Transcultural Perspectives in English Language Education: Teaching English in the Czech Republic from an American Lens

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Transcultural Perspectives in English Language Education:
Teaching English in the Czech Republic from an American Lens

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Honors Project

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Abstract

This project aims to provide a thorough examination of the English language education landscape in the Czech Republic, shedding light on key aspects such as the age of initiation, fluency attainment expectations, and the influence of various educational tracks. It delves into the sociocultural factors shaping English language acquisition, including the perceived necessity of learning English, parental language practices, and generational differences in proficiency. To capture the perspectives of American English teachers working in the Czech Republic, my research explores their attitudes, expectations, and challenges. This considers factors such as the necessity of knowing the Czech language and the perception of the Czech population towards American teachers. Additionally, my study investigates the cultural dynamics that influence the Czech education system, with a focus on understanding the nature of the student-teacher relationship. Methodologically, my research is a comprehensive approach. It combines an analysis of pre-existing scholarly works with firsthand insights gathered through interviews with an American teacher who has taught English in the Czech Republic. This project seeks to bridge existing knowledge gaps on this specific topic. The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide valuable insights for aspiring teachers. It is personally significant to me, as it aligns with my future goal to become an English teacher in this context. In addition, this project incorporates a creative component to synthesize English Education with my background in International Studies. A practical resource titled "A Beginner's Guide to Teaching English in the Czech Republic" was developed, drawing on the findings from my research. It includes fun facts, cultural insights, and a mini language guide, to serve as an accessible and easy guide.
Guiding Research Questions

● What is the landscape of English language education in the Czech Republic, and how does it vary based on factors such as the age of initiation, the expected age or grade of fluency attainment, and the presence of different educational tracks?

● How do sociocultural factors influence English language acquisition in the Czech Republic, including the perceived necessity of learning English, parental language practices, and generational differences in English language proficiency?

● What are the attitudes, expectations, and challenges of American English teachers working in the Czech Republic, including the necessity of knowing the Czech language and the perception from the Czech population?

● What are the attitudes, beliefs, and cultural dynamics influencing the Czech education system and what is the nature of the student-teacher relationship?
Literature Review

Landscape of English Education in the Czech Republic

My research questions have prompted me to find a plethora of new information and perspectives regarding the multi-faceted realm of English language education in the Czech Republic. Four interrelated research questions have guided my exploration, each shedding light on various aspects of English language education and its societal implications. My first research question sought to unveil the overall landscape of English language education in the Czech Republic. I was able to find a large selection of sources that addressed factors such as the age at which English instruction begins, how it transcends through the course of a student’s K-12 experience, and the presence of educational tracks in Czech school systems (Gregor, 2018). In a research article by Monika Černá (2014), there was great detail about the specific education reforms that took place in the region. Černá also proposed a new point that I have yet to encounter, that there is a lack of qualified English teachers in Czech school systems. Author Blanka Klimova (2014) suggests some explanations of recorded successful teaching methods and philosophies, which I am curious to compare to the definition provided of what constitutes a qualified teacher. However, I was not able to find how the language requirements differ specifically depending on the tracks. I plan to continue my research on this topic through looking at government websites, but am expecting to be faced with a language barrier. Another component of this research prompt that I was not able to find a specific or consistent quantity is the anticipated age or grade at which English fluency is expected.
Sociocultural Factors

Moving beyond the classroom, my second research topic delves into the sociocultural factors that influence English language acquisition. I found resources to help investigate the necessity of learning English, mostly as it relates to pursuing an Erasmus semester or finding better job positions, but none that are location-specific to the Czech Republic. One article I have found myself frequently visiting touches on student’s attitudes about learning English and how the integration of the language has affected areas of their life. In this article, author Mark Landry (2016) argues that many Czech students value their English education because of the global opportunities it allows. Another component I sought to address was the role of parental language practices in shaping English language skills and the intergenerational differences in proficiency levels. In another one of Monika Černá’s (2018) articles, she suggests applying the “three generation model” along with personal statements to explain trends in how much knowledge of English typical families have. I found one source particularly that included a study on the exact percentage of Czech nationals that identified as being English speakers (Pirodsky, 2020).

Similarly to what was explained in the preceding lines, these articles did not have any ties to the particular country itself though or even the geographic region. I also seemed to notice a gap of knowledge addressing the question of whether parents speak English to their children at home.

American Perspective

My third research question shifts its focus to the experiences of American English teachers in the Czech Republic. My research sought to examine the perspectives, attitudes, and expectations placed upon them. One component of this was an examination of whether knowledge of the Czech language is deemed necessary to find success in the field. Tamah
Sherman’s (2009) research article mostly answered this question, as well as provided more insight into the perceived attitudes towards Americans in specific. It did not offer any insight to how the teaching experience would differ having or not having Czech language proficiency, but I was able to make some of my own conclusions. There exists a lot of insights into the complexities of teaching English in a foreign cultural context that I pulled some findings from, but nothing else specific to the Czech Republic, which seemed to be a common occurrence. I did however find some blog postings from ESL instructors teaching there that gave me a better idea of their unique experiences. The drawback to this, as with any personal interview or case study, is that it is very specific and may not be applicable to the general population.

**Attitudes, Beliefs, and Cultural Dynamics**

My last research focus dealt with the cultural dynamics that make up the Czech education system, particularly in terms of the student-teacher relationship. I was hoping to find literature on the culture and customs in the country. I found quite a bit, but none with explicit ties to how that affects the nation’s view of education. Daniel Kunášek (2019) did however argue about the popularity and significance of “English camps” in the Czech Republic in his thesis. This opened a new field of research for me. My hope was to do a bit of a comparative analysis using the Czech Republic’s “deep culture” vs. “surface culture” to explain some of their beliefs, but additional research will need to be done to find enough support for each category. Another category I sought to examine was classroom dynamics, and how this affects what the student-teacher dynamic looks like. There was a major gap of research published addressing this, but I am hoping to gain more insight through my interview.

Overall, I have found a large portion of the information necessary to carry out my project when synthesizing the body of research I have crafted for myself. Each source contains its
benefits and drawbacks, but when molded together into the grand scheme of what education looks like in the Czech Republic, gives more clarity to what I am looking for. I have identified the major gaps of knowledge and am seeking to address them through my own research using a personalized interview.

**Proposed Activities**

In today’s day and age, English is no longer just a subject in a textbook or a class at school. It is a bridge to opportunities, a global currency of communication, and an instrument of cultural exchange. In the Czech Republic, the pursuit of English proficiency has become an important facet of contemporary life. It is being more heavily spoken in large cities, overtaking the realm of academia and higher education, and becoming more prominent in the workplace. I have a strong personal connection to this topic as it relates to my future career plans in a location that is dear to me. In delving into the intricacies of English education in the Czech Republic, I hope to gain insight into the structure of the Czech classroom, the prevailing pedagogical practices, and the social and cultural dynamics that exist in this landscape. All of which will make me better equipped to take on the role as an English teacher in this context. This research project displays the interdisciplinary component by merging findings from fields such as linguistics, education, sociology, and cultural studies. It seeks to understand the many factors influencing English language acquisition while recognizing that language is not solely a linguistic endeavor but a sociocultural one. It is connected with societal norms, generational dynamics, and educational practices that will be further explored within.

Currently, there exists a small body of published research covering general aspects of English education in the Czech Republic. However, there are discernible gaps that warrant exploration on my part. Specifically, there is a lack of information regarding the student-teacher
dynamic, as well as the prevalence of English spoken by parents at home. There are also minimal findings about how English education varies depending on educational tracks.

**Methodology**

To investigate the niche gaps of knowledge about English education in the Czech Republic, my research employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. These consisted of three main components: a comprehensive review of already-published works, an interview with an American English teacher that has taught ESL in the Czech Republic, and a creative brochure outlining my findings in a helpful guide. One limitation that I had is the geographical distance prohibiting me from undertaking any classroom observations.

A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to establish a foundation of knowledge and piece together new findings. I made use of peer-reviewed academic journals, books, language reports, and reputable online databases from different disciplines. I then synthesized these published works to help guide the development of my interview questions and discussions.

My interview was conducted with an American English teacher working in the Czech Republic to offer qualitative insights into the challenges, expectations, and perception of teachers within the Czech educational system. The interview participant is an individual I personally know that is teaching ESL in Czechia on a Fulbright Grant, similar to what I will pursue. She first received an interview invitation (See Appendix A) via email. I had a set collection of questions to guide our discussion (See Appendix B), but I also encouraged her to discuss aspects of her experiences she found particularly relevant or significant. The interview was conducted online via video conferencing platform Zoom. Zoom allowed me to admit the interviewee from a
waiting room, to ensure the safety of the call. The interview process was conducted within a two-week period of sending out the initial invitation. It took approximately one hour to complete. During the interview, I took notes on my participant’s responses to document the conversation and key insights. Additionally, I asked for consent to record the meeting via Zoom, which will be saved in my password protected account for 180 days. This allowed me access to a generated transcript and the opportunity to refer back if needed. Ethical guidelines, including informed consent, were adhered to throughout the interview process to protect the rights of my participant. All data collected from the interview was securely stored on my personal computer device, which is password-protected and accessible only to myself. After the conclusion of my research in approximately 3-5 years, all data will be permanently and securely deleted to comply with ethical and privacy considerations.

Once the interview data was collected, the analysis phase of the research commenced. Qualitative analysis was performed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between responses. I then did a cross-comparison of my findings in pre-existing literature with interview data to contrast the perspectives of authors with those of the teacher from the interview. All questions asked were intentionally designed to address gaps in knowledge identified during my preliminary research phase. My analysis focused on filling these gaps by using the relevant information from the interview data. This information was then synthesized to answer my research questions, provide insights into English education in the Czech Republic, and offer potential recommendations for areas for further research.
Results

Language Application Beyond the Classroom

In exploring the topic of English language use beyond the classroom, it became evident that there was limited existing literature available, highlighting a bit of a knowledge gap. The only statistic I was able to find on this topic was from a study asking Czech high schoolers about their frequency speaking English and their feelings and perceptions regarding it. All students in the survey “indicated that they use English on-line to various degrees,” and “quite expectedly more than double the number of students indicated that they mostly use Czech” (Landry 93).

![Diagram](English_usage_cloud_diagram.png)

**Fig. 1** Ways Czech students engage with English beyond the classroom and how this practice is perceived.
Luckily, insights from my interview with an American ESL teacher working in Czechia through a Fulbright Grant made clear how Czech students actively engage with the English language outside of formal educational settings, as shown in Figure 1. She mentioned that high school aged students frequently utilize English in various contexts, such as television, social media platforms, and video games. The topic of internet usage and video games was a surprising talking point that proved to be more important than originally imagined. My interviewee noted that throughout her years of teaching English in Czechia, that many of her male students were active participants in online gaming platforms. She reported that it is a common hobby amongst Czech teenagers and that many speak English on a daily basis when playing. This corresponds with an article about the relationship between online gaming and ESL learning, that stated that “Online video games may provide a means of offering learners persistent and authentic environments for second language learning that other methods cannot, and they may serve to lower anxiety and improve motivation among learners” (Horowitz 384). This topic led my interviewee to shed light on an observation regarding gender differences in English proficiency within Czech teens. She has found that her male students “often outperform the girls in assignments and tests,” and think it may have to do with online gaming. Thus, the intersection between video gaming culture and English language usage highlights a potential contributing factor to the observed gender gap in English proficiency. Unsurprisingly, multiple journals on the topic of English proficiency have highlighted this gender gap. The 2021 EF English Proficiency Index claimed that “the Czech Republic reported one of the largest gender gaps in English proficiency levels, with men significantly outscoring women on average” (17). While my findings suggest a higher proficiency in English among men compared to women in the Czech Republic, it's important to note that this was not part of my original research scope. Nonetheless,
this discovery sparks curiosity and suggests there is more to explore in understanding why such differences exist.

Moreover, participation in English camps emerged as another avenue for language learning experiences outside of traditional classroom environments. English camps are a common summer activity for Czech teenagers to actively participate and engage in a variety of fun activities while also interacting and connecting with native English speakers. Nearly 600 English camps have been organized in the Czech Republic in the last twenty years, with thousands of Czech students participating each year (Kunášek 5). I had very little knowledge about these camps prior to my research, but they proved to be fairly important avenues of English exposure. I found from both my interview and scholarly research that English Camps are based on using an active and conversational form of English. They are primarily organized by individual cities and towns as well as by local language exchange and study abroad programs. During the intensive week course of learning English with native speakers, the students “use the knowledge they have from school” to participate in activities and conversations with native speakers (Kunášek 6). In Monika Černá’s “Motivation in Language Learning: Focus on Individual Learners’ Stories,” she shares case studies testimonials from Czech students regarding their English camp learning experiences. In reference to one of the participants in the study, Černá noted that “Thanks to her participation in the camps, which she enjoyed, her ability to speak English developed. She also became more self-confident and willing to learn” (155).

In the study mentioned in the preceding lines that provided student’s stances on learning English, many students seemed to have neutral to positive-leanings on using the language. In regards to the advantages of English, the most common responses were comments such as: "it's easy," "international," and "everywhere." Repeated responses also included: "it's
popular" and "simpler than Czech" (Landry 94). While the sentiments expressed were positive, it remains uncertain whether these attitudes translate into active use outside the school setting. Nonetheless, the prevalent perception of English as "easy," and "popular," alongside assertions of its simplicity compared to Czech, suggests a general acceptance and comfort with the language. These findings underscore the importance of diverse learning contexts and extracurricular activities in understanding the broader landscape of English language acquisition among Czech students.

**Educational Tracks**

My research led me to find that after finishing compulsory education, Czech students choose between an academic track at a four-year gymnasium (30% of all secondary students), a secondary technical track (40% of students), or a vocational track (30%) (Straková 592). The teaching of English varies across these different tracks of education, as highlighted by insights from my interview. I was told that students enrolled in gymnasiums or specialized schools typically receive English education until graduation, with a strong emphasis on preparing them for university studies or English-speaking endeavors beyond academia. In contrast, vocational schools “place less focus on English,” and rather “prioritize technical skills” relevant to their chosen professions, according to my interview. However, it is important to note that this discrepancy in English education duration does not necessarily reflect differences in teaching quality or student proficiency. Instead, in my interviewee’s experience, it is simply a matter of longevity of English instruction across educational tracks.

Pre-existing literature provided differing perspectives though. One article claimed that the typical three-year vocational program is often a “dead end educational trajectory” (Dvořák 87). It made the point that one’s educational path often correlates with social status. Vocational and
technical schools are predominantly attended by students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This shows the circumstantial nature of access to English education, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds may have less exposure to language instruction compared to their counterparts in gymnasiums or specialized schools (Smith 591). Both the “choice of the upper secondary school” and the “consequent chances for successful transition to tertiary education” are strongly affected by social origin (Straková 592). This was an interesting take that was not entertained during my interview.

**Educational Tracks**

- **Gymnasiums**
  - English education provided until graduation
  - Preparation for university or English-speaking endeavors
  - Correlation to higher class status
  - Less commonly attended
    - General, unfocused education provided

- **Vocational/Technical Schools**
  - Lesser focus on English
  - Emphasis on technical skills
  - Correlation with lower socioeconomic status
  - English education not continued until graduation
    - More commonly attended

- **Commonalities**
  - Incorporation of standardized language proficiency assessments or exams
  - Emphasis on 4 basic language skills (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening)
  - Track chosen during students’ 5th to 7th year of elementary education

**Fig. 2** Illustrates the similarities and differences in English education across various educational tracks in the Czech Republic

All educational tracks require students to study an additional foreign language beyond English as well, as seen in Figure 2. This point was brought up both in my interview and my
I read that “German tends to be offered to and/or chosen by those who prefer more practically-oriented careers, and English tends to be offered to and/or chosen by students pursuing academic secondary and university education” (Nekvapil 125). This makes sense given that the majority of the findings from my interview and research suggest English is a key requirement for higher education.

Overall, these insights underscore the nuanced nature of English language education in the Czech Republic and the importance of tailoring language instruction to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of students across different educational tracks.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

I was able to find quite a bit of literature on the teaching dynamics of a Czech English classroom. In a nutshell, the current teaching of English at Czech schools is “based on the communicative principle, whose aim is not only the acquisition of language knowledge but of the ability to make oneself understood in everyday situations” (Klimova 85). As with the typical ESL classroom, the language skills are usually divided according to the type of the communicative process; receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) (Klimova 87). My interviewee shared that these are the four pillars of her curriculum, but that she “really stress[es] speaking though,” because she thinks it is “one of, if not the most, important aspects of language learning.” She shared that: “I always tell my students that there’s little point in learning a language if you can’t use that language to communicate a message effectively,” confirming the importance that communicative ability holds with the Czech education system.

In terms of the actual teaching approach, my interviewee also shared that “I've recently been implementing a warm up, just any kind of 5 minute warm up to get them in the right
mindset. I also like to have them stand up and move around a little bit,” because for many students, it might be their third or fourth class of the day. In terms of learning content, I was told that “it differs depending on the day and unit.” Our discussion led me to believe that she employs a dynamic approach to teaching, which mostly includes utilizing task-based learning strategies to promote interactive and hands-on language practice among her students. Conversely, on other occasions, she adheres to the more traditional lecture-heavy style of Czechia, often following textbook curriculum closely. Her mention of task-based learning parallels one of the findings in my research, that “In higher classes of elementary schools, at secondary schools, and at universities, the so-called method of task-based learning (TBL) can be used since it enables pupils to solve real-world issues. A lesson usually has the following stages: pre-task activity, task, planning, report, analysis, and practice (Klimova 89). This approach enhances students' motivation and engagement by offering opportunities for autonomy and personal relevance in their language learning journey.

Through my research, I also discovered that teaching strategies cannot be universally applied, as there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. One source differed from the next, which differed from my interview, and so on. Each pedagogical method has its strengths and limitations, and its effectiveness varies depending on factors such as the context, student demographics, and learning objectives. A good quote I found to sum this up is that creating an ESL classroom for Czech students “should take into mind all the relevant parameters to make tailor-made programs both attractive and useful for students and applicable” (Kralova 116). If teachers are competent and aware of their learners’ abilities and competences, then they are able to provide their students with a kind of input that enables them to train and develop their abilities (Tauchmanova 214).
As I prepare to transition into an English teaching role in Czechia, the insights gained from my research will serve as invaluable guiding principles. Recognizing there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching, I intend to integrate a variety of pedagogical strategies into my classroom. While I acknowledge the importance of adhering to the traditional lecture-focused format prevalent in Czech schools, I also plan to incorporate elements of task-based learning to infuse interactiveness into the learning process. By designing intentionally engaging activities, I aim to break the monotony often associated with lecture-based instruction and foster a more stimulating learning environment for my students. Moreover, drawing upon my unique experiences as an American, I will incorporate cultural insights and linguistic nuances into my teaching, in hopes of providing my students with a well-rounded perspective on English language and culture. Through this approach, I aspire to not only enhance students' language proficiency but also cultivate their curiosity, creativity, and global awareness.

**Student-Teacher Dynamic**

In the Czech Republic, the student-teacher dynamic differs significantly from the United States, as highlighted by insights from my interviewee. One notable distinction is the heightened level of respect afforded to teachers within the Czech educational system. I learned that at most schools, students demonstrate this by standing when the teacher enters the classroom, reflecting a deeply ingrained respect for authority figures in academic settings. Even on her first day of teaching in Czechia, after having no prior relationship or introduction to her students, my interviewee was greeted with standing students. This correlated to a statement I read regarding formality practices in Czech, that unlike English, it has a formal linguistic mechanism to use when addressing people formally, and a set of rules of etiquette about who can offer to be friendly to whom” (Landry 97). This concept segways into the dynamic of conversation.
Unlike the informal rapport often observed between American students and teachers, my interviewee discussed how there is a distinct “lack of personal conversation” in Czech classrooms, contributing to a more formal atmosphere. It was described to be “less chit-chatty” and more task-focused. Additionally, the teaching approach tends to be more lecture-based, with a greater emphasis on transmitting knowledge from teacher to student, rather than interactive dialogue and collaborative learning experiences. This aligns with my findings from Betáková (2010), where she explains the difference in total talk time amongst students and English teachers. It was stated that “even the latest studies show that teacher talk represents about two thirds of classroom speech” but that the talk is a “valuable source of comprehensible input for the learners” (74). Of course, this ratio of time is highly dependent on the specific contexts of the classroom and the specifics of the lessons.

This can be seen as a point of criticism for some. Researcher Vera Tauchmanova (2020) supports the idea that Czech teachers primarily facilitate and hold all classroom dialogue. Tauchmanova claims that “such a view must be a mistake – it is placing the emphasis on the teacher instead of the student” (211). She argues that the teacher’s task is not to tell the student how the language works, but rather to find good questions to ask students, so that they may discover for themselves (211). My research also led me to a claim that “inequalities in the type of pupil/teacher interaction serve to widen the gap between the higher and lower achievement classes” (Straková 590). While the Czech classroom may lean towards a more lecture-focused and hierarchical structure, it is important to recognize that these dynamics are not inherently negative, wrong, or ineffective. Instead, they reflect cultural norms and traditions deeply rooted in the Czech educational system.
**Generational Differences**

In the Czech Republic, the trend of learning English in schools has witnessed a significant transformation in recent decades, with its prevalence evolving over time due to historical factors. Because of its history as a former Soviet Bloc nation, for many years the country did not participate in the mass teaching of English, but rather, was subject to the widespread policy of Russian as the taught foreign language (Sherman 78). Following the political changes of 1989, “Russian ceased to be a compulsory subject in the Czech education system and the principle of free choice in language learning was declared” (Nekvapil 125). It was not until the early 2000s that English overtook all other foreign languages in terms of the total number of learners (125). As a consequence of this historical context, speakers belonging to older generations in the Czech Republic often have a proficiency in Russian rather than English, as English language education was not a mandatory component of their schooling.

### Generational English Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Generation:</th>
<th>Second Generation:</th>
<th>Third Generation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Likely grew up learning Russian as primary foreign language</td>
<td>- May possess a basic understanding of English</td>
<td>- Learning English as a standard part of the school curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Limited to no proficiency in English due to historical educational policies</td>
<td>- English education may not have been compulsory during their school years</td>
<td>- Expected to have the highest proficiency in English among the three generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- English language skills may be minimal or non-existent</td>
<td>- Exposure to English may have been limited compared to later generations</td>
<td>- Greater exposure to English through technology and media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 3** Diagram illustrating the evolving levels of English proficiency across three generations in the Czech Republic
As shown in Figure 3, this means there is often a difference in English proficiency from grandparents that likely know no English, to parents that might know basic conversational phrases, to children, who likely are working on obtaining fluency. This corresponds with the experiences of my interviewee. Sharing about her time living in a rural Czech town, she mentioned that “Most young people here, usually anyone under the age of thirty, speak pretty good English. A lot of middle-aged adults, like the parents of my students, speak just a little bit but enough to get by. Elderly people I run into on the bus and in the store, that's another story.”

I learned that compulsory education and foreign language classes typically start for students around age six, due to the Czech Ministry of Education implementing the *National Plan for the Teaching of Foreign Languages* in 2006 (Gregor 13). Since this reform, a high level of communicative competence in English has been commonly perceived as necessary to achieve an advantageous position within the job market. This is “often a view held by parents, who might also feel disadvantaged, due to their own inability to speak English” (Černá, Pre-Primary English 165). Today, there are over 86,000 foreign-owned companies operating in the Czech Republic (Kralova 112). Combine that with the fact that 91% of employers in international companies stated that English is “highly relevant in their performance,” and parents' concerns become a lot more valid (Kralova 111).

In one of the articles I found that included testimonials from English students, I read an interesting take. It was stated that “though Alice claimed to have selected her study programme autonomously, her parents obviously influenced the decision. Especially her father’s opinion regarding the usefulness of English nowadays seemed to have been influential since it was mentioned several times during the interviews: "My father uses English at work…he kept saying that English is important and in demand“ (Černá, Motivation in Language Learning 152). It
seems that Czech parents frequently emphasize the importance of their children's English studies, recognizing its role in the modern job market. Not only that, but endeavoring to provide opportunities for their kids to acquire proficiency in a language they themselves may not have had the chance to learn during their own upbringing.

**Necessity for Czech Language Knowledge**

My preliminary research made me aware of the perceived difficulty accompanying learning the Czech language. In response to the potential question of why some English speakers have not attained a high level of grammatical competence in Czech, one of the central claims is that “acquiring Czech grammatical competence is inherently difficult for language learners in general and for non-Slavic language speakers in particular, thus making it difficult for foreigners to learn the language” (Sherman 82). Luckily, through the conversation held in my interview, it seems that although the language is exceptionally difficult to learn, it is manageable to get by with just a few phrases. My interviewee suggested knowing “the basics,” such as “greetings,” “pleasantries,” and “simple requests for directions or food.” She explained that by knowing these few phrases, it enables one to navigate daily interactions more smoothly, create connections with locals, and demonstrate respect for the local language and culture. However, my interviewee also shared a personal anecdote recalling a time when she wished she had a better grasp of the language while filling out work visa papers and lease agreements. The official status of Czech—the de facto national language—is not set by the constitution or any special language law but rather by numerous other laws indicating that Czech is the language of official negotiations (Kaderka 173). Thus, knowing the language is essentially necessary when it comes to legalities and documentation.
When it comes to the perceptions of Czech locals, it seems that they generally appreciate expats who make any form of effort to learn the language. However, there may be some frustration or skepticism towards individuals who are unable to speak Czech from older generations. One of my findings claimed that some “do not tolerate imperfect Czech” and are incapable of "foreigner talk" (Sherman 84). Luckily, many foreigners have lived for years in the country without mastering more than a few phrases in Czech (Sherman 77). With this being said, potential American English teachers should not be discouraged by the expectation to learn Czech, as many people are understanding of expats' language learning journeys and appreciate genuine efforts to engage with their culture and community. Not only that, but with increasing levels of English proficiency, it is likely that most younger locals will understand, given that native spoken English is one of the easiest understood accented languages (Volín 39).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this project delved into the multifaceted landscape of English language education in the Czech Republic, addressing various factors that shape its dynamics. Firstly, regarding the age of initiation and expected fluency attainment, I found that students typically begin learning English around age six, but that there is no predetermined age or grade at which fluency should be attained. This emphasizes the gradual and individualized nature of language acquisition, and the fact that their schooling differs by educational tracks. In Czechia, students choose between these differing educational tracks after completing compulsory education. They include gymnasiums, technical schools, and vocational programs. English education varies across these tracks, with gymnasiums and specialized schools offering English until graduation, while vocational schools prioritize technical skills over English instruction. Despite differences
in duration, teaching quality remains fairly consistent across tracks, while student proficiency seems to differ.

When it comes to the perceived necessity of learning English, I discovered that it has undergone significant transformation over time, transitioning from the historical dominance of Russian to the current prevalence of English as a foreign language. Sociocultural influences, including parental encouragement, highlight the necessity of English proficiency in the modern job market. It also serves as a common motivation for students. This leads to the topic of generational differences in language proficiency. I found that using a three-generational model is an effective way to showcase the differences in current day Czech families when it comes to English ability. For grandparents, who likely grew up learning Russian as the primary foreign language, proficiency in English may be limited or non-existent due to historical educational policies. Parents, on the other hand, may possess a basic understanding of English, albeit limited, as English language education may not have been mandatory during their school years. In contrast, children are learning English as a standard part of their school curriculum and are expected to have the highest proficiency among the three generations, having greater exposure to the language through school and media.

Moreover, insights into the attitudes and challenges faced by American English teachers made clear the complexities of navigating linguistic and cultural differences within Czechia and the Czech education system. Many experience difficulty adapting to the different school normalities. Others struggle with the language barrier when it comes to legal documentation, but minimally when it comes to day-to-day life. Most American teachers agree that having a basis of Czech knowledge is exceptionally helpful, but not necessary to still live a comfortable and productive life.
Lastly, the examination of pedagogical approaches revealed a diverse landscape. Predominantly traditional lecture-based methods coexist with some interactive task-based learning strategies. The teacher has a very traditional role as being the head of the classroom and is seen as a highly respected authority figure.

Despite varying educational tracks and generational disparities, the overarching goal remains the same: to equip students with the language skills necessary for success in an increasingly globalized world. As I transition into an English teaching role in Czechia, I hope to adhere to tradition while also bringing new approaches and engaging activities.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this Honors Project hold significant implications for my future endeavors in understanding and enhancing English language education in the Czech Republic. While my project did not go as intended and my pool of interviewees was minimal, I still feel that I addressed common gaps of knowledge.

Firstly, by shedding light on the evolving landscape of English language instruction across different educational tracks and generations, this research provides insights for policymakers and educators seeking to tailor language curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students. Understanding the sociocultural factors behind it, such as parental attitudes and economic differences, can help to foster a more inclusive learning environment both inside and outside the classroom.

Furthermore, the exploration of pedagogical approaches, student-teacher dynamics, and the role of extracurricular activities like English camps offers a blueprint for educators to adapt and refine their teaching practices. By embracing diverse teaching methodologies, educators can enhance students' language proficiency while fostering their curiosity, creativity, and global
awareness. Teachers can also redesign the environment of Czech schools and move away from tradition and closer towards innovation.

Continued research in this area is important for staying on top of evolving trends and addressing persistent challenges in English language education. As technology advances and globalization accelerates, the demand for English proficiency is expected to grow. Given this, further research is necessary to work towards ensuring equitable access to high-quality language instruction and empowering students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.
Appendix A

Interview Consent Form

My name is Bailey Price, and I am an honors student at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. Currently, I am working on a research project on English Education in the Czech Republic, under the guidance of my faculty advisors, Dr. Fernanda Capraro and Dr. Shannon Orr.

Your perspective as an American teacher in the Czech Republic would be valuable to this study, and I would like to invite you to participate in an interview to explore your experiences. Your involvement would significantly benefit our understanding of English education in the Czech Republic, ultimately enhancing teaching practices. Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you have the flexibility to withdraw or skip questions at any point during the process. The associated risks are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

To ensure the confidentiality of your identity, only my advisors mentioned above and I will have access to your personal information when reporting the research findings. Additionally, when presenting the results, all identifiable information will be removed for complete confidentiality. Any data collected will be securely stored on my password-protected personal computer, accessible only to me.

If you are willing to participate, we can schedule a convenient time for the interview within the next two weeks. Please contact me at the email provided below to arrange the details. The interview will take place via Zoom and should not exceed 30 minutes. There is a possibility of re-contacting you for clarification or further explanation, if necessary. If you consent, the Zoom meeting will be recorded, and I will also take notes during the session. Participants are encouraged to complete the interview on a personal device, clearing internet browser history.
after completion. While there is a potential breach of confidentiality with recorded interviews, please note that data will be securely stored on my laptop, accessible only to me. The collected data will be retained for a minimum of three years, as required, after which it will be permanently and securely deleted to ensure no further accessibility.

Your willingness to share your experiences is greatly appreciated and will significantly contribute to the success of my research. By participating, you acknowledge your informed rights and provide consent to be a part of this study. For any questions about participant rights, please contact the BGSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (419) 372-7716 or irb@bgsu.edu. Additionally, feel free to reach out to me or my advisors listed below for any general inquiries about the study.

Thank you for considering this opportunity, I look forward to the possibility of interviewing you!

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Appendix B

Interview Questions

This is a confidential interview. You can stop at any time and there is no penalty for not participating. Do you wish to participate?

● How did you end up teaching English in the Czech Republic?
● In your experience, do Czech students commonly use English in their work or studies beyond the classroom? Can you provide examples or insights into how they apply their language skills in practical settings?
● Do you have any examples of how you've integrated cultural elements or local context into your English language lessons to make them more engaging and relevant to your Czech students?
● Do you have any specific strategies or teaching methods you've used to support students’ English journey?
● How would you describe the student-teacher relationship? How does it compare to an American setting?
● How necessary do you believe it is for American English teachers in the Czech Republic to learn the Czech language, and how has your own language proficiency influenced your teaching experience?
● Have you noticed any differences in levels of English knowledge amongst various generations?
● Does the presence of different educational tracks affect what a student’s English Education looks like?
Works Cited


Černá, Monika. “Pre-Primary English Language Learning and Teacher Education in the Czech Republic.” *Early Years Second Language Education*, vol. 9, no. 11, 20 Nov. 2014, pp. 165–175.


