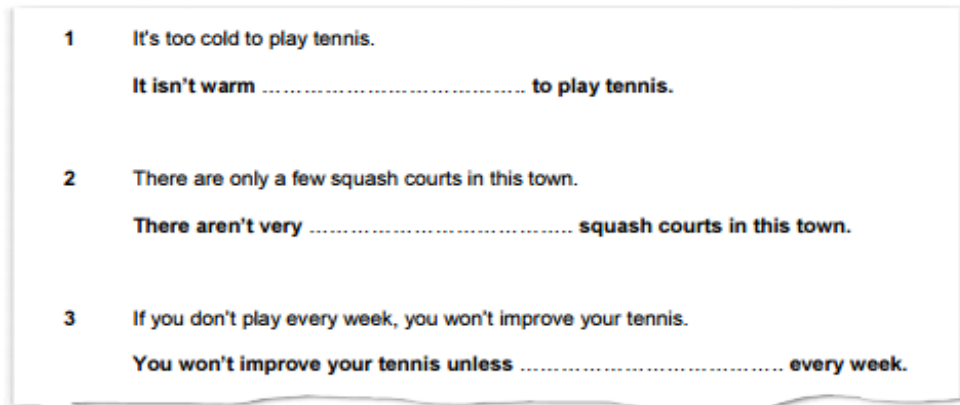


Figure 5. Example of language difficulty of PET examination

Data from: University of Cambridge 2011, 6

3.2.3 Cambridge English: FCE

The examination qualified as upper-intermediate is known as First Certificate in English. This examination proves that a learner is able to use language for work or study purposes. FCE level already helps students find work abroad in English-speaking environment because according to the Common European Framework of References it is focused on B2 level which means that students are able to use everyday written and spoken language. (UCLES 2013) the British Council (2014) defines the First Certificate in English as the most expanded language examination from English ESOL. It is accepted in business, administrative field, banking, airlines services etc.

Unlike KEY or PET, the FCE examination is composed of five parts. The structure of the examination is listed in the table below:

Table 4. Composition of FCE examination

	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Paper 1: Reading	3 parts/30 questions	1 hour	20%
Paper 2: Writing	2 parts: Part 1 – one compulsory question Part 2 – one from a choice of four questions	1 hour 20 minutes	20%
Paper 3: Use of English	4 parts/42 questions	45 minutes	20%
Paper 4: Listening	4 parts/30 questions	40 mins (approx.)	20%
Paper 5: Speaking	4 parts	14 minutes per pair of candidates	20%

Data from: University of Cambridge 2008

Reading, writing, listening and speaking parts have the same structure as the other Cambridge ESOL examinations, but FCE is extended by Use of English part. In this part the use of English vocabulary and grammar is tested. A student has to complete three short texts with gaps with different kinds of words. This exercise is focused not only on the right choice of lexis, but also on collocations, idioms and coherence. The second part of Use of English part focuses on grammar where the examined has to rewrite sentences in a different way. This task assesses student's ability of paraphrasing. (UCLES 2013) An example of FCE Use of English is listed below.

Use of English • Part 4

For questions **35 – 42**, complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. **Do not change the word given.** You must use between **two** and **five** words, including the word given. Here is an example (**0**).

Example:

0 School prizes are given out at the end of each year.

PLACE

School prize-giving at the end of each year.

The gap can be filled by the words 'takes place', so you write:

Example: **0**

Figure 6. Example of language difficulty of FCE examination

Data from: University of Cambridge 2014

Since year 2015 FCE examination has undergone some minor changes in its structure and a (total) timing of individual sections. More information about the upgrade can be found in chapter 3.1.

3.2.4 Cambridge English: CAE

Passing Certificate in Advanced English proves a really good knowledge of English. Students reach high-quality standard of a language in most situations such as work or school. (UCLES 2013) CAE examination is recognized by most British Universities as a proof of qualification for studying majors taught in English.

One of new rules established by University of Cambridge ESOL is an obligatory photographing of candidates before each CAE examination. This regulation is based on

better trustworthiness and safety of the examination for the students who use the certificate for immigration or study reasons. (the British Council 2014)

The CAE certificate is an international qualification that proves universities and employers that you are ready to study or work in the English environment. According to CEFR CAE is focused on C1 level which means that a language user is already a proficient language user. (UCLES 2013) Structure of CAE exam is listed in the table below:

Table 5. Composition of CAE examination

	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Paper 1: Reading	3 parts/30 questions	1 hour	20%
Paper 2: Writing	2 parts: Part 1 – one compulsory question Part 2 – one from a choice of four questions	1 hour 20 minutes	20%
Paper 3: Use of English	4 parts/42 questions	45 minutes	20%
Paper 4: Listening	4 parts/30 questions	40 mins (approx.)	20%
Paper 5: Speaking	4 parts	14 minutes per pair of candidates	20%

Data from: University of Cambridge 2008

CAE consists of five parts in the same structure like FCE examination. An example of language difficulty of CAE examination taken from the Use of English list:

Example:

0 **A** expressed **B** directed **C** indicated **D** guided

0	<input type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/> B	<input checked="" type="radio"/> C	<input type="radio"/> D
---	--------------------------------	--------------------------------	---	--------------------------------

What we know about music and the brain

Work on the human brain has (0) how different parts are centres of activity for different skills, feelings, perceptions and so on. It has also been shown that the left and right halves, or

Figure 7. Example of language difficulty of CAE examination

Source: data from University of Cambridge

Assessment of the examined is reported on the Statement of the Results which has got three parts: score, grade and candidate profile. Each student receives points from 0 to 100 points as a score from the whole examination (five papers). Based on this the student is evaluated and is given a final grade. If the student does not reach at least grade C he is

evaluated as B2 level (FCE). Some universities and organizations may require achievement of a specific score or grade. (University of Cambridge 2011, 6) More information about assessment is introduced in chapter 3.4.

Since 2015 CAE examination has undergone some minor changes in its structure and a (total) timing of individual sections. More information about the upgrade can be found in chapter 3.1.

3.2.5 Cambridge English: CPE

According to the British Council (2014) Certificate of Proficiency in English is the oldest and the most difficult advanced examination of the whole Cambridge ESOL qualifications. This certificate means a really high level of language knowledge and it is accepted by institutions of higher education in many countries, almost all universities in the United Kingdom and most of the employers all around the world. Since 2012 CPE has been tested only through four parts: reading, writing, listening and oral examination. CPE proves that a student has reached an extremely high level of language skills. (UCLES 2013)

Students who have passed CPE are able to communicate at the highest level with sophistication and fluency almost like a native speaker. CPE focuses on C2 (the highest) level according to CEFR (UCLES 2013). CPE exam has been revised since 2013, the current structure is listed below:

Table 6. Composition of CPE examination

Reading and Use of English: 1 hour 30 minutes	Shows you can deal with different types of text and demonstrate knowledge and control of the English language.
Writing: 1 hour 30 minutes	Shows you can write a variety of text types, such as essays and proposals.
Listening: 40 minutes	Shows you can follow a range of spoken materials, such as lectures and interviews.
Speaking: 16 minutes	Shows you can communicate in a real-life context. You take the test face to face with one or two other candidates.

Source: University of Cambridge 2013

3.3 Examination update since 2015

All Cambridge examinations ESOL will have new specifications from 2015. University of Cambridge regularly updates all the examinations so it is easier to meet the needs and satisfaction of students and teachers. Thanks to this, Cambridge University is sure that they react according to the latest language, learning and assessment research. Update from 2015 will be applied to FCE and CAE examinations. (UCLES 2013)

First Certificate in English updated version will be valid from January 2015. There are three main key changes in the structure of FCE. Four papers instead of five is the first update. Reading and Use of English will be combined into one single paper and it will assess language knowledge and reading skills. The whole examination will be 30 minutes shorter but it will be assessed still as the same language level. In writing and speaking papers will include extra tasks. (UCLES 2013)

CAE will have almost the same updates as FCE. Reading and Use of English paper will be combined into one single paper. CAE exam will be 45 minutes shorter than in the previous years but the content will remain identical. In writing and speaking, papers will include extra tasks. (UCLES 2013) The update is characterized by University of Cambridge.

How do Cambridge ESOL examinations correspond with Common European Framework of References?

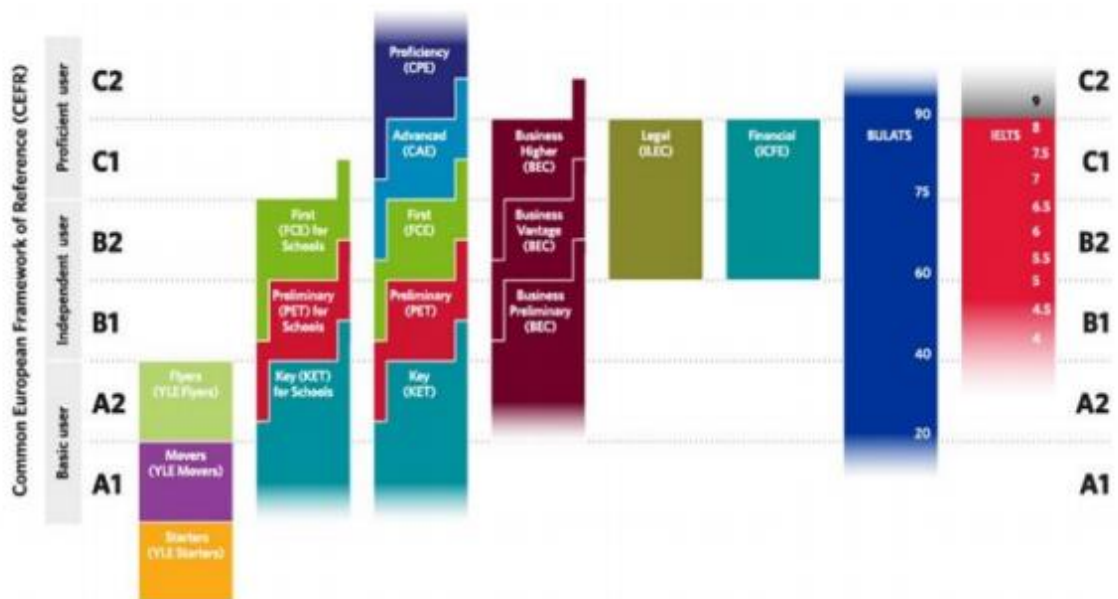


Figure 8. A range of exams to meet different needs

Source: data from Using the CEFR: Principles of Good Practice 2011.

3.4 Assessment of Cambridge examinations ESOL

Each part of the examination is assessed according to different criteria.

The written part according to University of Cambridge (2011, 24) is assessed in terms of content, communicative achievement, organization and language. The content focuses on answering particularly those questions a learner was asked to answer, communicative achievement considers if the language style is appropriate for the given task (magazine article, letter), organization focuses on logical order of the written text and language criteria focus on chosen lexis and grammar appropriate to the task.

Speaking part is assessed by two examiners. The active member of the oral examination is called interlocutor who asks students questions and manages the conversation. The interlocutor gives the evaluation of the student and marks the global achievement (the general mark of the test). The second member of the commission is called assessor who only listens to the oral examination and makes evaluation according to four criteria: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication. (University of Cambridge 2011, 24)

Grading Cambridge ESOL examination is complex, which means that if one of the papers is not passed, and results in other papers are sufficient, the examined can still pass the exam. Final evaluation is based on the performance in the whole exam. The results of each paper are shown in Statement of Results where the final grade, score out of one hundred points and candidate profile are listed. The results are qualified as Exceptional, Good, Borderline and Weak. University of Cambridge announces the results approximately four to six weeks after paper-based examinations and two weeks after computer-based examinations. (UCLES 2013) In the table below we can see how grading corresponds with the number of achieved points.

Table 7. Assessment chart of Cambridge examinations ESOL

Grade	Score	CEFR level
A	80-100	Level C2
B	75-79	Level C1
C	60-74	
Level B2	45-59	Level B2

Source: data from University of Cambridge 2011

3.5 British Council

3.5.1 Basic information

The British Council is an international organization located in the United Kingdom supporting cultural relations and creates educational opportunities. The British Council has got subsidiaries in more than one hundred countries in six continents. Working with governments makes a better chance to transform the whole education system and improves the opportunity and employability with help of English. The British Council also organizes English teaching and training for teachers in different ways (broadcasting, radio web pages). Fields of the British Council interest is art, education and society. (the British Council 2014)

3.5.2 History of British Council

The organization was established in 1934 when relationships in Europe were unstable. The British Council decided to strengthen the influence throughout cultural relations which were definitely ahead of time. The first documented outlined mission was “promoting abroad a wider appreciation of British culture and civilization by encouraging cultural, educational and other interchanges between the United Kingdom and elsewhere”. (the British Council 2014)

The original mission of the British Council is still the same today. Working on better communication among countries, understanding people and different countries is easier than ever thanks to the British Council. More than 200 offices nowadays co-operate with the United Kingdom British Council, including the Czech Republic. (the British Council 2014)

4 METHODS OF QUALIFYING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Language qualification consists of informal and formal methods. Informal methods are often used in classrooms immediately during teaching language and motivate students to further studying. Formal methods are mostly in a form of a language certificate (which is already a valid proof of language skills).

Anthony Green (2013, 3) defines language assessment as a wide range from informal classroom activities to well-known national language examinations. He claims that language assessment involves obtaining evidence to inform inferences about a person's language-related knowledge, skills or abilities. Assessment is an inseparable part in the whole process of teaching and learning a foreign language. The purpose of qualification is to guide learners with valid feedback, which is a tool for improvement.

There are many forms of qualification of a language. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2009, 76) language assessment is based on prototypical usual exercises which can have many forms. The most valuable qualification is based on more exercises containing different grammatical tasks. The purpose of this method is to fulfill a particular function within a larger language test. Based on this the most objective inferences of language assessment are evaluated.

5 SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL PART

The purpose of the theoretical part was to introduce CEFR as the key instrument for qualifying language skills to those who are involved in learning, teaching and assessment. The second purpose was to introduce the Secondary school leaving examinations (Maturita) and the Cambridge examinations ESOL and give a basic overview over language testing.

The theoretical part was divided into four chapters. The first chapter dealt with CEFR starting with a basic introduction, history of CEFR, structure, division of language levels and characteristics. The second chapter presented the Maturita examinations. In this chapter the current situation, division, assessment and ways of preparation were described. The third chapter was devoted to the Cambridge examinations including a description of particular language tests, assessment and basic information about the British Council. The last chapter introduced ways of qualifying language skills.

Acquired information from the theoretical part will help with understanding the outcome of the questionnaire and empiric survey presented in the practical part.

II.

ANALYSIS

6 THE ANALYSIS OF MATURITA EXAMINATION LANGUAGE LEVEL IN COMPARISON WITH CAMBRIDGE EXAMINATIONS ESOL

6.1 Goal of the research

The aim of the thesis was to research the language level of the Maturita examinations and Cambridge examinations ESOL. The purpose of the analysis is to investigate the rate of equivalence between these two language examinations. The main goal of the thesis is to determinate which language level - B1 or B2 (according to Common European Framework of Reference) is adequate to each language examination. Partial goals of the work are the analysis of differences in the way of language preparation, learning materials, the biggest problems of the students and the successful rate of the students passing the Maturita examinations or Cambridge examinations ESOL.

English language levels of FCE and the Maturita English examination at Czech schools are both comparable to CEFR. FCE is more recognised than the Maturita English examination because the validity and difficulty of the exam is higher. I assume that the Maturita examinations do not reach the language level of Cambridge examinations – FCE. The analytical part investigates the truthfulness of this hypothesis and follows these questions: What is the way of preparation for both of the tests? What are the main language aspects which make FCE more advanced than the Maturita examinations?

6.2 Methodology of the research

In the thesis there are used two types of research methodologies. The first one and the major one is a questionnaire survey. The second source of information is an empiric survey based on experience of English teachers and lecturers, which is a common method of investigation in the humanitarian field.

The questionnaire survey is based on the questionnaire which has two versions according to the examination. Variant A investigates the Maturita examinations and variant B investigates Cambridge examinations - FCE. The respondents completed the relevant version depending on what examination they prepare their students for. Each questionnaire is composed of 15 various questions. One part of the questionnaire includes multiple choice and the polar questions aimed mostly at the research of language levels according to CEFR and the rest of the questionnaire is composed of 4 more extensive open questions

where respondents used not only their own answers, but also personal notes and own ideas based on experience.

The second type of methodology is an empiric survey which is a valuable source of information. The combination of various techniques of research is important for high-quality outcome of the survey. The authors Gratton and Jones (2010, 8) characterize the empiric survey as a tool for development of new ideas through the collection of data. This means that researching one step further and collecting information to test their explanation is the basis of an empiric survey. All information connected with empiric research was gained in a form of interviews (and additional notes in questionnaires) with English teachers and lecturers which showed real opinions on the issue. Pelikán (2011, 19) claims that empiric research refers to more concrete results than other only theoretical methods of research.

The analysis of both methods will be three-folded. Firstly, I will present the results connected with the Maturita examination English language levels. Secondly, I will present the findings related to the testing results of Cambridge examinations and in the third section I will compare gained data / information results of both examinations and state a conclusion.

6.3 Organization of the investigation

I have chosen a personal way of delivering paper-based questionnaires to the respondents. The reason for this was having a personal contact and a chance to make an interview, which helped me with my research and gave me a better overview of the issue.

The survey was collected from 22 November 2014 to 5 April 2014. I have asked 12 respondents specialized in the Maturita examinations and 12 respondents specialized in Cambridge examinations. The respondents specialized on the Maturita examinations were secondary school English teachers who actively prepare the students for this type of examination. The second group of the respondents was composed of the English teachers who actively prepare the students for the Cambridge examinations in various language courses.

7 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS OF THE MATURITA EXAMINATION

In this part of research a group of English teachers who actively prepare the students for the Maturita examinations at secondary schools was tested. The majority of the teachers prepare their students in the last year of secondary school studies so they have a close contact with the Maturita and can provide relevant information. The section is divided into three parts, the first part contains the multiple choice questions, the second consists of the open questions where the respondents had a possibility to express their own ideas and opinions and the last part contains of the polar questions aimed at B1 and B2 level of English according to CEFR.

7.1 Multiple choice questions

Multiple choice questions in the questionnaire survey investigated the basic facts about learning language, about teachers, experience of the teachers, learning materials and reached language skills of the students according to CEFR, which is the key instrument for evaluation of language levels (B1 or B2).

What language level do you prepare your student for?

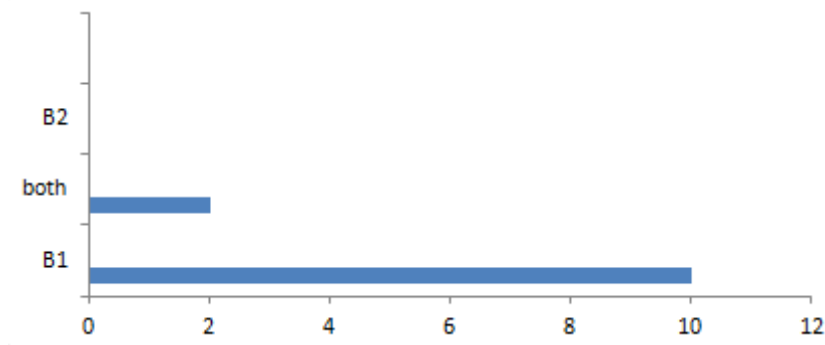


Figure 9. The target language level taught by teachers preparing for Maturita

The figure 9 shows us the that 10 (83, 3%) English teachers out of 12 actively prepare the students for B1 level according to CEFR. 2 (16, 6%) English teachers prepare students for both (B1 and B2) levels according to CEFR. No respondent stated that he/she prepared the students for B2 level. This graph gives us an idea about the language level needed for passing Maturita examination.

What is the number of successful students who have passed the examination in your group?

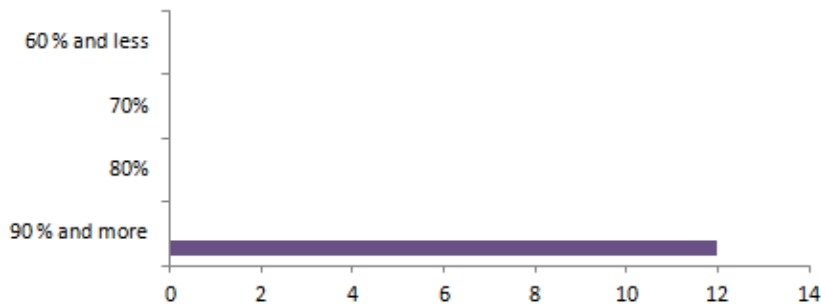


Figure 10. Number of successful students who have passed the Maturita examination

From the graph above it is visible that all respondents (100%) answered that their students are in 90% or more successful in passing the Maturita examination.

Which of language materials do you currently use for teaching English?

Language material

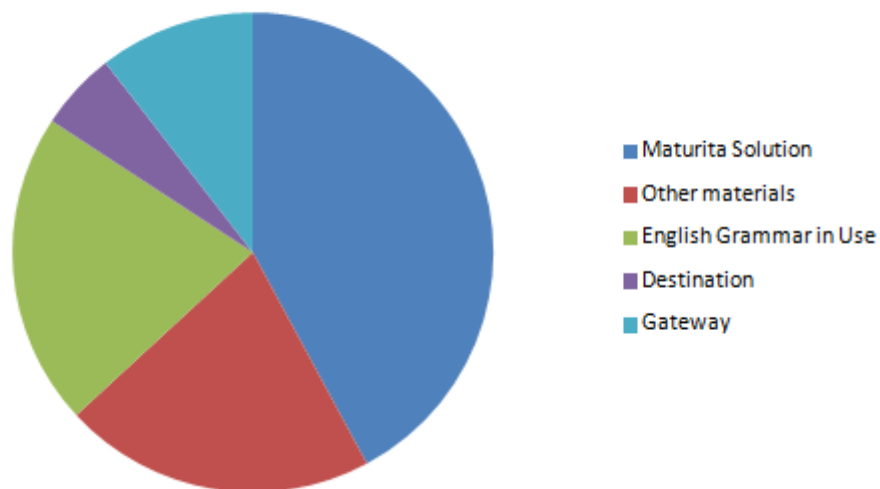


Figure 11. Usage of language materials for the Maturita

The graph shows that the majority (66, 6%) of language materials used by the teachers preparing for the Maturita examinations is Maturita Solution. Furthermore, the teachers also use English Grammar in Use, Gateway and Destination. Maturita Excellence and Maturita Activator are other materials which the teachers also use.

7.2 Open questions

In this section the respondents had more space to express their opinions and write personal notes which supported the investigation.

How long have you been preparing your students for the Maturita examinations?

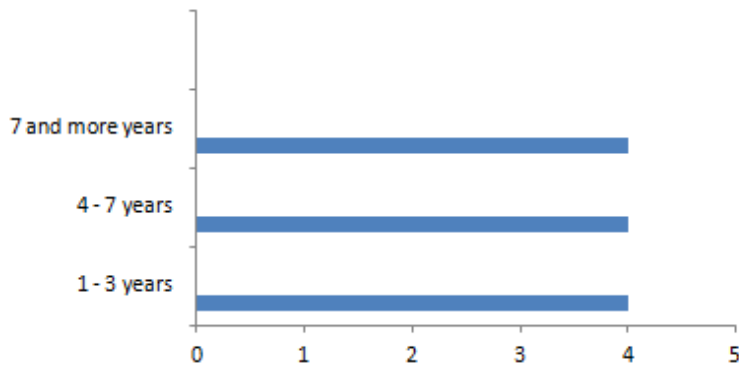


Figure 12. The length of experience of English teachers

Out of 12 English teachers, 4 (33, 3%) have been preparing students for 1 – 3 years, 4 (33, 3%) have been preparing their students for 4 – 7 years and 4 (33, 3%) have been preparing students for 7 or more than 7 years. As shown in the figure experience of the respondents is various so the answers give us objective results.

What grammatical tasks do you practice with your students most?

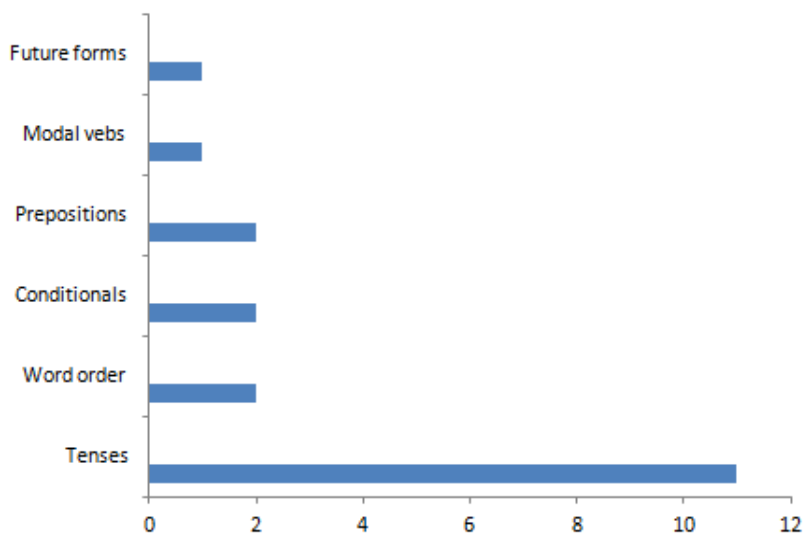


Figure 13. Most practiced tasks for the Maturita examination

According to the questionnaire survey the most practiced task in classes focused on Maturita preparation is the right choice of tenses, word order, conditionals, prepositions, modal verbs and future forms.

What grammatical tasks are the most difficult for your students?

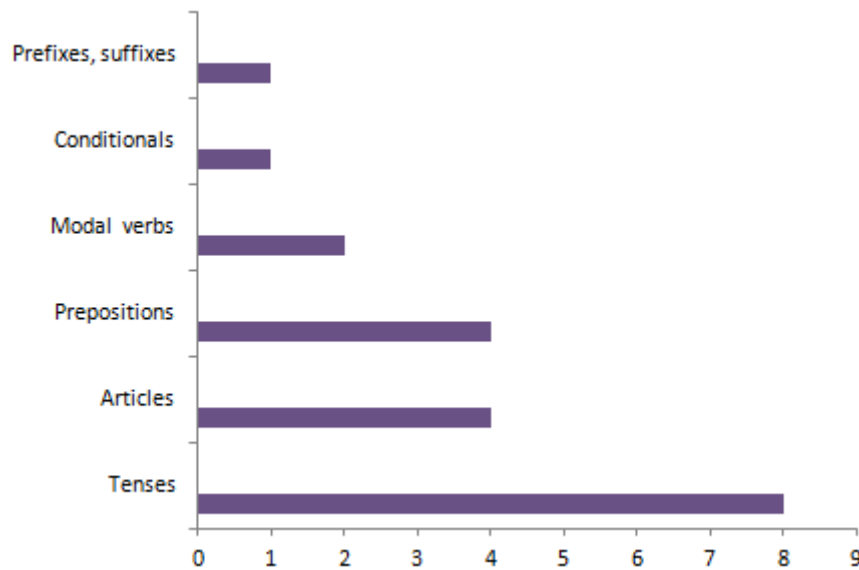


Figure 14. Most difficult grammatical tasks for the students

From the table above it is visible that the most difficult grammatical tasks for students preparing for the Maturita examinations is the right choice of tenses, articles, prepositions, modal verbs, conditionals, prefixes and suffixes. Data from this graph are closely connected with previous figure 13. It is visible that the teachers focus on the problematic tasks which they practice the most frequently. Grammatical tenses represent the most problematic category which is practiced the most frequently, however, the teachers do not pay enough attention to articles which are not practiced enough.

How would you describe the biggest problem of the weakest students in your class?

State concrete problems.

This open question was aimed at the concrete problems of grammatical tasks. The students had the biggest problems with distinguishing between:

1. Past simple and present perfect
2. Second conditional and third conditional

3. Definite article and indefinite article

The survey has shown that the most problematic grammatical task is to distinguish between the past simple and present perfect, the second and third conditional and definite and indefinite article.

7.3 Polar questions

The last part of the questionnaire survey is presented in a form of the polar questions where the respondents were asked to circle yes or no.

Do your students reach this language level?

7.3.1 Statements equal B1 level according to CEFR.

Characteristics of this statement is equal to B1 level according to CEFR

1. My students can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar topics (encountered at work, school and leisure).

11 (91, 6%) respondents answered positively, 1 (8, 3%) answered negatively.

3. My students can understand the texts which consist mainly of high frequency every day or job-related language.

All respondents (100%) answered in a positive way.

5. My students are able to enter a conversation on a topic they are familiar with, personal interest or pertinent to everyday life unprepared.

10 (83, 3 %) respondents answered positively, 2 (16, 6 %) answered negatively.

7. My students are able to write personal letters describing experiences and impressions

11 (91, 6 %) respondents answered positively, 1 (8, 3 %) answered negatively.

According to these facts we can analyse the reached language level of the students being prepared for the Maturita examinations. Based on the questions it is evident that the students have, in most cases, reached B1 level according to CEFR.

7.3.2 Statements equal to B2 level according to CEFR.

2. My students are able to understand extended speeches and lectures and can follow even more complex lines of argument from a familiar topic.

4 (33, 3%) of respondents answered positively, 8 (66, 6%) answered negatively.

4. My students can read the texts concerning contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints.

4 (33, 3%) of respondents answered positively, 8 (66, 6%) answered negatively.

6. My students can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity which makes regular interaction with native speaker quite possible.

1 (8, 3%) respondent answered positively, 11 (91, 6%) answered negatively.

8. My students can write a clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to their interest. They are able to write an essay or report and express their point of view.

2 (16, 6%) respondents answered positively, 10 (83, 3%) answered negatively.

According to statistics it is evident that the majority of the students who are being prepared for the Maturita examination do not reach B2 level according to CEFR.

8 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS OF CAMBRIDGE ESOL EXAMINATIONS

This part of research is aimed at the English language teachers and lecturers who actively prepare their students for Cambridge examinations ESOL and participated in the investigation. The majority of the teachers focus on the preparation of FCE examination and this will be the examination of major importance for the comparison. The section is divided into three parts. The multiple choice questions, open questions and polar questions.

8.1 Multiple choice questions

In this section there are investigated the basic facts about language teachers, learning materials, their experience and successful rate of the students. Furthermore, this section includes the questions concerning language abilities defined by CEFR, which is the key section for evaluation of language levels (B1 or B2).

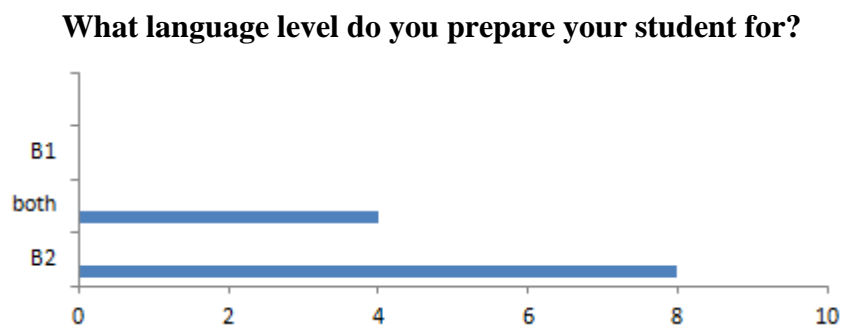


Figure 15. The target level of English due to CEFR taught by the teachers preparing for Cambridge ESOL examinations

The questionnaire survey has shown that out of 12 English teachers, 8 (66, 6%) have been preparing their students for B2 level according to CERF, 4 (33, 3%) have been preparing for both B1 and B2 level and no English teacher has been preparing the students for B1 level of English.

As the figure shows, the majority of teachers prepare their students for B2 level according to CEFR and a part of them prepare for both B1 and B2. The graph represents the needed language level for passing the Cambridge examinations ESOL.

What is the number of the successful students who have passed the examination in your group?

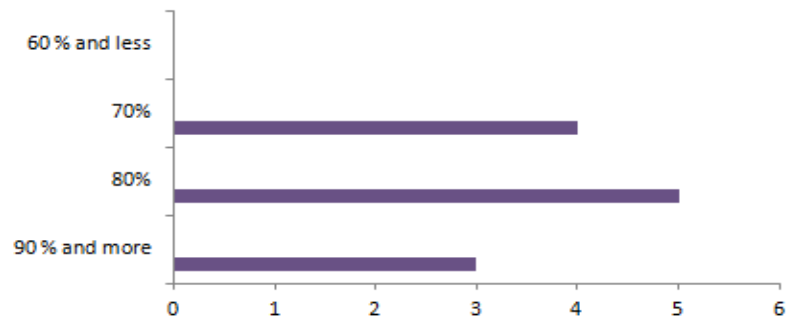


Figure 16. Number of the successful students who have passed Cambridge ESOL examination

Out of 12 teachers, 5 (41, 6%) responded that their students have 80% rate of successfulness in passing the Cambridge examinations ESOL, 4 (33, 3%) responded that their students have 70 % rate of successfulness and 3 (25%) answered that their students are in 90 % or more successful.

The figure above shows that no respondent answered that his/ her students were successful only in 60% or less. The result of the survey is that the average rate of successfulness is 70 - 80%, which is a positive outcome.

Which of language materials do you currently use for teaching English?

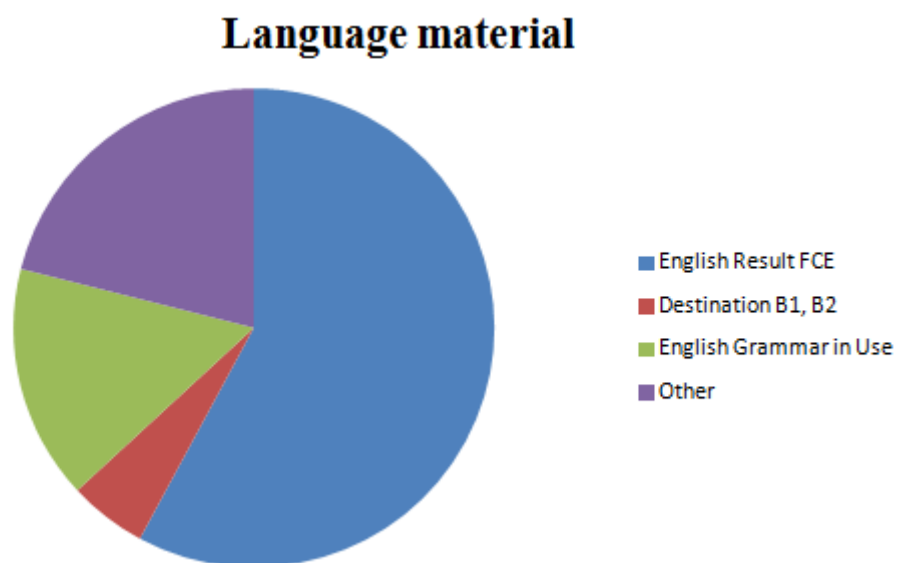


Figure 17. Usage of language materials

The graph shows that the majority (57, 9%) of language materials used by the teachers preparing for the Cambridge ESOL examinations is English Result. Apart from there, they also use English Grammar in Use (15, 8%), Destination B1, B2 (5, 3%) and other materials (21, 1%). The respondents have stated that from other materials they use mostly the book Compact First.

8.2 Open questions

In this section, the teachers had more space to express their own ideas and write personal notes which helped with the survey.

How long have you been preparing your students for Cambridge examinations?

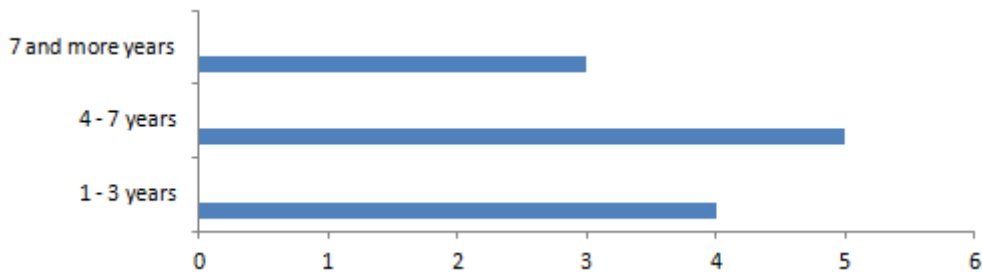


Figure 18. Years of teaching experience

Out of 12 English teachers, 4 (33, 3%) have been preparing their students for 1 – 3 years, 5 (41, 6%) have been preparing their students for 4 – 7 years and 3 (25%) have been preparing their students for 7 years or more. As shown in the figure, there are slight differences in the years of experience in language teaching of the respondents but the majority of them have sufficient experience for a valid analysis.

What grammatical tasks do you practice with your students most?

All respondents stated Use of English as the most difficult part of Cambridge examinations ESOL. Concerning this fact, they practice with their students following tasks:

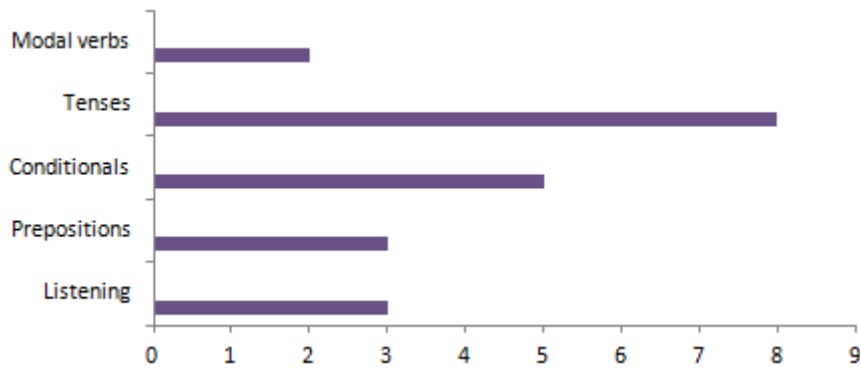


Figure 19. Table of the most practiced tasks

In the table above there are demonstrated the grammatical tasks which the teachers practice with the students the most. In the open questions the teachers stated 5 grammatical tasks which are practiced in the classrooms the most often. From the table it is visible that tenses are the most practiced grammar task, after tenses, conditional sentences, prepositions, listening, and modal verbs.

What grammatical tasks are the most difficult for your students?

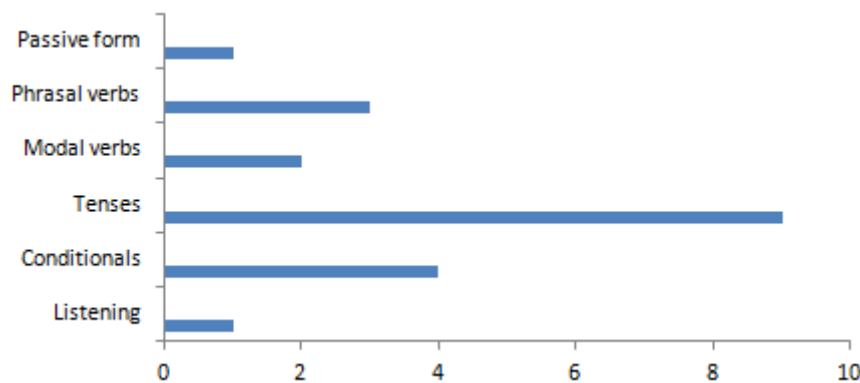


Figure 20. The most difficult grammatical tasks

The respondents were asked to state the most difficult grammatical tasks for the students. From the table above it is visible that the right choice of tense is the task which makes the students the biggest trouble. According to the comments mentioned in the questionnaire tenses are so difficult because this grammatical task does not occur in the Czech language, the second most difficult grammatical task for the students is the right choice of conditionals. Other problematic issues are phrasal verbs, modal verbs, passive form, and listening.

How would you describe the biggest problem of the weakest students in your class?

State concrete problems.

This open question was aimed at the concrete problems of grammatical tasks.

1. Past perfect X present perfect
2. Second conditional X third conditional
3. Past perfect simple X past continuous

The majority of the respondents answered that the most difficult grammatical task for the students is to distinguish between tenses, concretely between the past simple and present perfect; another difficult tasks are the right choice of the second and third conditional, past perfect simple and past continuous.

8.3 Polar questions

Do your students reach this language level?

The last part of the multiple choice questions is presented in a form of the polar questions where the respondents were asked to circle yes or no.

8.3.1 Statements equal B1 level according to CEFR.

Characteristic of this statement is equal to B1 level according to CEFR

1. My students can understand the main points of clear standard speeches on familiar topics (encountered at work, school and leisure).

All respondents (100%) answered in a positive way.

3. My students can understand the texts which mainly consist of high frequency every day or job-related language.

All respondents (100%) answered positively.

5. My students are able to enter a conversation focused on a topic they are familiar with, personal interest or pertinent to everyday life completely unprepared.

11 (91, 6%) respondents answered positively, 1 (8, 3%) answered negatively.

7. My students are able to write personal letters describing experiences and impressions

All respondents (100%) answered in a positive way.

According to these facts can we analyse the reached language level of students being prepared for Cambridge examinations ESOL. Based on the questions it is evident that the students have reached with no difficulties B1 level according to CEFR.

8.3.2 Statements equal to B2 level according to CEFR.

2. My students are able to understand extended speeches and lectures and can follow even more complex lines of argument focused a familiar topic.

10 (83, 3%) respondents answered positively, 2 (16, 6%) answered negatively.

4. My students can read texts concerning contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints.

10 (83, 3%) respondents answered positively, 2 (16, 6%) answered negatively.

6. My students can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speaker quite possible.

9 (75%) respondents answered positively, 3 (25%) answered negatively.

8. My students can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to their interests. They are able to write an essay or report and express their point of view.

7 (58, 3%) respondents answered positively, 5 (41, 7%) answered negatively.

From the statistics above it is evident that the majority of the students being prepared for Cambridge ESOL examination reach B2 level according to CEFR.

9 COMPARISON OF MATURITA EXAMINATIONS AND CAMBRIDGE EXAMINATIONS ESOL

Results from the Maturita examinations survey and Cambridge examinations ESOL survey are compared in this section. Both examinations are compared in a form of the highest results evaluated from each question. This section demonstrates us the differences in a reached language level (B1 or B2) of the students being prepared for the Maturita examinations and Cambridge examinations ESOL according to CEFR. The comparison is divided into several parts. The key questions for the evaluation are the polar questions in a form of statements.

9.1 Level of preparation

The survey has shown that the majority of the students being prepared for the Maturita examination are taught according to B1 level compared to the students being prepared for the Cambridge examination ESOL – FCE, where the teachers focus on B2 level according to CEFR.

9.2 Success rate of students

The students who have passed the Maturita examinations in previous years were at the average of 90% or more successful on the other hand, the students who have passed Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE were at the average of 80% successful.

9.3 Learning materials

According to the questionnaire survey the teachers who prepare students for the Maturita examinations use Maturita Solution in most cases. This learning material is classified as B1 level according to CEFR. Other mentioned materials such as Maturita Activator and Maturita Excellence also include grammatical tasks relevant to B1 level. When compared to the Cambridge examination ESOL – FCE the survey shows that the major learning material for preparation is English Result FCE which is classified as B2 level according to CEFR. The learning materials focus on the level of each examination.

9.4 Length of experience

The questionnaire survey shows that both groups of the English teachers have approximately the same length of experience in language teaching and assessment field.

(Maturita – 5 years, Cambridge - 5, 5 years) This fact improves the equality and credibility of gained information.

9.5 Most practiced tasks

The teachers who prepare students for the Maturita examination mostly practice with their students the following grammatical tasks: tenses, word order, modal verbs, prepositions and future forms. The teachers who focus on Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE preparation mostly practice following tasks: tenses, conditionals, listening, modal verbs and prepositions. I did not find many differences in content of preparation of each examination.

9.6 Most difficult tasks for students

The teachers preparing for the Maturita examinations have stated that tenses, articles and prepositions belong among the most difficult tasks of their students. The teachers preparing for the Cambridge - FCE examinations determined tenses, conditionals and phrasal verbs as the most difficult tasks.

Here, I would like to highlight definite and indefinite articles which are problematic for students being prepared for the Maturita examinations on the other hand students being prepared for the Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE have already no difficulties with this grammar task which is classified as B1 level of English.

9.7 Concrete most difficult grammar tasks

Among the students being prepared for the Maturita examination to distinguish between past simple tense and present simple tense is the most difficult task. Other most difficult tasks are the differences between the second and third conditional and definite and indefinite articles. These grammatical tasks show us B1 level according to CEFR. The students being prepared for the Cambridge ESOL – FCE have the most difficulties with distinguishing between the past perfect and present perfect tense, which are already equivalent to B2 level. Other difficulties are distinguishing between the second and third conditional, past perfect simple and past perfect continuous. The students being prepared for Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE had already no troubles with grammatical tasks which are problematic for the Maturita examinations.

9.8 Statements according to B1 or B2

- Do the students reach B1 level?

Maturita – 91, 6% yes

Cambridge – 97, 9% yes

- Do the students reach B2 level?

Maturita – 22, 8% yes

Cambridge – 75, 1% yes

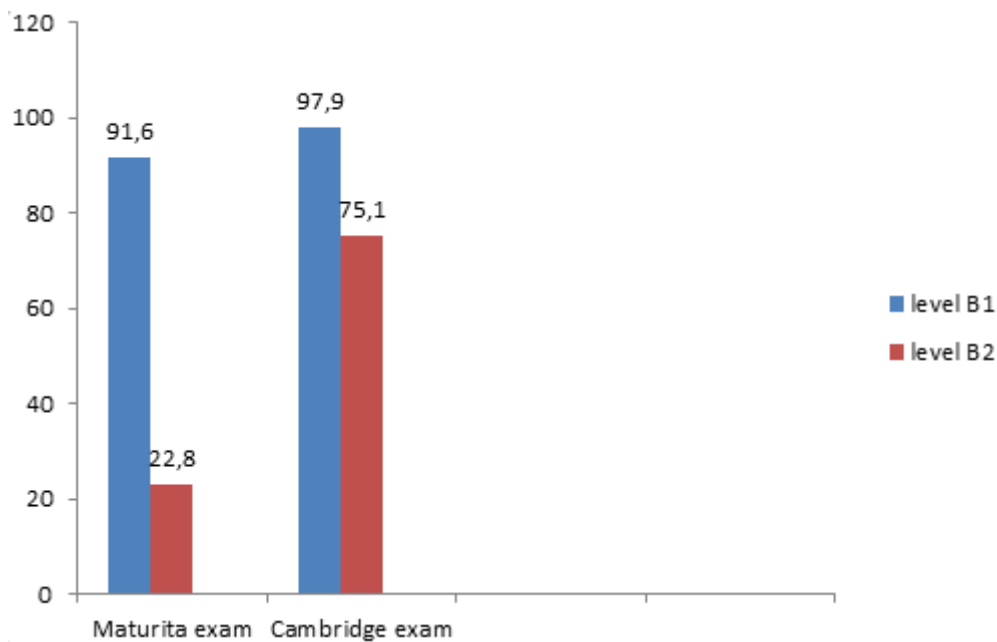


Figure 21. Comparison of English language levels

It is clear from the graph above that the teachers preparing for the Maturita examination in 91, 6% said that their students reach B1 level of English according to CEFR but only in 22, 8% do they reach B2 level. The teachers preparing for Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE have said that their students reach B1 level in 97, 9% B1 and B2 in 75, 1%. This is a key section for English level comparison. According to these facts, we can say that Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE have got higher level of English classified as B2, on the other hand the Maturita examinations reach only B1 level according to CEFR.

9.9 Empiric survey

The questionnaire survey was supported by an empiric survey based on experience of the investigated English teachers. In this section information gained in personal interviews is also presented. Research started with question: Can you state any further comments

connected with the questionnaire and language levels of the Maturita examinations in comparison with Cambridge examinations?

As I have mentioned before, in the whole process of investigation I have considered personal notes, opinions and interviews with the English teachers. According to these facts, it is obvious that the English teachers agree with the results of the survey. Most of the notes mentioned are supporting the fact that the Maturita examinations do not reach level of the Cambridge examination ESOL – FCE.

The respondents related to the question about the Maturita examinations have stated that they mostly prepare their students for B1 level according to CEFR. Those who stated that they prepare their students for B2 level explained that they do not think that the Maturita examinations reach B2 level but they want to prepare the students for a higher level to increase the number of successful students.

Another investigated fact is that the English teachers from secondary schools recommend their students to register for Cambridge examinations. The reason is that most universities in the Czech Republic accept Cambridge examinations instead of the admission examinations (for majors connected with English language). The teachers who prepare for Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE admitted that in their group are already students who have passed the Maturita examination but they think that Cambridge examinations have got higher quality.

A common opinion of all teachers is that the Maturita examinations are equal to the Cambridge examinations – Preliminary English test (PET) of B1 level which is not accepted by universities or abroad. If the Maturita examination was divided into a lower and higher level (like in the previous years), we could speculate about the equivalency of a higher level of Cambridge examinations – FCE but currently the Maturita examinations are joined into one level of difficulty equivalent to PET, B1 level according to CEFR. The questionnaires and interviews can be found in Appendices.

10 SUMMARY OF THE ANALYTICAL PART

The analytical part processed the results from the questionnaire and empiric survey. This investigation analysed the equivalency between two language examinations – secondary school leaving examinations in the Czech Republic (Maturita) and Cambridge examinations ESOL. The survey was aimed at the level of English (B1 and B2) according to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

The results were presented in three parts.

The first part presented the results connected with the Maturita examinations in which secondary school English teachers were tested. The first section was aimed at the multiple choice questions, the second section was aimed at the open questions and the last section was focused on the polar questions, which was the crucial section for the whole evaluation. From the results of this survey, it seems clear that the students being prepared for the Maturita examinations reach only B1 level of English according to CEFR in general. This conclusion was based on all questions answered by the group of tested respondents.

The second part presented the results connected with Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE. It was also divided into three sections: the multiple choice questions, open questions and polar questions. In this part the English teachers who prepare their students for Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE were tested. The survey results have shown that majority of these students reaches already B2 level according to CEFR.

The third part focused on comparison of two previous parts. I have compared the level of preparation, successful rate of students who have passed these two examinations, language materials, the most difficult and most practiced grammatical tasks and the reached language level of English B1 and B2 (in a form of statement) according to CEFR. In each section the results showed that the Maturita examinations do not reach the level of English of Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE. The level of the Maturita examinations is equal to B1 level, however, Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE are equal to B2 level according to CEFR.

The hypothesis statement that the Maturita examinations do not reach the language level of Cambridge examinations – FCE was confirmed.

CONCLUSION

In my bachelor thesis, I focused on two language examinations: the Secondary School Leaving Examinations in the Czech Republic (the Maturita) and Cambridge examinations ESOL. The primary goal of the thesis was to research the equivalency of these two examinations and to determinate language level (B1 or B2) according to the Common European Framework of Reference using the questionnaire and empiric survey.

Language level of the Maturita examinations and Cambridge examinations is a frequently discussed topic and the results of this work helped us understand the differences between language examinations based on the Common European Framework of Reference, which is the most influential document connected with language testing and assessment.

The theoretical part of the thesis was divided into four sections. In the first section I focused on description of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the key document for language testing and assessment and I dealt with descriptions of each language level (A1 – C2). In the second section I described the current situation, structure and assessment of the Secondary School Leaving examinations in the Czech Republic (the Maturita). The third section focused on the structure, division and assessment of Cambridge examinations ESOL. The last section described the methods of qualifying language skills.

The practical part was based on the questionnaire and empiric survey. The primary goal of the analysis was to compare all language levels of the Maturita examinations and Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE and to investigate the hypothesis statement that the Maturita examinations do not reach the language level of Cambridge examinations. The respondents who participated were the English teachers from the secondary schools and the teachers who prepare their students for Cambridge examinations. The analytical part of the thesis was divided into three sections. The first section investigated the facts connected with the Maturita examinations. The second sections investigated the facts connected with Cambridge examinations and in the third section both results were compared.

Based on the results of the survey, it is obvious that the Maturita examinations do not reach the language level of Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE. The empiric survey in a form of interviews and personal opinions supported this statement. The majority of the evaluated questions showed that the Maturita examinations are equivalent to B1 level and Cambridge examinations ESOL – FCE are equivalent to B2 level according to CEFR.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALTE: Association of Language Testers in Europe

CAE: Certificate in Advanced English

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference

CPE: Certificate in Proficiency English

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages

FCE: First Certificate in English

KET: Cambridge English Key

PET: Preliminary English Test

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

UCLES: University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate

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APPENDICES

- P I Interviews with respondents
- P II Questionnaire
- P III Language levels according to CEFR

APPENDIX P I: INTERVIEWS WITH RESPONDENTS

Interviews with teachers preparing for Maturita examination:

Question: “Can you state any further comments connected with the questionnaire and language levels of Maturita examination in comparison with Cambridge examination?”

Answer 1: “I would say that level of Maturita – level B1 is not as, or can’t be as respected as the level of FCE talking about Cambridge exams and I highly recommend students to register for Cambridge exams because when they want to work abroad or study abroad at universities they need Cambridge exams and not Maturita of B1 level.”

Answer 2: “Generally I prepare my students for B1 level, because I think it corresponds with Maturita demands. Couple of years ago, when there were two levels at Maturita, lower and higher level, the higher level was equal to FCE, almost. But today when we have only one level, Maturita is B1 level, which is PET level, I think. As a teaching material I use Maturita Solution and materials of my own, B1 level of course. And I would like to make one point: The success rate at Maturita exam is more than 90% now. You would never get the same figures if the level was B2. And yet another point, universities accept FCE as an entrance exam, Maturita is not accepted, simply because it’s level is lower....“

Interviews with teachers preparing for Cambridge examination:

Question: “Can you state any further comments connected with the questionnaire and language levels of Maturita examination in comparison with Cambridge examination?”

Answer 1: “I help my students with their preparation for FCE exam. In my opinion FCE exam is based on a higher level of English. Even if the majority of my students have already passed the Maturita exam they want to pass FCE as well because these exams are accepted abroad and by universities. As a study material I use only FCE Result which I consider as the most useful.”

Answer 2: “If I should compare level of English I must say that Maturita exams cannot reach the level of FCE exam which I consider as B2. In my classes I use only

materials equal to B2 level, mostly FCE Result and my own materials. Most of my students are aware of the fact that they will have better job and study opportunities with Cambridge exams not with Maturita that is why I recommend to register for these exams.”

APPENDIX P II: QUESTIONNAIRE

If you prepare your students for Maturita examination circle variant A

If you prepare your students for Cambridge examination circle variant B

Variant A – Maturita examination
examination

Variant B – Cambridge

1) How long have you been preparing students for language examinations? Maturita/
Cambridge examination

2) What language level do you prepare your students for?

- B1
- B2

3) What grammatical tasks do you practice with your students most?

4) What grammatical tasks are the most difficult for your students?

5) What is the number of successful students who have passed the examination in your
group? Maturita/ Cambridge examination

- 60% and less
- 70%
- 80%
- 90% and more

6) Which of language materials listed below do you currently use for teaching your
students?

- English Result - FCE
- Nová Maturita – Solutions
- Destination B1, B2
- English grammar in use

- Gateway
- Other

7) How would you describe the biggest problem of the weakest students in your class? State concrete problems. (For example: past simple vs. past progressive)

8) Do your students reach this language level? (according to the weakest student in the class), mark with \surd or X

- My students can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar topics (encountered at work, school and leisure).
- My students are able to understand extended speech and lectures and can follow even more complex lines of argument from a familiar topic.
- My students can understand texts which consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language.
- My students can read texts concerning contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints.
- My students are able to enter a conversation unprepared on a topic they are familiar with, personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.
- My students can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speaker quite possible.
- My students are able to write personal letters describing experiences and impressions
- My students can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to their interest. They are able to write an essay or report and express their point of view.

APPENDIX P III: LANGUAGE LEVELS ACCORDING TO CEFR

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: Data from Council of Europe 2011