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The Role of Local Language Mastery for Foreign Talent Management at Higher Education Institutions: Case Study in Czechia

E. FICHTNEROVA[‡],
R. J. NATHAN[#]

Purpose: This article explores the role and impact of Czech language mastery in the integration and retention of foreign academics in HEIs in the Czech Republic (Czechia). Czech higher education institutions (HEIs) aspire to attract the best talents to the workplace. The well-being of foreign experts in local workplaces is often researched without expounding the impact of local language mastery. HEIs in Czechia, like other universities in the European Union (EU), have strategic needs for foreign talents in tertiary education, however, various barriers persist in attracting and retaining foreign academics in Czechia.

Design/Method/Approach: Based upon the theories of Global Talent Management, Internationalization, and Social Ecology, this study conducted quantitative research and collected primary data from 211 foreign academics living and working in HEIs in Czechia. The study evaluated the dimensions of the well-being of foreign academics with their Czech language mastery. For higher validity, the analyses were supplemented with qualitative research (research triangulation) - a qualitative analysis of open answers to supplementary questions, in which respondents got an opportunity to express their feelings and opinions, was performed.

Findings: The result shows that although a multicultural environment exists in HEIs in Czechia, which allows for communication in English, the need to understand the local language i.e. the Czech language, for work orientation, administrative procedures and integration of a foreign employee into the local community in the medium and long-term are still pertinent. The Czech language is one of the biggest obstacles while integrating into the local community, and it takes foreigners at least five years to learn it for everyday interaction.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to the extension of Global Talent Management theory by extending the dimension of local language mastery as an important driver for employee integration and retention into a local workplace and community for sustainable employment.

Practical Implications: The study found that foreign academics can improve Czech language proficiency and feel better integrated with local communities after five years in Czechia. HEIs could play a proactive role in integrating and retaining foreign talents by assisting with local language mastery.

Originality/Value: This study highlights the importance of local language mastery in regional HEIs of the EU, whose retention of foreign talents is directly affected by the expatriates' ability to master the local language.

Research Limitations/Future Research: The research lacked sufficient information on the total number of foreign academics currently residing in Czechia. However, 211 foreign academics participated in this study. Future studies could expand the study by surveying foreign experts in other EU countries as well as including other dimensions besides local language mastery.

[‡]Eva FICHTNEROVA,
Ph.D. Scholar, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences,
University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, the Czech Republic
e-mail: fichtnerova@ef.jcu.cz
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3794-5839>

[#]Robert Jeyakumar NATHAN,
Visiting Professor, Faculty of Economics,
University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, the Czech Republic
e-mail: rnathan@jcu.cz
Associate Professor, Faculty of Business,
Multimedia University, Malaysia
e-mail: robert.jeyakumar@mmu.edu.my
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0897-0015>

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Роль володіння місцевою мовою для управління іноземними талантами у закладах вищої освіти: тематичне дослідження в Чехії

Ева ФІХТНЕРОВА[†],
Роберт Джеякумар НАТАН[#]

[†]Університет Південної Чехії в Чеському Будейовіце, Чеська Республіка
[#]Університет Південної Чехії в Чеському Будейовіце, Чеська Республіка;
Мультимедійний університет, Малайзія

Мета роботи: Ця стаття досліджує роль і вплив володіння чеською мовою на інтеграцію та утримання іноземних викладачів у закладах вищої освіти Чеської Республіки (Чехії). Чеські заклади вищої освіти (ЗВО) прагнуть залучити найкращі таланти на робочі місця. Добробут іноземних фахівців на місцевих робочих місцях часто досліджується без пояснення впливу володіння місцевою мовою. Заклади вищої освіти Чехії, як і інші університети Європейського Союзу (ЄС), мають стратегічні потреби в іноземних талантах у вищій освіті, однак існують різні бар'єри для залучення та утримання іноземних викладачів у Чехії.

Дизайн / Метод / Підхід дослідження: Грунтуючись на теоріях глобального управління талантами, інтернаціоналізації та соціальної екології, у цьому дослідженні було проведено кількісне дослідження та зібрано первинні дані від 211 іноземних викладачів, які живуть і працюють у ЗВО Чехії. У дослідженні оцінювалися виміри добробуту іноземних науковців з урахуванням їхнього рівня володіння чеською мовою. Для більшої достовірності аналіз доповнений якісним дослідженням (тріангуляція дослідження) – був проведений якісний аналіз відкритих відповідей на додаткові запитання, в яких респонденти отримали можливість висловити свої почуття та думки.

Результати дослідження: Результати показують, що хоча у закладах вищої освіти Чехії існує мультикультурне середовище, яке дозволяє спілкуватися англійською мовою, потреба в розумінні місцевої мови, тобто чеської мови, для орієнтації на роботу, адміністративних процедур та інтеграції іноземного працівника в місцеву громаду в середньостроковій та довгостроковій перспективі все ще залишається актуальною. Чеська мова є однією з найбільших перешкод на шляху інтеграції в місцеву громаду, і іноземцям потрібно щонайменше п'ять років, щоб вивчити її для повсякденної взаємодії.

Теоретична цінність дослідження: Це дослідження сприяє розширенню теорії глобального управління талантами, розширюючи вимір володіння місцевою мовою як важливого чинника інтеграції та утримання працівників на місцевому робочому місці та в місцевій громаді для забезпечення стабільної зайнятості.

Практична цінність дослідження: Дослідження показало, що іноземні науковці можуть покращити рівень володіння чеською мовою та почуватися краще інтегрованими з місцевими громадами після п'яти років перебування в Чехії. Заклади вищої освіти можуть відігравати проактивну роль в інтеграції та утриманні іноземних талантів, допомагаючи їм з оволодінням місцевою мовою.

Оригінальність / Цінність дослідження: Це дослідження підкреслює важливість володіння місцевою мовою в регіональних закладах вищої освіти ЄС, чие утримання іноземних талантів безпосередньо залежить від здатності експатріантів оволодіти місцевою мовою.

Обмеження дослідження / Майбутні дослідження: Дослідження проводилося в малому та середньому бізнесі, а аналіз базувався на перехресних даних, які не можуть бути застосовані до ширшого спектру галузей.

Тип статті: Емпіричний

Ключові слова: інтернаціоналізація, іноземні працівники, Європейський Союз, Чехія, володіння місцевою мовою, глобальне управління талантами.

1. Introduction

Highly skilled academics as well as scientists migrate among HEIs, their knowledge and skills are required from abroad to increase the international competitiveness of HEIs. They are also looking for better teaching, scientific, and even living conditions. Migration is based on various reasons, mainly on push-pull factors (Ravenstein, 1889; Cernanska, 2018). Qualified professionals are attracted by highly developed countries and prestigious universities (Shachar, 2006; Ackers, 2008). For young doctoral students, it is important to gain their own experience abroad (Marcu, 2014). The time spent abroad will help them acquire work experience and integrate into international networks. The migration of highly skilled workers is a good state strategy for maintaining a level of employability and competitiveness in the labour market. Brain circulation is a way of avoiding potential unemployment and of further increasing the value of degrees and gaining experience for future employment (Wiers-Jenssen, 2009; Behle, 2014). High-quality experts may have employment contracts with different international HEIs, i.e. it is a transnational issue of a physical and social transfer of knowledge and skills (Sperduti, 2017). International migration is related to the integration and legal position within the country in which migrants temporarily or permanently live and work (Cantwell, 2011).

The internationalization of HEIs supports mobility and thus increases the migration of academic and scientific employees. The European Commission published a code with basic measures concerning rights, roles, and rules of conduct for research and academic staff (European Commission, 2005).

HEIs in Czechia work with the internationalization strategy of the tertiary sector (Knight & De Wit, 2018), and introduce tools to ensure quality in management and development of human resources in science and research. The strategy of internationalization could internationally increase the attractiveness of HEIs to foreign experts, i.e. support brain gain and circulation (MEYS, 2020). The complexity of looking at each individual with all aspects of behavior and dimensions of personality is indispensable for the process of integration (Germain, 1981; Gitterman & Germain, 2008). The social-ecological perspective is therefore a suitable theoretical approach as the work environment is a dynamic and interactive system in which all components influence each other (Hare, 2004). Based on this interpretation, employees are influenced by their environment and also affect it through their actions (Kondrat, 2002; Johnson & Yanca, 2010).

However, the lack of knowledge of a language can act as a barrier to the allocation of resources and positions of highly skilled employees, even more strongly than the appropriate professional skills and qualifications (Gimenez & Morgan, 2014).

2. Theoretical Background

The European academic labour market is strongly attractive to the best scientists from economically weaker countries (Sbalchiero & Tuzzi, 2017). This situation is called the "Matthew's effect", i.e. available resources (workforce) are distributed among actors (HEIs) proportionally to what they already have; those who have much will get even more, i.e. renowned and scientifically attractive institutions attract foreign experts who bring new knowledge and skills, and thus these HEIs become rich (Merton, 1968). HEIs have a local economic influence on R&D, knowledge and technology transfer, and human capital development (Lilles & Rõigas, 2017).

Studies on Global Talent Management have garnered wide academic attention (De Boeck, Meyers & Dries, 2018). Specifically, talent management has also been tied to expatriate and academic migration and international mobility (Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe, 2014; Cerdin & Brewster, 2014; Collings, 2014; Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2016). Global Talent Management in Czechia aims to improve

intercultural working coexistence in the field of local tertiary education.

Immigration to a foreign HEI/country is a big social change. Other work conditions, culture, mentality, values, religion, etc. can result in social, health, and other problems during adaptation to the new society (Putova, 2017). The integration should emphasize the ecological concept of a person-in-environment (Kozlova, Tothova & Kahoun, 2003). It addresses the functioning of an individual in the environment and has an impact on his/her welfare and health (Kondrat, 2013; Skotakova, 2020). According to the Ottawa Charter, a person's health and personal welfare involve creating and maintaining positive social, psychological, and physical well-being throughout life. (WHO, 2012). Therefore, in job integration, coordinated support and comprehensive care from the employer (HEI) are indispensable.

The general university language, the so-called lingua franca, is often considered to be the English language (ThoughtCo, 2020). Good language and communication skills have a positive effect, while poor language skills may act as a strongly negative factor in migration (Cantwell, 2011). But we can also meet the criticism of the westernization of higher education with English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) because of the pressure on academics to be part of international networks in western European countries and to publish only in English journals (Sperduti, 2017). Eastern European universities must respect this universal approach and lingua franca, but must also consider their possibilities, values, and opportunities in education, science, and research.

However, the research showed that a serious obstacle to the integration and well-being of foreign university employees into the major society of Czechia is the Czech language, which is the only official language used by authorities. It is difficult for foreigners to learn it - diacritical marks, sentence structure, soft and hard "i/y", declensions, timing, etc. People with Slavic roots (especially from Slovakia, Ukraine) learn Czech faster than foreigners whose native languages have Germanic, Romance, or other roots. Smooth communication with the majority is a prerequisite for job satisfaction and good social integration. Language skills are essential for life in Czechia, especially when staying in cities or towns outside the capital city of Prague (the respondents expressed this fact in their answers to open questions) - there are more foreigners, expatriates, and people who communicate in foreign languages living in Prague (ICPraha, 2021). In Prague, for example, there is the Expat Center, which is a service of the Capital City of Prague, where foreigners can find free advice (Expats, 2021). The Department of Asylum and Migration Policy in Prague is the only one of the centers in Czechia whose officials speak English (MOI, 2022).

3. Problem Statement

Against this backdrop, literature reviews suggest that for expatriates working in Czechia, their knowledge of the Czech language can break down barriers in their integration, and usage of the Czech language at work could determine their satisfaction with interactions with colleagues at work, neighbors, and acquaintances. It is hence the focus of this study to measure and analyze to what extent the command of the local language, in this case: the Czech Language, impacts the well-being and life of academic expatriates working for HEIs in Czechia, as this is operationalized to measure their intention to continue working in Czechia.

4. Data and Methods

It is not readily possible to get specific data on foreigners working at universities in Czechia, which are usually not

registered in national statistics¹, and the data must be acquired by directly approaching individual institutions (Sbalchiero & Tuzzi, 2017). At present, the exact number of foreigners (esp. academics and scientists) working in Czechia is not known. The Czech Statistical Office (CSO) registers foreigners according to demographic characteristics, work, and trade license; partial categorization is completely missing, e.g. for scientific, professional, and mental workers. Despite the above-mentioned insufficient information on the total number of them, it was possible to address the target group through existing employers – i.e. HEIs. Based on this information and the analysis of institutional annual reports, the size of the target group was set at approximately 3,000 foreign employees with long-term residence permits. The questionnaires with 100 questions, examining selected aspects of integration in Czechia (see Appendix 1) were disseminated to foreign employees at all 26 public HEIs registered by MEYS (2021) as well as through the social network Facebook of Euraxess Centre in Prague.

The analysis was devoted to examining the Czech language as an aspect of social integration. Data collection yielded 221 completed responses from the participants. The data were obtained in 2019, before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, which reduced the common migration of foreign employees in 2020 and 2021.

Data analysis from the quantitative research was performed using SASD 1.4.10 (Statistical Data Analysis) and IBM SPSS programs version 27 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The analysis was based on the first and second stages of classification. In the first stage of classification, frequency tables were constructed for individual indicators, and absolute and relative frequencies and mean values were calculated (mode, median, mean, variance, standard deviation, range, variance estimate, and standard deviations and interval estimate of mean and variance). A qualitative analysis of open answers to supplementary questions from the questionnaire was processed by open coding in the Atlas.ti 7 programme.

In the second stage of classification, contingency tables with absolute and relative frequencies (column, row, total, and expected) and a sign scheme were constructed. As part of the context analysis, the Chi-square of good correspondence - χ^2 (Pearson Chi-Square) and the Independence Test were applied according to the nature of the characters and the number of observations. Furthermore, calculations of Pearson's contingency coefficient, normalized Person's contingency coefficient, Cuprov's coefficient, Cramer's coefficient, Wals's coefficient, Spearman's coefficient, and Correlation coefficient were performed. The strength of the relationship was measured at three levels of significance level - $\alpha = 0.05, 0.01, \text{ and } 0.001$. To determine the direction of the statistically significant relationship between the two characters, the level of possible deviation was calculated for each field of the Pivot Table. In case of insufficient observation, Yates correction was applied.

5. Results

Of the 221 respondents who participated in this study, 137 were men (62%) and 84 were women (38%). 78.7% were under the age of 44 and 21.3% were over 45. The average year of birth was 1981. The basis for a long-term stay in Czechia was employment for 88% (primarily scientific research and teaching), study for 8%, and family reasons for 4%. 192 (86.8%) respondents indicated a long-term residence permit in Czechia. 22 (10%) indicated permanent residence, and 7 (3.2%) persons repeated short-term residence.

The respondents had a Ph.D. and higher (total 69%), or academic degrees – bachelor, master, engineer (30% of people), 2 people

stated other education. Most of the respondents were scientific, professional, and intellectual workers (88%).

The largest representation of the respondents by nationality varied in the countries of the European area, i.e. Ukraine 8.6% (19), 7.7% (17) Slovakia, 6.0% (13) Italy, 4.9% (11) Spain, 4.5% (10) of Germany and 4.1% (9) of the Russian Federation. Another 64.3% (142) of the respondents stated their origin from the following countries (according to the number of representatives): European continent – France (8), Greece (7), Great Britain (6), Poland (5), Portugal (4), Romania (4), Turkey (4), two each from Belgium, Belarus, Croatia, Hungary, The Netherlands, Austria, Serbia, one person each - Finland, Sweden. The participating respondents from countries outside Europe stated their origin from India (19), Iran (13), the USA (10), Mexico (4), Pakistan (4), three each from Egypt, South Africa, Nepal, Taiwan, two each from Armenia, Bangladesh, China, Canada, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Vietnam, one each from Argentina, Brazil, Georgia, Chile, Indonesia, Japan, Colombia, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and Venezuela.

5.1. The Czech Language as an Aspect of Integration

A foreigner must solve the issue of adaptation to the new workplace (including labour-legal matters and the amount of income, possibly verification of qualifications), housing and transport to work, possibly employment for the wife and school facilities for the children, meals, issues of health care, banking services, actions in the authorities, his spiritual needs and others that are closely related to his life and the life of his family. It can also be a psychological issue (or a change in the social role) when separating from the family and friends who remained in the country of origin.

127 of the 221 respondents (57.5%) mentioned problems/obstacles with the Czech language. The biggest obstacles reported by the respondents were listed as follows:

- 1) Very difficult grammar (diacritical marks, sentence structure, spelling, tenses, declensions, genders, prefixes, conjunctions, prepositions, conditionals, timing, etc., but also correct pronunciation).
- 2) Differences or similarities to the native language of the foreigner. Some foreigners had trouble remembering the correct forms of words, they had problems with differences and similarities to their native language - e.g. with Russian, which is easier, or completely different from their native language (e.g. Greek or languages of the Romance and Germanic language groups).
- 3) Lack of time for learning and practice in Czechia. The respondents reported that they were often very busy at work and did not have time to learn and practice speaking. Some of them did not need Czech at work, so they had no motivation to learn.
- 4) The reluctance of Czech citizens to speak to foreigners who do not speak the language. Those who tried to speak often encountered reluctance to speak on the part of Czech citizens and impatience with foreigners who were not confident in the language. The problem appeared also in getting into some Czech language courses.

5.2. Acquiring Knowledge of the Czech Language

Knowledge of the majority language is the cornerstone of good integration into society. 69.1% of the respondents stated that they did not know Czech or were beginners only. 19.4% of the respondents had advanced knowledge and 11.5% could speak and understand Czech very well.

¹ Czech Statistical Office - CSO. (2014). KZAM: Systematical Part. Available at: https://www.czso.cz/csu/kzam_systematicka_cast.

The respondents described their experiences. It was possible to mark the Czech language as one of the biggest obstacles when entering Czechia, very often the foreigner needed his/her employer's or a Czech citizen's help with documents and negotiations in Czech. There was also recommended help from the Euraxess Centre, which works under the Academy of Science and provides services for foreign academics and researchers in its centres in Prague, Brno, and in the meeting points at Czech HEIs (*Euraxess Czech Republic, 2020*). Some respondents expressed an idea to stay in bigger towns because foreigners can find more English-speaking people there and people in the countryside do not speak foreign languages. To support foreign experts in Czechia, there are also projects within the development programs of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, e.g. PILZ at Masaryk University in Brno, which solves problems associated with the employment of foreign workers at our universities and the posting of our workers abroad, incl. the processing of still unresolved areas of internationalization of human resources (*MUNI, 2018*).

The respondents mostly learned Czech in Czechia through practice – work, study, and contacts with the majority. They also attended the Czech language courses provided by local HEIs. Some learned Czech in paid courses and at language schools in Czechia, on free Euraxess courses or in courses of Integration Centres for Foreigners of the Ministry of Interior (*Integration Center for Foreigners, 2020*), or prepared themselves by self-study. Several people learned Czech beforehand in their native country or knew Czech from their home environment. The greater part of the respondents mentioned a combination of two or more places and ways where and how they learned Czech. The Internet or mobile applications were also mentioned as a supporting resource. 50 % of the respondents learned the Czech language in courses or with a teacher. 17 % learned Czech communication in the Czech environment by learning by doing (work, school, family), 11 % by self-study (however, it is assumed that self-study is only part of the language acquisition, staying in the Czech environment is more important), 15 % of the people stated that they used all types of learning, 7 % at least two types (i.e. university courses + the Internet or speaking to native speakers).

The international environment at the university allows the use of multiple languages. The most used languages for communication at work were English (57 %) and Czech (20 %), followed by Russian (4 %), Slovak (4 %), and Spanish (3 %). Other languages were found in the "Other" item - e.g. Greek, Dutch, Polish. 3 % or less used Italian, German, French, and Ukrainian.

Overall, the respondents rated the Czech language as a difficult and illogical language for them and the biggest obstacle to adaptation and integration (mainly communication with authorities and during official meetings). 53.8 % of the respondents were not satisfied with their knowledge of the Czech language, 26.4 % were moderately satisfied and 19.8 % were satisfied.

Knowledge of the Czech language is assessed according to the Common Language Reference Framework created by the Council of Europe, which defines 6 language levels, each level is described in detail, including a list of knowledge and skills that a person must master at that language level. It defines three basic levels of language use, which are further divided into: A – a basic language user, B – an individual user, C – an experienced user (*Prague Education Center, 2022*).

5.3. Research Setting and Data Structure

A statistically significant connection between knowledge of the Czech language and interaction with people in Czechia was proven. It is true that the respondents who stated that their knowledge of the Czech language was excellent significantly more often rated their interaction with people in Czechia as excellent. The respondents who stated that they did not speak Czech or were beginners significantly more often rated their interaction with people in Czechia as poor to average.

A statistically significant connection between knowledge of the

Czech language and meeting people of the same culture was proven. It is true that the respondents who stated that they spoke Czech very well met people of the same culture significantly more often. The respondents who significantly more often rated themselves as beginners in terms of knowledge of the Czech language met people of the same culture less often. A statistically significant association between the traits was not demonstrated in other cases. The results are shown in *Tab. 1*.

Table 1: Knowledge of the Czech Language in relation to the following variables:

Knowledge of the Czech Language	χ^2	df	p	Sig.
Interaction with People in Czechia	32,292	4	<0,001	***
Cultural Barriers	2,88	4	0,578	---
Meeting People of the Same Culture	13,283	2	<0,01	**
Experience of Discrimination	0,617	2	0,735	---
Frequency of Using Employer's Services	2,517	2	0,284	---
Assessment of the Quality of Life in Czechia	5,631	4	0,228	---

Note: * - significant at $\alpha = 0.05$; ** - significant at $\alpha = 0.01$; *** - significant at $\alpha = 0.001$

Knowledge of the Czech Language proved the significant connection with the following variables: Interaction with People in Czechia and Meeting People of the Same Culture.

Source: Research results, 2022

A statistically significant connection between interaction with people in Czechia and satisfaction with the work environment was demonstrated. It is true that the respondents who rated their interaction with people in Czechia as good or excellent expressed greater satisfaction with their work environment. The respondents who rated their interaction with people in Czechia as poor to average were significantly more often dissatisfied with their work environment or had a neutral attitude towards it.

A statistically significant connection between interaction with people in Czechia and perceived cultural barriers was demonstrated. It is true that the respondents who rated their interaction with people in Czechia as good or excellent did not see any or only small cultural obstacles while observing their cultural traditions. The respondents who rated their interaction with people in Czechia as poor to average significantly more often stated that there were serious obstacles preventing them from observing their cultural traditions.

A statistically significant connection between interaction with people in Czechia and the frequency of using employer's services was demonstrated. It is true that the respondents who rated their interaction with people in Czechia as excellent used services for foreign employees to a significantly greater extent.

A statistically significant connection between interaction with people in Czechia and assessment of one's standard of living while staying in Czechia was demonstrated. It is true that the respondents who rated their interaction with people in Czechia as good or excellent expressed greater satisfaction with their standard of living during their stay in Czechia. It can be stated that the better the interaction with people in Czechia was evaluated, the greater the satisfaction with one's standard of living while staying in Czechia was. In other cases, a statistically significant association between the traits was not demonstrated. The results are presented in *Tab. 2*.

Tab. 3 shows the result of a Chi-Square result for the test of association between each research factor and foreign academics' command of the Czech language. The best knowledge of Czech was reported by the respondents with permanent residence status in Czechia, compared to the respondents with a residence permit or a short-term visa. The result indicates that the respondents working in natural and technical sciences significantly had less

command of the Czech language compared to those in other fields of work.

Table 2: Interaction with People in Czechia in relation to the following variables:

Interaction with people in Czechia	X ²	Df	p	Sig.
Amount of Wages	6,031	4	0,197	---
Satisfaction with the Work Environment	19,884	4	<0,001	***
Cultural Barriers	16,972	4	<0,01	**
Experience of Discrimination	2,034	2	0,362	---
Frequency of Using Employer's Services	6,286	2	<0,05	*
Assessment of the Quality of Life in Czechia	11,908	4	<0,05	*

Note: * - significant at $\alpha = 0.05$; ** - significant at $\alpha = 0.01$; *** - significant at $\alpha = 0.001$

Interaction with People in Czechia proved the significant connection with the following variables: Satisfaction with the Work Environment, Culture Barriers, Frequency of Using Employer's Services and Assessment of the Quality of Life in Czechia.

Source: Research results, 2022

Table 3: The Impact of the Command of Czech Language on Foreign Talents

Factors	X ²	df	p	Sig.
Foreigners' Type of the Stay in Czechia	24,101	8	<0.01	**
Foreigners' Area of Expertise	10,454	4	<0.05	*
Foreigners' Type of Employment Contract	12,902	4	<0,05	*
Foreigners' Type of the Housing	27,014	6	<0,001	***
Foreigners' Nationality	38,587	6	<0,001	***
Foreigners' Length of Stay in Czechia	49,806	4	<0,001	***
Foreigners' Feeling "Like at Home" in Czechia	10,703	2	<0,01	**
Foreigners' Interaction with Local Community	32,292	4	<0,001	***

Note: * - significant at $\alpha = 0.05$; ** - significant at $\alpha = 0.01$; *** - significant at $\alpha = 0.001$

Impact of the Command of Czech Language on Foreign Talents was positively tested at all above-stated factors.

Source: Research results, 2022

The foreigners with fixed-term employment contracts had significantly less ability to speak Czech or were beginners in their knowledge of the Czech language. The respondents with their own housing reported a better knowledge of the Czech language, compared with those who lived in a hostel, boarding house, or commute to a workplace in Czechia. The foreigners from former USSR countries significantly more often stated that they were learning the Czech language and rated their knowledge as advanced, compared to the foreigners from Asian and African countries, who more often stated that they could not speak Czech or described themselves as beginners.

The foreigners who had been staying in Czechia for a longer time (more than 5 years) significantly more often stated that they spoke Czech very well or that they were learning the Czech language and rated their knowledge as advanced, while the foreigners with the shortest period of stay in Czechia (under 2 years) significantly more often stated that they could not speak Czech and described themselves as beginners.

It is found that the respondents who stated that they felt "like at home" in Czechia significantly more often rated their knowledge of the Czech language as very good. The respondents who stated that they did not feel "like at home" in Czechia significantly more often evaluated themselves in terms of knowledge of the Czech language as beginners who could not speak Czech yet. Interaction with the local community was already proven in Tab. 1.

A statistically significant connection between the length of stay in Czechia and knowledge of the Czech language was observed. Generally, the statistical analysis showed that foreign academics living in Czechia for more than 5 years and who can speak the Czech language felt well integrated into their workplaces and local communities, which signals their satisfaction with their well-being. Analysis of adjusted residues for the Length of Stay and Knowledge of the Czech Language is presented in Tab. 4.

Table 4: Length of Stay and the Knowledge of the Czech Language

Analysis of adjusted residues shown by a sign diagram:		Knowledge of the Czech language		
		I cannot speak, I am a beginner	I have advanced knowledge	I can speak Czech very well
Sign Scheme	Length of Stay in Czechia	< 2 years	+++	---
	2-5 years	o	o	--
	> 5 years	---	++	+++

Note: +/- (for $\alpha \leq 0.05$); +/+ (for $\alpha \leq 0.01$); +++ / --- (for $\alpha \leq 0.001$); SPSS version 24

The sign diagram showed the relation of the Length of Stay in Czechia and Knowledge of the Czech language.

Source: Research results, 2022

The foreigners staying up to 5 years declared English or other languages for their communication at work, while those who stayed in Czechia for more than 5 years stated that they use the Czech language at work. The results are shown in Tab. 5.

The answers from the English questionnaires concerning the use of a native language in the work environment expressed a value of 2.16 on a five-point scale (I do not use the native language - I use little - I use on average - I use more - I use the most). A value of 4.06 was found in the Czech questionnaires; foreigners whose native language was of Slavic origin (most often Slovaks) had a communication advantage.

Table 5: Length of Stay and the Language of Communication at Work

Analysis of adjusted residues shown by a sign diagram:		Language of Communication at Work		
		Czech	English	Other Language
Sign Scheme	Length of Stay in Czechia	< 2 years	---	+++
	2-5 years	-	o	+
	> 5 years	+++	---	o

Note: +/- (for $\alpha \leq 0.05$); +/+ (for $\alpha \leq 0.01$); +++ / --- (for $\alpha \leq 0.001$); SPSS version 24

The sign diagram showed the relation of the Length of Stay in Czechia and Language of Communication at Work.

Source: Research results, 2022

The foreigners working in technical and natural sciences use their native languages at work very little, but those working in humanities/social sciences and administration/services use their native languages very often, as it is showed in Tab. 6. They can arrange contacts or interpretations for foreigners from their language groups.

Table 6: Area of Expertise and Use of a Native Language At Work

Analysis of adjusted residues shown by a sign diagram:			Use of a native language at work		
Sign	Area of Expertise in Czechia		Very little	On average	Very often
	Humanities and Social Sciences		-	o	+
	Natural and Technical Sciences		+	o	--
	Administration, Services, and Others		o	o	+

Note: +/- (for $\alpha \leq 0.05$); ++/-- (for $\alpha \leq 0.01$); +++/--- (for $\alpha \leq 0.001$); SPSS version 24

The sign diagram showed the relation of the Area of Expertise in Czechia and Use of a Native Language at Work.

Source: Research results, 2022

There were more communication languages in the respondents' personal life in Czechia. Our survey found that most (43 %) foreigners communicated in English in their personal lives, and another substantial part (22 %) in Czech. Other languages were represented by 9% and were varied according to different nationalities - languages such as Arabic, Belarusian, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Hindi, Croatian, Iranian, Kannada, Hungarian, Malayalam, Mandarin, Marathi, Punjabi, Persian, Polish, Romanian, Ruthenian, Greek, Serbian, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. The Russian language was represented by 7 %. Furthermore, German, Spanish, Slovak, Ukrainian, Italian, and French were also spoken.

Coded answers to open questions were processed in Atlas.ti programme. Fig. 1 presents respondents' recommendations on how to be prepared and overcome the language barrier. They yielded the following information: the first major barrier when entering Czechia was complicated administration for issuing a work visa. The embassy required completed forms in the Czech language and certified translations of documents but did not provide the possibility to provide a translator; communication took place only in the Czech language, which is the only official language for Czechia. After entering Czechia, the respondents often described barriers to finding suitable housing – citizens of Czechia often cannot speak another language and were not willing to accommodate foreigners because they could not negotiate with them, there was also a problem with concluding a contract in another language than Czech. The workplace lacked familiarization with work procedures, forms, and the possibility of consultation in English. There were some obstacles to registration at the doctor's (who would be willing to accept patients from abroad and communicate in English) as well as a language barrier in the hospital - neither doctors nor nurses spoke English and required the participation of a translator.

Respondents' recommended ways of learning Czech for a work assignment in Czechia: Czech language courses, communication during the work process, communication with a close local friend, reading newspapers, magazines, and books, watching TV and films, participating in social events, learning from everyday life circumstances.

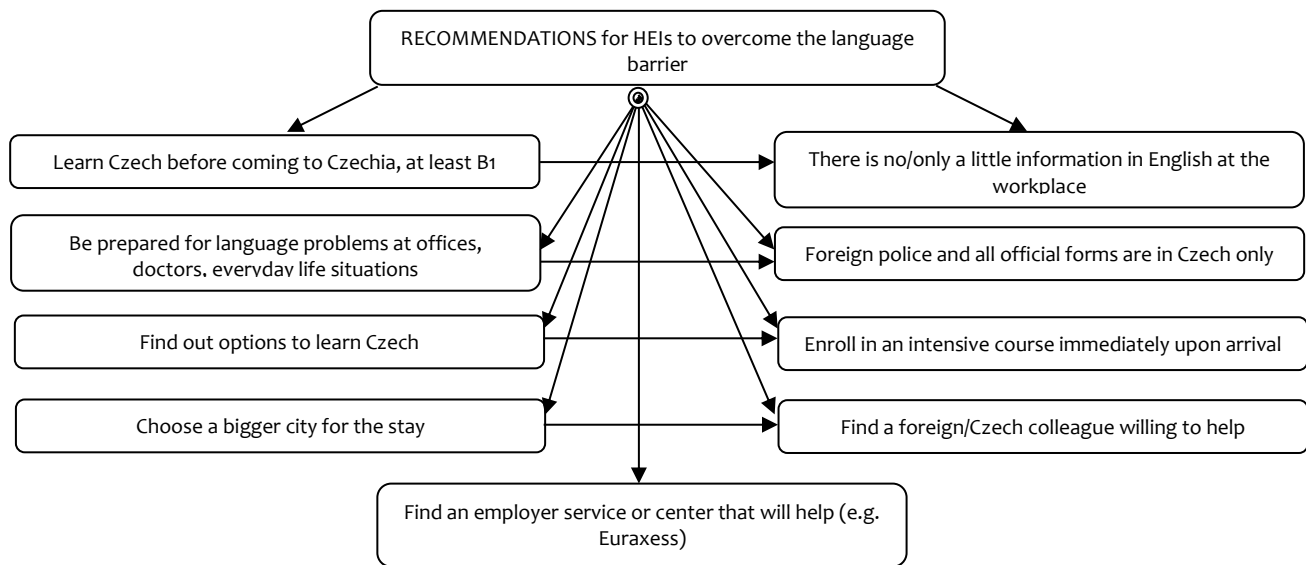


Figure 1: Respondents' recommendations on how to be prepared and overcome the language barrier

Source: developed by author

6. Discussion

The Czech language was confirmed as one of the most serious obstacles when entering and starting work in Czechia. It is followed by bureaucracy - complicated forms/documents in Czech starting at the Czech Embassy in a foreign country. The answers also stated that the language barrier was mainly in small towns and villages (except Prague), also in the Czech state authorities; officials communicated only in Czech. For meetings with the authorities, it is advisable to have a Czech-speaking person as an escort. It is necessary to use Czech language courses so that the individual could learn to speak as soon as possible; foreigners must be prepared for language problems. It was recommended to start studying Czech as soon as possible (preferably before arriving); to know at least basic phrases (ideally to speak at B1 level), to learn diligently, and to communicate in Czech often.

Analyses of the correspondence between the length of the stay and chosen criteria showed that foreigners are already integrated into Czech society after five years of long-term residence. The data were obtained in 2019. The research was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic situation that significantly reduced the migration of foreign employees in 2020 and 2021. It is unclear if the same situation before the pandemic will return once the pandemic is over.

Czech HEIs as employers provide foreign employees with various services, incl. language courses, and follow their strategic plans for internationalization under the Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education for the period from 2021 (MEYS, 2020). Services for foreign employees are usually provided by Incoming or Welcome Offices or International Offices, Personnel Departments, or the Euraxess Centres (Euraxess Czech Republic, 2020), which have local contact points in Prague, Brno, and public universities.

Foreign employees' involvement in the work process should start with an intensive or semester Czech language course that helps to learn Czech. It is often accompanied by social or gastronomic events to get acquainted with Czech realities and culture. However, there is not always a sufficient service system and high-quality service staff with language skills and multicultural training to provide smooth and rapid adaptation. Buddy services for foreign employees are sometimes provided by student volunteers under the banner of the Erasmus Student Network.

There are no general studies or manuals advising foreigners on the best way how to adapt to Czechia or quickly gain knowledge of the Czech language. Foreign employees are guided by instructions from their employer or other foreigners already living in Czechia as well as their Czech acquaintances. Respondents praised Euraxess services - their contract staff assists foreign researchers and academics when entering Czechia with a visa process or residence permit, accommodation, health insurance, medical care, meeting the needs of family members, banking services, organizing intensive language and cultural courses and involves their clients into various social events for integration with the majority. These services also include an escort service to the Police or other authorities or other ones such as legal and translation services. A foreigner can also turn to the Integration Centres of the Ministry of Interior (*Integration Center for Foreigners, 2020*) to provide Czech language courses, legal services, and other help especially to third-country nationals to the Advisory Centre for Foreigners and Migrants under the Charity, which provides social and legal advice, administrative matters, assistance with accommodation, employment, mediation of interpreting and translation services to all foreigners, regardless of age, nationality or residence regime (*Diocesan Charity of Ceske Budejovice, 2021*). All these above-mentioned services are free of charge. There are also various types of Czech language courses and internationally certified exams provided by the Institute of Language and Vocational Training of Charles University (Charles University, 2021), further, a foreigner can find face-to-face private language courses, even online Internet ones (*Pazdiorova, 2021*). Tests of Czech to grant citizenship in Czechia are also available online (*NPICR, 2021*).

Good knowledge of Czech can be acquired by networking, i.e. - establishing friendships, and collegial and neighborly relations, which will help the foreigner to function more effectively and integrate into the majority (*Dvorakova & al., 2008*). Mediation of contacts to institutions and organizations, or groups or communities to which a foreigner can turn for advice or consultation is also important. In Prague, for example, there is the Expat Centre, which is a service of the Capital City of Prague, where foreigners can find free consultancy and help. Foreigners also often inform each other through websites (*Expats, 2021*) and also on social networks - e.g. on Facebook, there are various ex-pats groups. Foreigners can also find support, for example, within the international web platform of the Cactus Foundation, which deals with and conducts research in the field of researchers' mental health. This initiative helps researchers create a fairer, more equal, and inclusive society (*Cactus Foundation, 2020*).

Czech HEIs need foreign academics who are satisfied with their well-being in Czechia. As such, the goal of the talent and HR management of HEIs should be to facilitate the inculcation of the Czech language in their foreign academics. Foreign academics' adaptation and mastery of the Czech language would significantly improve their continued intention to stay and work in Czechia as well as harmonize their coexistence within the local community. The peak of integration is called 'empowerment' because foreigners would then gain control of their lives and living conditions, internalize new values, and perceive themselves well in the new society (*Navratil, 2003*).

Hosting prominent professors and scientists from the whole world is a noteworthy benefit of the educational process in Czechia. Good interactions in the work environment help expatriates to adapt faster to the new workplace. Relevant services of the employers supporting a rapid adaptation to a new work environment and

integration into life and culture are essential for newcomers from abroad. One of the most important ways the employer can help them is an intensive course in the Czech language at the beginning of their stay. Solutions on how to learn and permanently increase the Czech language skills of foreign staff in HEIs should be implemented. NGOs/private companies can also help with integration projects, courses and services for foreigners as well as social environment - colleagues and other persons including online social networks.

The research results showed the need for continuous education in the multicultural area and sensitive management of human capital from abroad - based on ethical rules and internationalization strategies. For work ecology and the integration of foreign experts into the new work environment, it would be necessary to implement a standardized system of integration services within the entire Czechia, which would be analogous to the system of coordinated comprehensive rehabilitation services (*Pfeiffer, 2014*). The integration services at HEIs should help remove obstacles in all aspects of integration and provide support in everyday life, offering help with acquiring the Czech language, especially at the beginning of the stay, when the foreigner is disadvantaged in the new environment. The service system will be efficient if it is timely, comprehensive, interconnected, coordinated, and available in time and place, synergistic in cooperation with external partners for administrative, legal, translation, banking, and other necessary services - e.g. provision of school facilities for children and treatment in medical facilities (which especially helps women). Integration should also be supported by the possibility of employing a partner (dual-career jobs). The combination of a high-quality multicultural work environment together with a coordinated system of services and the removal of unnecessary obstacles, esp. with the Czech language, will help to maintain or improve the work performance of each foreigner and positively influence one's health, intellectual, psychological and social aspects, and the overall quality of life.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore one of the aspects of the smooth integration of foreign talents into Czech HEIs, i.e. the knowledge of the Czech language, which can essentially help foreign academics to adapt and integrate into their jobs and lives, and achieve their career goals in Czechia.

The Czech language belongs to the Slavic group of languages that can be learned with ease by foreigners from the same language group, however, it can be difficult to master for people from other language groups. Our study finds that the Czech language skills are essential for a long-term stay in Czechia, especially when staying in cities or towns outside the capital city of Prague - where are more foreigners and people communicating in foreign languages, especially English and older people in German (*Integration Center Prague, 2021*). Our study finds that without knowledge of the Czech language, a foreigner cannot integrate well into the majority of Czech society because of feeling the language barrier everywhere. HEIs and workplaces play a vital role in integrating language training into their foreign talent adaptation programmes to facilitate better integration of expatriates into their workplaces and local communities.

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9. Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Appendix 1: Matrix of the questionnaire (questions focused on the Czech language “CC, DD, EE, FF, GG” and ‘X’ denotes significant association between the variables)

	A	D	E	F	J	N	R	X	Z	CC	GG	II	LL	NN	OO	PP	RR
A. Nationality			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
B. Biggest Barriers to Entry Czechia	X	X	X							X				X	X	X	X
C. Type of Residence	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
D. Length of Stay	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
E. Region of Stay	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
F. Marital Status	X				X	X			X	X				X	X	X	X
G. Highest Education Level	X	X			X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
H. Area of Expertise	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X				X			X
I. Type of Employment Contract	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X				X			X
J. Amount of Wage	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X							X
K. Type of Accommodation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
L. Satisfaction with Accommodation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X				X			X
M. Compare Social Status with Czech Citizens	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
N. Social Status Ranking in Czechia	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
O. Social Status Ranking in Country of Origin	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
P. Category of Employment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X				X	X	X	X
Q. Experience of Culture Shock	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
R. Satisfaction with Work Environment	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X					X	X	X
S. Sense of Confidence in Job	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X							X
T. Employer’s Support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
U. Opportunities for Professional Development	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X						X
V. Contact with People from Country of Origin	X	X		X		X		X	X		X	X	X				X
W. Neighbours in Czechia	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X				X
X. Meeting People of the Same Culture	X	X		X		X					X	X	X				
Y. Meeting People of the Same Religion	X	X		X		X		X			X	X	X				
Z. Feeling “like at home” in Czechia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
AA. Relationship of Czech Citizens to Foreigner’s Nationality	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
BB. Satisfaction with State Authorities in Czechia	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
CC. Knowledge of Czech Language	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
DD. Use of Native Language in Communication	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
EE. Language of Communication at Work	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
FF. Language of Communication in Private Life	X	X	X	X			X	X		X		X	X				X
GG. Interaction with People in Czechia	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
HH. Sufficiency of Monthly Income	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X						X
II. Cultural Barriers	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
JJ. Religious Barriers	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
KK. Barriers in Behaviour and Mentality	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
LL. Experience of Discrimination	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
MM. Evaluation of Quality of Services Provided by Projects (Euraxess)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X					X	X	X
NN. Evaluation of Quality of Services Provided by Employer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
OO. Type of Offered Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X		X	X
PP. Frequency of Using Services	X	X	X	X		X	X		X			X	X	X	X		X
QQ. Satisfaction with Quality of Medical Care	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
RR. Assessment of Quality of Living Standards in Czechia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Source: Research results, 2022