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Výuka angličtiny v distančním studiu na VŠ

English Teaching within University Distance

Education Programmes

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Prohlášení

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Abstract

The aim of the diploma thesis is to provide theoretical bases for university distance course designing as well as supply practical feedback based on personal teaching experience. While the theoretical part contains general information concerning basic concepts of Distance Education, the practical part describes specific aspects of English distance education courses taught at the Pedagogical Faculty, JCU. The individual class descriptions are followed by introduction of need analysis research and its results. The conclusion attempts to present a critical view of current distance education situation at the Pedagogical faculty and offer possible further improvements.

Anotace

Předmětem této diplomové práce je poskytnout teoretické základy vysokoškolského distančního vzdělávání společně s praktickými poznatky založenými na osobní zkušenosti učitele. Zatímco praktická část obsahuje obecné informace týkající se základních konceptů distančního vzdělávání, praktická část popisuje specifické aspekty distančních kurzů angličtiny na Pedagogické fakultě JČU. Po popisu jednotlivých vyučovacích hodin následuje seznámení s provedenou analýzou potřeb a jejími výsledky. V závěru se autorka pokouší kriticky zhodnotit současnou situaci distančního vzdělávání na Pedagogické fakultě a navrhnout možná zlepšení.

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Introduction

The diploma thesis presents a brief peek into theory and practise of distance education. The theoretical part sticks to Moore and Kearsley's understanding of distance education concept, which represents a comprehensible, effectual approach to distance education theory. Other cited theory authors' works include those of Roy, Saba, Samad and Nor, and Hutchinson and Waters. The initial chapters provide an overview of basic distance education terms and facts. Further on a description of distance course features and design details has been given. The practical part introduces detailed description of courses and their one semester syllabi. The section is followed by need analysis research, which has been carried out during the first and second semester among students and some of the students' potential employers. The research findings together with my personal experience have formed a base for the final critical overview. The motivation to devote the thesis to distance education springs from my personal encounter with the subject. As an inexperienced English distance course teacher facing many challenging situations, I realized the need to promote the neglected though highly dynamic area of distance education. However especially the English language teaching and learning has been receiving a lot of attention, English distance course, though being in the focus of global learners demand, still prove to be a tricky issue at many Czech and international educational institutions. However, huge scope of on-line course are available on the internet, the distance education still suffers a pitiful reputation. At this point most distance education expert stress the need for a radical system change. The diploma thesis attempts to provide a simple reflection of current situation within the field in order to possibly stimulate the system transformation at JCU.

1. Distance Learning – Introduction

As this thesis attempts to explore distance education at the university level, it is crucial to reveal the meaning and connotation the term distance education has, and the way it is used in both theory and practice.

Even from a non-professional point of view it becomes obvious that distance education (DE) is a type of education most probably carried out over distance. Quite logically it should include both a teacher and a student, as it –same as just any type of education – consist of the two fundamental elements: teaching and learning. Supposedly, as the term implies, the education would take place over distance, meaning that one of the essential features of such education is the physical separation of teacher and the student. Due to that, the participants are required to use a different means of communication in contrast to classical face-to-face education. Quite often these communication channels are represented by modern IT options as well as more classical ones e.g. radio or correspondence. Also, as the personal contact within DE is suppressed to minimum, it requires the student to devote a significant amount of time and energy to self-studying. To be able to do that, the student should have already acquired necessary study habits and techniques, which means that DE is almost exclusively intended for adult learners with a certain previous education experience. As one can guess, the student autonomy plays a considerable role in the process, and represents a key ingredient of the student's success. The importance of the teacher's role is, quite undeniably, equally important, as the teacher not only provides a necessary feedback, but also directs and motivates the student. The third fundamental aspect of DE is, of course, the course syllabus, or, in another words, the structure and organization employed.

1.1 Terms and Definitions

Generally speaking, the importance of education has been on the rise since the dawn of human history. Though the concept of distance education is not new to recent educators, the impact of globalism, newly appearing cutting-edge technologies and still greater demand for education has been causing a revolution in the existing distance education systems. Yet, based not only on my personal experience, in many cases there is a lack of professionals experienced in designing and practising DE courses. Distance education seems to be a shamefully neglected part of teachers' trainings, thus often possessing reputation of less relevant area of education. As Roy (2001) points out, 70% of the lecturers he approached had "a weak to average knowledge of distance education". Most ironically, when asked whether distance education should be included into mainstream teachers' training, those 70% of educators gave a negative answer. Obviously, however it is one of the fastest growing area of education, DE still appears a Trojan horse to many teachers. One of the reasons seems to be the confusion about what it actually means. Though most of the existing terms appear to possess a similar meaning, they often mean different to a certain extent. Below a short display of the most common terms can be seen as referred to by Moore and Kearsley (1996) and Roy (2001).

- Distance Education
- Distance Learning
- Open Learning
- E-learning
- Online Learning
- Independent Study

Concerning the thesis, the decision to pick the term distance education has been made after exploring the theoretical bases of the field. Within the meaning of the term all three essential aspects are

included: the aspect of teacher, student and distance that specify this branch of education. As Moore and Kearsley (1996) mention, sometimes the term “distance learning” is used alternatively, though its meaning omits one of the essentials, and that is the aspect of teacher as a supervisor in the knowledge acquiring process.

1.1.1 E-learning and Online Learning

The terms emphasizing the use of modern communication technologies as *E-learning* and *Online Learning* do not seem to be accurate enough. In fact they denote a narrow discipline which does not necessarily have to be a part of every distance learning programme, though it undeniably represents a highly efficient distance education tool. In other words, as Moore and Kearsley (1996) suggest, education over distance cannot be simplified into a conventional class pattern where only IT has been added.

1.1.2 Open Learning

The term *Open Learning*, as the name implies, stresses the principle of “openness” which allows students a significant autonomy, including possibility to enrol anytime and regardless of previous education, make decisions over formal tests taking etc. (Moore, Kearsley 1996:3-4). However, in most institutions providing education over distance, courses and their formal requirements are more strictly set, directing students in a certain way and stimulating their performance. Therefore obviously, the term cannot be used globally.

1.1.3 Independent Study

The last of the above mentioned terms, *Independent Study*, reflects the U.S. tradition more than anything else. As Moore and Kearsley refer to it, “it is the term used to describe correspondence courses administered by traditional colleges and universities” in the U.S.A. (1996:38) This brief definition seems to put *Independent Study* aside

with *Distance Education*, however there is a number of differences. The courses are offer both separately from or integrated with the regular campus courses, and even so called daily students are allowed to take these courses while no distinction is made in their transcript. For many of them it is a way to solve problem of overlapping classes. In the U.S., universities providing independent study also offer high school courses. Another specific aspect of independent study has in common with open learning strategy is the “open enrolment policy” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:39), which means that students are allowed to begin a course anytime based on their personal preferences.

1.1.4 Distance Education

Out of the above mentioned, the term *Distance Education* appears the most appropriate as well as general enough to include both teaching and learning activities without pointing out only certain technological advances while omitting other aspects. However, quite naturally there are many different points of view at what distance education actually mean, and consequently various definitions.

For example Greenberg (1998) defines *Distance Education* as a planned teaching and learning experience using a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning. Because the entire system of distance education in Malaysia applies to adult learners only, Merriam and Meznah (Samad, Nor 2005) define it as an adult and continuing education.

Teaster and Blieszner ´s definition describe distance education as situation where teachers and learners are separated in space and possibly time.

Compared to that, Desmond Keegan has provided a more detailed definition, describing distance education as the separation of teachers and learners, which free learners from necessity of travelling

to a fixed place, at a fixed time to meet fixed person, in order to be trained. The most universal and apposite appears the definition formulated by Michael G. Moore:

“Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:2)

However it is especially Moore who literally hits the nail on the head and emphasizes mainly the “special character” of this field of education, several common characteristics can be traced in all definitions. Generally speaking, as especially Samad and Nor (2005) emphasize, the distance education differs from classroom education in seven basic aspects:

- 1) In conventional education system the rate of learning is set by the teacher, while in distance education learners make their own decision
- 2) Content of conventional class directly dependent on the teacher and thus may vary from class to class. In distance education all learners work with the same subject matter.
- 3) While conventional class offers a face-to-face communication with the teacher and classmates, distance education depends upon various media of communication
- 4) In conventional class the teacher makes suggestion about the topics based on the students’ interest. In distance learning the learner proceeds in own pace and occasionally discuss issues with the instructor or classmates.
- 5) While in conventional class learners learn together, distance learners study isolated

6) while learners in conventional class may revise from their notes only, distance learners are supplied with a recorded material.

7) While students at conventional class are motivated by the instructor, distance education requires enough self-motivation.

Table I: Comparison Factors for Classroom Learning and Distance Learning

(Samad, Nor 2005:4)

<u>Learner</u>	<u>Classroom</u>	<u>Distance</u>
<i>Choice</i>	Established: The rate of learning is established by the instructor	Preferences: The learning is selected by learners themselves
<i>Content</i>	Varies: The instructor determines and varies the learning content	Same: Every learner views the same content
<i>Interaction</i>	Personal: Face to face and collaborative discussions among learners	Media: Media of communication as the medium for interaction among learners
<i>Interest</i>	Adjustable: Instructor makes informal suggestions based on learner interest	Mixed: Learner proceeds at own pace (asynchronous leaning) and learner discusses issues (synchronous leaning)
<i>Location</i>	Classroom: Learners learn together in the same room	Dispersed: Learners learn in isolation
<i>Materials</i>	Not prepared: Written notes and syllabus are reviewed by learners	Prepared: Learning can be accessed many times from a website
<i>Motivation</i>	Motivated by instructor: Training according to class time	Self-motivated: Needed for asynchronous learning

1.2 History of the term Distance Education

As for the term *Distance Education*, a number of various definitions evolved throughout the history of this field of education. First attempts to define distance education originated back in the 1970's. The first modern definition of the term was published by the one of the Pioneers of distance education theory, Michael G. Moore, who in summer 1972 produced a paper called "Learner Autonomy: The Second Dimension of Independent Learning" which was reported later that year by a Canadian journal. In his work Moore divided "the universe of instruction" into two "families of teaching behaviour" represented by conventional or "contiguous" and distance teaching, further described as "the family of instruction methods in which teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaviours, including those than in contiguous teaching would be performed in the learners presence, so that communication between the learner and the teacher must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical, or other device." (Moore 1972:76 in Moore, Kearsley 1996:197)

Moore as the first realized that there was no educational theory to account for teaching and learning behaviour executed over a distance. He understood the importance and necessity of "describing and defining the field, discriminating between the various components of this field, identifying the critical elements of the various forms of teaching and learning, building a theoretical framework which embraced this whole area of education." (Moore 1973:661 in Moore, Kearsley 1996:197)

Moore chooses to define the teaching learning relationships characterized by separation between learners and teacher with a term he assumed from Swedish educator Holmberg. Holmers, being fluent in German, adopted the term from prominent German researchers at the University of Tübingen, who used the terms "Fernstudium"

(distance study) instead of the term “correspondence study” used in the U.S. at that time (cf. Moore, Kearsley 1996).

When mentioning the German scholars, it is necessary to point out the significance of Otto Peter’s pioneering works. In his article *Distance Teaching and Industrial Production: A Comparative Interpretation in Outline* published in 1967 Peter sees distance education as “complementary to our industrial and technological age” (Peters 1983:95 in Moore, Kearsley 1996:198) According to his thesis “distance education allows industrial methods to be applied to the design and delivery of instruction, but that unless industrial methods are used, distance education will not be optimally successful” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:198) Peter suggests that industrial techniques as planning, labour division, mass production, automation, standardization and quality control need to be taken into account when designing distance courses. Although his ideas might appear rather exaggerated, quite correctly he stressed out the importance of the two fundamental factors: 1) the use of modern technological advances and 2) the necessity of task division when designing and providing distance courses. However Peter belongs among the pioneers of distance education theory and presented his ideas more than 40 years ago, even today the two previously mentioned factors are quite often neglected aspects of many distance education programmes.

If we look at the distance education theory in the Anglo-Saxon world of the 1970’s, we notice a significant figure of Wendemeyer, whose attempt to define this field of education influenced Moore’s view. Wendemeyer’s endeavour was to define distance education “not only independent in space and time but also potentially independent in controlling and directing learning” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:199).

Based on the views of Peter and Wendemeyer and his own empirical experiences, Moore introduced a new, fully descriptive and globally

applicable theory of distance education, the theory of transactional distance.

1.3 The Transactional Distance

The transactional distance theory assumes that distance is a pedagogical phenomenon. As the main feature of distance education is the separation of learners and teachers by space and (or) time, the attention is focused on the impact this separation has on the learners, teachers, their communication, the curriculum and the management of the courses.

Obviously, a distance course is a highly specific unit which deserves a careful preparation and discrete approach. It is essential to distinguish its specialities and provide a sufficient training background to the teachers and course designers as well as to those who are in charge of managing such courses. On the other hand, the students must be prepared to manage their learning autonomy, and consider the responsibility for their own learning.

As the authors point out:

“When we speak of distance learning, we do not speak of an educational course that is no different from “contiguous” courses except for the physical separation of learners and teacher. This distance is a distance of understanding and perception caused by the geographic distance, that have to be overcome by teachers, learners, educational organizations if effective, deliberate, planned learning is to occur.”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:200)

Same as any type of education, distance education is first of all a type of interaction between the student and the teacher, which takes place in environments physically separated from each other. Quite naturally, due to this distant relationship, a certain communication gap takes place. The extend of this gap is directly dependent on the degree of transactional distance. A certain degree of transactional

distance appears in every type of education, e.g. a situation where there is a student, teacher and a communication channel. The communication channel may be for instance a written correspondence, spoken or written communication over the internet, or a spoken language in a face-to-face interaction. Thus, a certain degree of transactional distance exists in every type of education, e.g. any activity including a teacher and a student, and thus may be found even in a typical conventional classroom situation. Of course, quite logically, the transactional distance appears to be greater when the communication opportunities are lower, a situation particularly represented by distance course. Due to the limited communication, the teacher is forced to adopt a highly specific approach, fundamentally different from the one of the classical face-to-face class. As Moore states, this “special teaching behaviours fall into two clusters: dialog and structure”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:201)

1.3.1 Dialog

Dialog might be seen as a tool of communicating ideas and instructions between teacher and student. The character of the dialog depends on formal factors as educational philosophy of the institution, course design, nature of the course, the size of the group etc, and informal factors as the teacher and students' personalities. A particularly important formal factor is the means of communication. While correspondence represents rather a slow and ineffective communication channel, e.g. audio or computer conferencing promises a rapid and prolific interaction (cf. Moore, Kearsley 1996).

Dialog surely is of a high importance especially within language course, as the ability to communicate represents the essential skill. In this context foreign language distance education seems to be a double the difficult task, as the learners tend to communicate less when a foreign language is used.

1.3.2 Course Structure

The course structure is another essential aspect determining the degree of transactional distance. It includes the entire course design, e.g. learning objectives, content themes, information presentation, assignments, testing and evaluation. As Moore and Kearsley(1996) point out, the course design might be either carefully structured or rather flexible depending on the educational philosophy of the institution, self-study abilities of the learners, subject, and perhaps most importantly on the media of communication. The more limited communication, the more fixed structure is required and vice versa. A highly structured course naturally means less learners' autonomy, while on the other hand it surely is more comfortable from the point of view of teacher. At this point the course designers should be alert, as a rigid structure gives a little chance to learners to adjust the course to their personal needs.

Now we see that dialog and course structure are inversely proportional. The high level of dialog creates little need for structure; in fact it is desirable for such a course to have as little structure as possible, so that such modifications can be made to suit individual students' needs. In such a case the transactional distance is relatively small. On the contrary, a rigid course structure dictates the pace of learning and learners receive a strict guidance, which results in less dialog and considerable transactional distance.

1.3.3 Learner Autonomy

A situation may occur when there is neither dialog nor structure. Such a case represents the greatest degree of transactional distance, and requires the learners to accept responsibility for their own learning, and thus set their personal study goals and learning strategies. In another words, the greater the transactional distance, the greater the learners' autonomy is needed.

The idea of learner autonomy was first introduced by Moore in 1972. At that time education was strongly under the influence of behaviourism, which took the main concern in how to control the learner most efficiently.

“Instructors were urged to specify their goals in very specific behavioural terms, to prescribe a highly structured regime of presentation, practise, and reward, and to test and measure achievements of all students according to the precise standards built into the objectives. The purpose of interaction was to test...The challenge for educator was to produce a perfect set of objectives, techniques, and testing devices... that would fit every learner, in large numbers...so that n one would deviate.”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:204)

1.4 Theory in Practise

As for the Czech schools, the quotation above perfectly fits not only the distance education programmes, but generally all education events carried out in public institutions. It is more than alarming that the description that relates to the 1970´s still applies in the current Czech education system. Except for insufficient teachers training within the field, students´ approach towards new interactive methods appears to be another obstacle. It has to be said that students when offered “extra” opportunity to communicate with the teacher via the internet outside the scheduled classes, did not display much interest to share or consult problems concerning their studies. Based on my personal experience, I would describe their learning approaches as rather passive. Obviously the means of communication did not appear to have the same validity as face-to-face contact. In this sense their learner atomy was extremely low.

Of course in certain situation and for certain subjects fixed structure may be favourable. On the other hand, as Moore points out,

independence of learners should be view as “a valuable resource rather than distracting nuisance.” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:204)

Language course undeniably requires a huge amount of initiative from the students´ side, e.g. the activity Moore describes as the learner autonomy:

“Ability of a learner to develop a personal learning plan..., the ability to find resources for study one’s own work or community environment, the ability to decide for one self when progress was satisfactory...”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:204)

As within distance education a certain degree of transactional distance always exists, it is highly favourable for educational institutions to educate autonomous learners. The transactional distance phenomenon can be reduced in three ways; that is particularly 1) to tighten the structure, 2) to increase the dialog, and 3) to boost learner autonomy. From practical point of view it is favourable to increase the learner autonomy, otherwise extreme amount of structure and/or dialog is required. Ideally, when designing a distance course, all three elements should be taken into account and appropriate quantity and quality of the dialog, well structured support materials, and sufficient learner autonomy should make an appropriate part of the course design.

2. Distance Course Design

As it has been explained earlier, distance education differs from conventional class in a number of ways and as such it must be approached. In conventional class, face-to-face communication between the tutor and students takes place on daily bases. The situation allows the participants to carry out an intensive dialog as well as to divert from the course syllabus whenever needed. The entire course design is thus created by the teacher alone to a large extend.

In case of distance education the situation is much more complicated and thus requires special measures to be taken. The role of teacher is more difficult and due to the greater transactional distance does not allow spontaneous changes as it is in case of face-to-face communication. Information distribution takes place over a certain communication channel, usually correspondence or IT network, which in most cases slows down the pace of interaction between students and the tutor and, most importantly, requires a specific set of technical and quite often even graphical skills.

In order to provide distance education of a desirable quality, many different areas besides sole teaching must be covered. All these activities make up the course design, which is, compared to a conventional class, much more elaborate.

First of all it must be set clear what information is relevant for the students, and decision about the content of the course must be made. The content should reflect not only the philosophy of the institution, but most importantly the specific needs of students. This can be done either on the bases of previous experience or research. Obviously, beside their teaching duties it is hardly possible for teachers to carry out such research. For this and previously mentioned reasons, whenever a distance course is being designed, it

is essential to employ specialists to deal with particular issues concerning the course development.

As far as my personal experience concerns, only little attention is paid to previous research of students' needs. This quite often results in students viewing the course as unnecessary, and together with other inconveniencies cause the education to be ineffective.

To prevent this it is necessary to understand the importance of "labour division" (Moore, Kearsley 1996:7). As any complicated structure, distance education course design consists of many aspects, which are impossible to be covered by a single individual only. The following example shows another problem faced by teacher of DE courses in practise.

As communication within distance courses is usually distributed through a particular media, suitable technology is necessary to provide the message to the participants. Of course, most of conventional class teachers would have a little or no experience in this field. This is quite understandable because teaching requires the teacher to focus on quite different set of skills. It would be rather naive to expect e.g. language teacher to have any deeper knowledge of IT media. However, this is exactly what distance teaching cannot be done without. Then, quite logically, distance course design cannot be done without at least consulting an IT specialist. Ideally, IT specialists should cooperate with the teacher and based on his instructions create an appropriate study material.

To create a study material of a decent quality it might be necessary to consult a graphic designer who set an effective layout to the materials. It is more than obvious that such multi-tasking cannot be done by a single teacher.

When reflecting my personal experience with teaching a distance course, I have to emphasize especially the lack of time a teacher has for the above mentioned activities. It is literally impossible to act as

an instructor, content and IT expert and a graphic designer at the same time. Therefore, a well structured distance course can only be designed by a group of specialists.

As Moore and Kearsley (1996) stress, it is necessary to view distance education as a system consisting of interdependent units including learning, teaching, communication, design, and management. Unfortunately, this view has been ignored and quite frequently distance courses are distributed in somewhat scattered and unplanned manner. This consequently results in low effectiveness in terms of student learning and jeopardizes the entire educational programme as well as the institution's reputation. Beside that the negative effect causes disillusion with the tutor and discourages him from any further initiative.

Being a teacher of distance programme acquainted with the various practice obstacles myself, in the following section I would like to take a closer look at the practical aspects of DE course designing, particularly 1) technology 2) teaching and tutoring 3) students.

The aspect of course content will be discussed later in the section on ESP.

2.1 Technology within DE

Communication between the teacher and a student is a fundamental concept of any form of education. In distance education communication is provided through some kind of media, which means a need for a technology. Historically the first distance courses were delivered through correspondence, and even nowadays written or printed word is still perhaps the most common type of media used in DE courses. Though the printed media as books and study guides undeniably represent a practical and economic way of presenting information to students, they are not 100% suitable to modern approach towards teaching and education in general, especially in case when the information needs to be carried over distance. Its

monologic character, very low degree of interaction and considerably slow pace of interaction between the participants can be mentioned as the most apparent drawbacks.

Fortunately, new advances in technology can minimize the negatives of the above mentioned method. Innovative approaches to DE take advantage of satellite, cable or computer networks, which enable to distribute text, picture and sound.

At this point most distance tutor very often have to face two basic obstacles: Particularly in context of Central Europe the most frequently mentioned problem may be considered 1) insufficient finances for the equipment and 2) limited access to the media, which together result in poor IT skill with both teachers and the students. Consequently many distance tutors tend to avoid using these media, since they view them as an obstacle itself. Moore and Kearsley support this view by stating that: "The use of technology to carry the message of teachers and students, rather than relying on face-to-face lecture, discussion, and the blackboard, is what makes distance education so novel to most people." (Moore and Kearsley 1996:10)

As it has become clear from the previous discussion, one of the essential problems of modern distance education is either insufficient or inappropriate use of media resulting from poor teachers' (and students') skills. It is rather a sad fact that e.g. the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of South Bohemia does not offer any practical IT course to language students, not even elective one!

Ironically, it is especially language teaching which, as a field involving great deal of verbal communication skills, requires a particularly intensive use of media substituting face-to-face interaction. Much to my disappointment, the University of South Bohemia, though providing distance courses of English language, have not included such media into the course syllabus. In addition to that, though the Pedagogical Faculty commands a couple of technologically well

equipped classes, few teachers seem to have undergone training necessary to handle these gadgets.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most suitable means of interaction between the teacher and the student appears to be the Internet – nowadays relatively cheap and quite easily accessible technology. The network belongs to the basic facilities at the university, yet it is very little used for educational purposes. As I have been informed by students of distance programmes, very few teachers communicate with their students via e-mail, though to me it seems the most obvious option and I used it for instructing and informing students substantially.

Another great advantage of internet is that it can be used for computer conferencing as well. These computer conferences seem to be a good opportunity for the teacher and students to consult and discuss issues outside the scheduled classes. Wide spread computer programmes as Skype or MSN give opportunity for both private or conference talk, which is ideal for interaction with students at distance. For example, these conferences or even individual consultation could take place at certain previously agreed and announced time, thus allowing the participant to discuss actual problems.

There are several requirements to this method. First of all both students and the teacher must be provided access to a computer and the internet connection. Secondly, the computer must be furnished with a reliable and fast internet connection. Third, in case of a computer conference, the teacher needs to be properly qualified in order to be able to conduct such an event in a way which ensures the maximum benefits to the students.

However, in practise I have been facing some fundamental problems. First, not being a proper member of the department, I have been provided neither an office place nor a personal computer. Secondly,

some of the students complained about a limited access to the internet, while others displayed insufficient computer skills. However, except for the nonexistent technical background, the greatest obstacle appears to be students' inability to accept responsibility for their own studies, which they often tend to parade as scepticism about the use of media. Due to a low reputation DE possesses in the eyes of many people, students often expect the distance courses to be less difficult than the classical ones. After they realize the opposite is true, few of them are ready to invest time, money and energy into their learning progress.

Obviously, improvement can hardly take place before significant changes in the system will be done.

“The biggest challenges facing education today are for legislatures to develop policies that require the development of a total systems approach for distance education, for administrators to redistribute human and capital resources into a total system, and for teachers to be trained to work as specialists within such a system.”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:8)

At this point it is essential to keep in mind that the entire education must be perceived as a system at the first place. It would be rather unfortunate to expect technologies alone to change the current situation. As it has been already stated earlier, distance education does not differ from a conventional class solely in the use of technology.

2.2 Distance Teaching

As mentioned before, the role of a teacher in a distance education course significantly differs from the one of a conventional class teacher, and, in addition to that, it puts a high demands on the teacher skills in terms of methodology.

Perhaps the most considerable difference in contrast with a conventional course is the limited amount of interaction between participants. Due to that, the teacher receives the feedback reaction from students with certain delay, which makes it difficult to predict any further steps. At this point, it is mostly less experienced teacher who may face serious problems, as they do not have the sufficient experience to foresee students' response. Here again we see the necessity of a team of specialist who prepare the syllabus, as the teachers themselves cannot afford to waste energy on rearranging the course several times per semester in case they realize it does not fully suit the students' needs.

The principal role of a DE teacher is to promote interaction. Moore and Kearsley (1996) distinguish three types of interaction. The first of them, "student-content interaction", represents "the interaction the student has with the subject matter..." (Moore, Kearsley 1996:129). The "learner-instructor" interaction, representing the relationship between the learner and the teacher, is "regarded as essential by most learners and as highly desirable by most educators" (Moore, Kearsley 1996:129). The third type of interaction is the "learner-learner" interaction. From the pedagogical point of view it is a highly desirable tool of stimulation and motivation among students.

The problem with many distance education programmes is that they stick too much to a certain medium and usually only one type of interaction is exercised properly. However, it is essentially important to include all three types of interaction.

It is a frequent mistake with many DE teachers that they focus on presenting information rather than promoting students' participation. In fact there is only little difference between presenting a new topic to students, however professional the presentation is, and assigning them to read a section in a textbook. The goal of a DE teacher should be to "find the balance between presenting content information and organizing students' interaction with the

information” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:132). Many teachers focus at their performance excessively while they totally neglect the need for students’ participation. Quite frequently they try to excuse their mistake by complaining about too little time they have been given, but the fact is that historically, the Central- European schooling tradition has always prioritized a large amount of information contrary to communication skills. Of course, there is no serious problem in presenting information over a distance, but get the students involved is considerably more difficult. In Moore and Kearsley’s view, “the single most important skill that all educators must develop is to make their students active participants...” (Moore. Kearsley 1996:133). Teachers’ training programmes should pay more attention to trainees’ communication skills. Obviously, some specific techniques as question asking, presenting issue for analysis, group discussion and self evaluation are often neglected simply because the teachers are not aware of the methodology and technology that could help them to make their cases more efficient.

Regarding my practical experience with teaching and, in fact, also designing a DE course, it was rather difficult to deliver information and, at the same time, include a participation boosting activity, too. Beside the enormous size of a group, the main reason for this is very little time the teachers are given. As subject matters are often complicated, most teaches prefer to use this time for information presentation because they believe it is the core of teaching. Consequently, there is little or no time for students to participate actively. It even seems that most students are accustomed to this style of teaching and somehow fancy this passive role, as little activity is expected from their side. This is, however, a completely wrong approach because the efficiency of such class is very low. Of course, there is little chance for change unless more communication is allowed, for instance by introducing computer conferences via internet.

2.3 Distance Education Student

As it has been discussed previously, distance education is a form of education intended to educate adults in the first place. As Moore and Kearsley (1996) report, most distance students are adults between 25 and 50 years of age. Thus, when thinking of a distance education student, almost exclusively we have to consider psychology of an adult person.

Based on the study of andragogy, Moore and Kearsley suggest a couple of basic propositions, which should be taken into account when teaching adults:

- “While children trust the teacher to define course content, adults need to define it for themselves, or at least to be persuaded it is relevant to their needs.
- While children accept a dependent relationship with a teacher, adults have a sense of self direction and personal responsibility.
- Children have little personal experience to draw on, but adults have a lot, which they appreciate being used as a learning resource, and resent being ignored in favour of other people’s experiences.
- Children will accept the teacher’s decisions about what to learn, when, where, and how. Adults like to make such decisions themselves or at least to be consulted.
- Children must acquire a lot of information as the basis of life in the future. For adults the future is now; they have a basis of information and see learning as necessary for using it in solving problems in the present.
- Children may need external motivation to make them learn; adults volunteer to learn because of their intrinsic motivation.”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:153-154)

Children usually accept education as a part of their life. While younger learners often take up studies simply because they have no clear idea of what else to do, for most adults there are very specific and clear reasons for enrolling into a learning programme. Generally speaking, they are motivated and hard-working students. (Moore and Kearsley 1996)

The greater concern in learning performance observed with these students results in “a considerable degree of anxiety” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:155). Many distance learners express doubts about their abilities to complete the course successfully. Moore and Kearsley speak about “an anxiety about ability to meet expectations, both external, and more important, self-expectations” (Moore, Kearsley 1996:155). According to the authors, it is the responsibility of the teacher to dilute these fears and support such environment where students feel that “there is no such thing as a dumb question” (Moore and Kearsley 1996:155).

However understanding environment the teacher tries to create, there always will be a certain number of drop outs. Moore and Kearsley (1996) state that the single most important factor affecting the successful course completion is the student’s intention to complete.

Obviously, student’s personality is one of the most influential factors. Unfortunately, for teachers who meet their students only a couple of times per semester it is literary impossible to fully recognize character.

Nevertheless, some general finding made by Moore and Thompson suggest that

“Individuals who are more field independent (i.e. less influenced by the surrounding environment, including social environment) are better suited to distance learning than people who are less field independent.”

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:163)

Another important factor they refer to is the educational background of each student. Generally speaking, the more educational experience the student receives, the more successful he or she is going to be at a DE programme. A logical explanation might be that these students have acquired certain learning habits and based on these they are able to choose learning strategies better.

As it has been already discussed previously, adult students need to feel that what they learn is relevant to their needs. In case the subject matter seems to be of little or no practical use, the students interest increases rapidly. However, this is only one of many academic concerns Moore and Kearsley mention to have a significant affect on distance learners. Some of them are in the hands of teacher, others are a matter of the programme structure and institutional organization and philosophy.

Features affecting students' success in a DE course programme:

- the perceived relevance of the content to career or personal interests;
- the difficulty of the course or programme (i.e. amount of time/effort required);
- the degree of student or administrative support available;
- the nature of the media used for course delivery and interaction;
- the nature of the pacing or scheduling involved;
- the amount and nature of feedback received from instructors/tutors on assignment and on course progress; and
- the amount and nature of the interaction with instructors, tutors, and other students.

(Moore, Kearsley 1996:163)

In addition, a set of extracurricular concerns including responsibilities towards job, family, and community, personal interests or health conditions influence student's performance in a significant way. These aspects usually shape the student's motivation to great extent. Unless the student's surrounding provides enough support and understanding for his/her learning, there is only little hope for success. As Moore and Kearsley state, "job and family considerations take priority over distance learning requirements" (Moore, Kearsley 1996:163).

As for my personal experience, many of the students who have been attending my classes entered the programme because they felt that better education could provide them better opportunities for employment, or their employers urged them to improve their qualification. Although I had expected them to be mature and devoted learners, very much to my surprise a vast majority of them did not display any deeper interest in the subject, nor they seemed to be interested in their study programme as such. Their motivation to complete the programme might have been slightly stronger compared to daily students, however their effort can be described as of rather a pragmatic nature. The reason might have been the fact that in general students perceived language classes as a sort of supplementary seminars of lesser importance. Their main focus obviously lay in passing the "important subjects". As seen above, at this point my practical experience does not go in a line with the theoreticians' view.

Beside the low activity they performed, vast majority of the students showed reluctance to ask questions, though they were repeatedly invited to do so. Some of them even expressed concern about "not asking a stupid question".

Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to realize the personal features of individual students, thus my conclusions have been drawn on the bases of general impression only. However, to sum up

my over-all impression, large majority of the students appeared to be passive, shy, and insecure. On the other hand they often treated their colleagues with disrespect when interrupting their speech or talking while the others were speaking.

A number of students displayed content with the possibility to communicate and access materials and instructions through the e-mail address, which had been previously arranged for each study group. However, some minor complications concerning the use of the media appeared during the semester. For instance, some students complained about the others deleting important message etc.

Although there was only very little interaction between me and the individual students, certain issues became clear anyway. Students frequently complained about having not enough administrative support or not knowing whom to address in case of academic obstacles. They seemed to be not properly informed about the program of the semester either. Ironically, it is especially the distance students who, from obvious reasons, need a support of a counsellor or students adviser.

2.4 Course Content and ESP

From the previous discussion it becomes clear that in order to achieve the greatest efficiency in a distance education course, students must perceive the course content relevant to their interests. To achieve this, whoever is in charge of the course design, he or she must carry out a need analysis first, to realize the students' needs.

Most of the students who enrol university distance education programmes seem to do so, because they hope a university degree can help them to build a better career. A good command of English related to their field is often considered a necessary professional competence. Many of them have some previous basic knowledge of general English, and they are interested in acquiring professional language to be able to deal with everyday agenda at their jobs. In fact,

the language they are interested in is the English for specific purposes (ESP).

While course design for general English class has been determined by tradition, ministerial decree or the authors of the textbooks, ESP course must be individually tailored to suit needs of every particular group of students (Hutchinson, Waters 1992).

When designing an ESP course, some fundamental questions have to be asked to provide necessary feedback information for the subsequent syllabus creation.

According to Hutchinson and Waters, an ESP course designer should ask the following questions at the first place:

- **“Why** does the student need to learn?
- **Who** is going to be involved in the process? This will need to cover not just the student, but all the people who may have some effect on the process: teachers, sponsors, inspectors etc.
- **Where** is the learning to take place? What potentials does the place provide? What limitations does it impose?
- **When** is the learning to take place? How much time is available? How will it be distributed?
- **What** does the student need to learn? What aspects of language will be needed and how will they be described? What level of proficiency must be achieved? What topic areas will need to be covered?
- **How** will the learning be achieved? What learning theory will underline the course? What kind of methodology will be employed?”

(Hutchinson, Waters 1992:22, bold in original)

Finding answers to these questions means going a step closer to a successful course design. Generally speaking, ESP “made-to-measure” courses tend to be potentially more efficient. Once the

course matches the students' expectations, the learners will most probably work with a greater enthusiasm. Within DE, boosting the students' motivation to maximum is one of the teacher's fundamental responsibilities. Tailoring an ESP represents an ideal way to achieve it.

2.5 Teaching English at a distance

However bizarre it might seem, learning languages at a distance has traditionally represented a vital branch of DE. Roy (2001) reports the beginnings of correspondence language teaching to fall back to Germany of the 1850's. According to Moore and Kersey's historical enquiry, by the end of the 19th century a number of well esteemed Anglo-Saxon universities had established first university distance courses by mail.

Since that times distance teaching of languages has undergone a significant change. Rapid technological advance of the last few decades has introduced distinctive interactive methods, which help to enhanced teaching languages at a distance.

Still, some might expresses justified doubts about the convenience of language and other distance teaching. As Roy's apt remark conveys, "There is nothing like having a teacher in front the student for effective language teaching" (Roy 2001:5). However, instantly he leans towards William Harrell view: "It is not quite same for the students as being there with a teacher as they study, but it is a lot better than being on their own (Harrel 1998:180 in Roy 2001:6).

Although new dynamic communication options bring DE closer to conventional class, still many DE participants are reluctant to take advantage of them and break their old study habits. Roy particularly emphasizes the need for students to adopt new learning styles, "which in a sense are more proactive and which will fulfil their needs better" (Roy 2001:6).

However, introducing new technologies to education is not like shooting fish in a barrel. Roy (2001) is concerned with not properly designed on-line courses, same as insufficient computer skills, which forbid effective data entry and network communication.

However, numerous examples of well-established institutions providing DE illustrates the growing popularity of English distance courses. Roy (2001) emphasizes remarkable achievements of the Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia on the field of English distance teaching. Trajanovic and his colleagues (2007) describe a successfully designed English course for distance students at the Faculty of Informational Technologies in Belgrade, Serbia. World-famous Universities as Oxford, University of London, The University of Edinburgh, Sorbonne University, Heidelberg University etc. keep track with learners` requirements when offering online courses. Other respected institutions are exploring their way to the distance education field, as seen in case of Princeton, Stanford, and Yale:

"Representatives of Princeton, Stanford and Yale have been meeting to discuss the growing interest in distance learning and Internet-based educational programs in the arts and sciences. Our initial discussions have focused on continuing education for our alumni. The result of these discussions may lead projects that explore these opportunities."

(Princeton Weekly Bulletin March 6, 2000 Vol. 89, No. 19ot)

Number of well-established higher education institutions specialized on solely distance education exists. They included respected school as Open Universities Australia, South African Institute for Distance Education, The Open University UK etc.

Learners whose interest is not to achieve a university degree can choose from a huge scope of online language courses. The following links represent an exemplificative sample of online English courses providers:

<http://www.peakenglish.com/index.jsp>

<http://www.elcox.co.uk/>

<http://www.abaenglish.com/distance-english.html>

<http://www.londonschool.com/courses/online-courses/>

http://www.lingualearn.co.uk/managers/distance_courses.htm

Obviously, the evidence proves that teaching English language at a distance is not an impossible task. However, in order to make the distance education process efficient, necessary measures need to be taken. As Roy states, “It appears that ultimately, the answer to the question of whether English can be taught at a distance is circumscribed by a conditional “yes” and depends on a number of factors.” (Roy 2001:8)

As it has been previously discussed, a meaningful language distance education requires a very specific and well-considered approach. In many cases, both students and teachers must be ready to adopt a system fundamentally different from the one they have been using up to now. DE, however not new on the scene, is still covered with a blanket of scepticism. On the other hand, globalized society has created growing demand for education accessible for literally everyone. At this point significance of DE is undeniable, and it will continue growing substantially in the future.

3. English Distant Courses at the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology

Currently, the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology (PP) provides three distance bachelor programmes, namely they include Social Pedagogy (*Sociální pedagogika* - SOP), Nursery Teacher Training (*Učitelství pro mateřské školy* - MS) and Specialized Subjects Teacher Training (*Učitelství odborných předmětů* - UOP). The students can also choose to study a distance master programme of Primary School Teacher Training (*Učitelství pro 1.stupeň ZŠ*), which is offered as a daily study programme, too.

Generally, at the University of South Bohemia all study programmes designed to be studied at a distance are called “combined studies” (*kombinované studium*). The term points out the fact that though students regularly attend classes, a major part of their studies is left upon their self-studying.

According to my experience with the MS and SOP programmes, students attend classes every two weeks on Fridays. The classes usually start around 9 a. m. and last till the late afternoon. Distance programmes are typical with long blocks of classes taking place only few times per semester. A typical class takes 90 to 180 minutes. Obviously, such a lengthy study sessions put high demand on students` ability to concentrate, as well as vitally challenge teacher`s creativity and stamina. Seminars longer than 90 minutes hardly allow the teacher to hold students` interest, especially if carried out in a large group more than 50 students. Unfortunately, the current arrangement of the distance programmes does not allow any significant changes to be made.

The excessive size of groups seems to be a common feature of the distance programme classes. However the language classes contained only a part of the total number of students within a particular

programme, yet the figures were ridiculously high, especially for language teaching and learning. The MS programme English class contained almost 40 and SOP programme English class even over 60 students.

Another fundamental problem appeared to be an extreme variance in the students' proficiency. The classes featured extremely heterogeneous groups with a variable ratio of absolute beginners to advanced students who, in many cases, experienced a several years long stay in English speaking countries, most particularly as Au-Pairs. Due to no previous testing and/or division of the groups, there was no initial record of the individual students' language skills.

Soon after being asked to teach distance English course, I found out there was no formal syllabus for either of them. Hence I approached Ms. Kadlecova, who had been teaching the courses previously, for some practical advice. As I was informed, the English courses at the PP department were provided by the Department of English, which unfortunately, had not received any suggested course plan or course requirements from the PP department. Thus, the teacher's responsibilities included not only to carry on the classes, but also to develop a two-semester syllabus for each group.

In addition to that, due to the large number of students in the groups, it seemed almost impracticable to set the class needs without any further testing, as students' levels of knowledge differed immensely, ranging from absolute beginners to advanced students. At this point, the need for an efficient class plan represented the fundamental issue.

3.1 The Study Materials

Following Ms. Kadlecova's advice, I used the self-study textbook English Step by Step (SbS) as the primary resource for both MS and SOP English classes. As a material for self study of English, the book gives grammar explanations in Czech, which I found useful for

students' home study. Also, same as in most Czech-English textbooks, each unit features a Czech-English vocabulary list, which is, in my opinion, particularly appreciated by adult learners who tend to be more conservative.

I personally do not consider the book to be a cream of the crop among textbooks of English; however, some principal advantages seemed to talk in favour of it. First of all, the textbook English Step by Step, being a personal property of Ms. Kadlecova, seemed to be the only available self-study book at that moment. According to the information I got, the Department of English Language could not provide any self-study book of English. Ms. Kadlecova, who had been using the SbS previously with distance courses, provided me with not only with a copy of it, but also a valuable source of electronic form of part of the book together with other materials including grammar and listening exercises, which have turned out to be especially valuable when instructing the students via e-mail. The course design has almost exclusively been based on these materials. Regarding the conversation activities I included in the classes, they were designed on the bases of my previous teaching experience and often derived from various sources of supplementary literature for English tutors.

Due to the limited possibility to copy handouts for students, the electronic way was used to distribute study materials. Following Ms. Kadlecova's advice, each group has been provided a common e-mail address, which serves as a communication and material distribution channel. All students can access the address, download, and consequently print out the handouts. This has proved to be a very economic and efficient way of providing study materials. Also, in case an announcement needs to be made, a message is sent to the common e-mail address. Thus, all students can read and follow the instruction. Generally speaking, the system has been working well and proved to be a very reliable means of communication. The e-mail addresses have proved to be particularly practical when providing

audio materials, since all students can take advantage of them without the necessity to make a copy of a CD. Few misunderstandings occurred, especially when the students did not check the messages etc., however the rate was not higher than with a face to face communication.

Some may argue that asking the students to get their own copy of the book would be far the best way of solving the problem with material distribution. As far as my personal opinion concerns, I found it rather illogical to ask students to spend on a book, which they would use for a limited period of time only. In addition to that, there still would be a need to distribute supplementary materials, which would require the teacher to make hundreds of copies. At this point, the e-mail distribution seemed to be the most practical solution.

Concerning the supplementary materials, the students were provided selected pages of “The Essential Grammar in Use” by Raymond Murphy. The communication activities were designed on the bases of various sources as “Face to Face Elementary Resource Pack” or “Elementary Communication Games”.

3.2 The Teacher´s Background

To understand a character of a course to the full, it is always important to know the teachers academic and professional background. The following section provides some basic information on my teaching experience and impressions on teaching DE classes.

Being a senior student at the Pedagogical Faculty, up to now my teaching experience has been rather limited however not insignificant. As a senior student, I have completed my teaching practise, part of which I carried out in Hungary during my Erasmus Programme intership.

Beside that, I have been teaching English language at different language schools for some years, usually individual classes or small

groups. This provided me a great “training space” and opportunity to establish my own teaching style. I especially appreciate working with many different students of various age groups, which often provides a valuable source of inspiration. Thanks to this, I have also developed a sense of human personality, which, as I have learned, represents a fundamental aspect of teacher’s work. As I believe, a teacher should always be a little bit of an actor, since having fun while learning makes up a magnificent tool of motivation.

Teaching distance courses seems to be a great professional challenge to me. Although my previous experience included teaching chiefly adult learners, teaching a university distance courses of English to large groups was a completely new situation for me. With no foregoing practise I was rather naïve thinking that compared to a conventional class, a distance course requires no more than a bigger amount of homework. Soon I realized the essence of DE is completely different and much more elaborate.

In contrast to a wide-spread opinion, teaching DE takes much more effort and energy compared to teaching classes on daily bases. It is particularly difficult for a young teacher, because a long-time experience is needed to predict students’ reactions in order to keep a dynamic pace of the class. Quite naturally, without any previous practise, an inexperienced teacher can hardly prepare a well designed syllabus for DE. The reason is very simple: during each session with students a teacher finds out a new set of information, which he/she was not even aware of before. Of course, it takes some practise before the teacher can turn the information into skills he/she can use to work with DE students successfully.

3.3 SAJK Description

The English class within SOP programme is called SAJK and it spans first and second semester of the studies. Normally the students enrol

SAJK1 in the winter term and after passing the end-of-term test, they continue with SAJK2 in the following semester.

As shown in the timetable bellow, the SOP students almost exclusively attend classes lasting 4x45 minutes. Considering the previous discussion, this is rather an inefficient way of teaching. In addition to that, throughout the first semester there were only 2 options to meet at the English class. It is no surprise then that the students approach the seminar in a rather casual manner. According to a wide-know fact, frequent practice represents a fundamental pillar of language teaching. Without providing the students a regular practise they can hardly be expected to make any progress. In this case the class can serve only as an occasional opportunity for revision of previously acquired knowledge. The figure I. gives a more detailed idea of the SOP programme class distribution.

Figure I: SOP Schedule for the Winter Semester 2009/2010

PÁTEK	HODINA							
	1. 9.00	2. 10.00	3. 11.00	4. 12.00	5. 13.00	6. 14.00	7. 15.00	8. 16.00
25. 9.	Zápis do studia		Úvod do studia KPE/SÚSK (Mgr. Procházka/ doc. Somr) 6 Prezentace fakult (Mgr. Novotná, Mgr. Procházka)					
9. 10.	Úvod do studia práva KPE/SÚRK (doc. Hejda - VŠE, FM J. Hradec) 4				Základy managementu KPE/SZMK (Ing. Musil - VŠE, FM J. Hradec) 4			
23. 10.	Úvod do psychologie KPE/SÚLK (PhDr. Vaněčková) 4			Úvod do studia KPE/SÚSK (doc. Somr) 2		Úvod do pedagogiky KPE/SÚPK (doc. Somr) 2		
6. 11.	Úvod do studia práva KPE/SÚRK (doc. Hejda - VŠE, FM J. Hradec) 4				Základy managementu KPE/SZMK (Ing. Musil - VŠE, FM J. Hradec) 4			
20. 11.	Anglický jazyk I. KAJ/SAJK1 4 (Mgr. Synková) D321				Úvod do pedagogiky KPE/SÚPK (doc. Somr) 4			
	Německý jazyk I. KNJ/SNJK1 4 (Mgr. Durajová)							

4. 12.	Úvod do studia práva KPE/SÚRK (doc. Hejda - VŠE, FM J. Hradec) 4	Úvod do psychologie KPE/SÚLK (PhDr. Vaněčková) 4
18. 12.	Úvod do pedagogiky KPE/SÚPK (doc. Somr) 3	Úvod do psychologie KPE/SÚLK (PhDr. Vaněčková) 4
15. 1.	Úvod do pedagogiky KPE/SÚPK (doc. Somr) 3	Anglický jazyk I. KAJ/SAJK1 4 (Mgr. Synková) D321
Německý jazyk KNJ/SNJJK1 4 (Mgr. Durajová)		

According to the official list, SAJK1 class featured 67 students. Two of them have never attended the class, one has dropped out. Among the majority of women, there are 7 men in the group. According to my rough estimate, most students are in their late twenties and early thirties, only few students seem to be over 40. Vast majority of them work at public administration. The most commonly mentioned jobs included public administration officer, labour officer, social worker, policeman etc. Most of the students reported a previous experience with learning English. 34 students claimed to have graduated in English from high school, passed an English language certificate exam (e.g. FCE), passed so called “little state exam” in English, passed an exam at a tertiary school or taken a test assigned by the ministry. 6 students claimed to be complete beginners with zero knowledge of the language. Perhaps one quarter of the classes marked themselves as “false beginners” and suggested revision of basic language patterns.

Although practically half of the classes claimed to have passed an exam of at least intermediate level, most of them proved to frequently make basic mistakes including the paradigm for the third person singular in present simple verbs, wrong use of the verbs *to have* and *have got*, wrong word order in both declarative and interrogative sentences.

3.3.1 The Placement Test

To discover the level of students' skills and limitations, a grammar structured placement test was introduced. The test consisted of 30 grammar questions ranging from the very basic ones testing the proper use of the present simple tense of the verb, to more complicated questions of an upper-intermediate level, where students' knowledge of modal verbs and conditional sentences was examined. For each question three answer options were given.

Before taking the test the students were explained that their results would serve as feedback information for the subsequent course design, and would not affect their final grade in any way. The students who claimed to be complete beginners were not required to take the test. Although having been explained the purpose of the test, many students attempted to reach answers from their classmates and repeatedly had to be admonished to silence. Unfortunately, due to a huge size of the group proper conditions for test taking could have been hardly achieved, which resulted in not fully objective test results. However rough, the collected data reflected the students' abilities and provided useful feedback for further interaction with students.

Out of the total number of 47 students 6 of them passed the test with the 100% result. 9 students achieved no less than 90% results, 7 students reached between 80 and 89%, 10 students answered with 70 to 79 percent of questions correctly, 8 students passed with 60% plus results, 7 students got performed less than 60%.

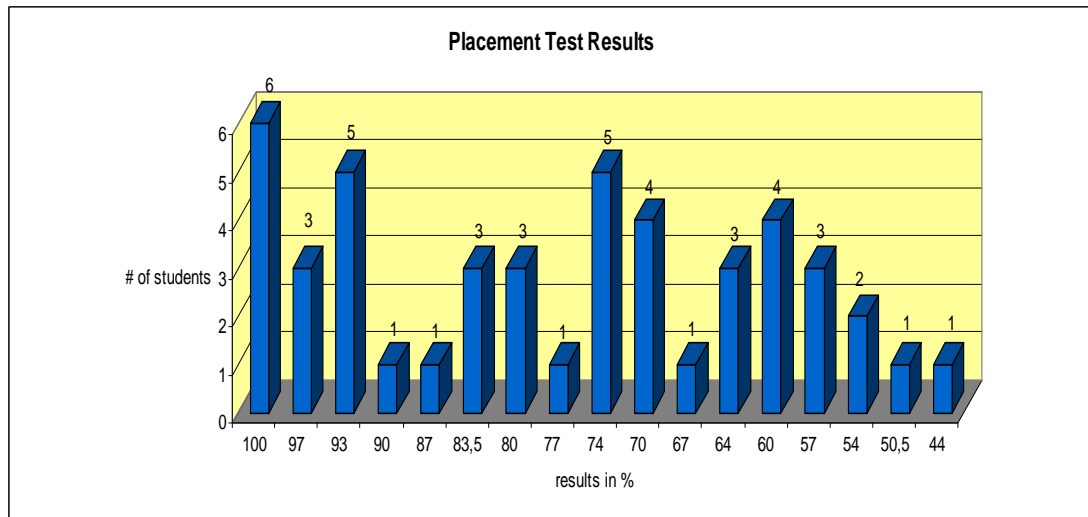


Figure II: Placement Test Results

As the test results show, a major part of the students performed with average results between 100% and 90%. This group contained 15 students. At the same time, 15 students less achieved less than 70%, which indicates a highly heterogeneous group.

Due to the extreme heterogeneity of the SAJK1 class the following arrangement was made. The advanced students who proved to have passed an English exam earlier were automatically given the credit without any further requirements. This resulted in significant reduction of number of students as the class size was cut by almost a half. Since majority of class attendants displayed elementary skills, the class objectives included the basic issues of English language at the first place.

3.3.2 SAJK1 Class Plan

As it has been mentioned earlier, the SAJK1 course design preparation was based chiefly on 2 fundamental findings. First, the class contained numerous group of elementary students, which suggested the basic nature the lessons. Second, due to limited amount of in-class time, it became clear there would be little chance for elementary students to catch up with the advanced learners.

Thus, the course was designed to satisfy elementary students' needs at the first place.

According to the first semester class schedule, the English classes took 360 minutes in total, and were distributed in two blocks of 180 minutes. The first class took place on the 20th November 2009, starting at 9 a. m. Out of the total number of 67 students, 53 were present.

3.3.2.1 The Class Description – November 20, 2009

- 1) Formal introduction – c. 20 minutes
- 2) Students introduce themselves – c. 15 minutes
- 3) Placement test – c. 35 minutes
- 4) Break – c. 15 minutes
- 5) Basic grammar introduction – c. 35 minutes
- 6) Practise; conversation game – c. 25 minutes
- 7) Game overview – c. 15 minutes
- 8) Homework assignment – c. 10 minutes
- 9) Pronunciation demonstration – c. 10 minutes

Based on the previous information and experience with AMSK1, I expected a large, highly heterogeneous class. However this time the number of students was enormous.

The class began with a formal introduction, which took approximately 20 minutes. First of all, I introduced my self and explained the current situation to students, of who many expressed serious concern about the class size and different proficiency levels. The suggestion to separate the class into two groups was accepted with enthusiasm.

Same as in the case of AMSK1, the SAJK1 class included a number of elementary students who needed to be worked with intensively. Therefore all students who had passed English exams of at least

intermediate level were given the possibility to attend classes optionally in order to reduce the group of the actual learners to minimum, and thus maximize the efficiency of classes. As it has been explained earlier, the intermediate students were guaranteed credits if their proved to be holders of an official English exam certificate.

As a next step, the textbook and study materials were introduced and the formal requirements explained. Students were given instructions concerning their common e-mail address. They were also explained to expect to receive all different kinds of instructions and information throughout the semester in the electronic form, and they were also invited to use this means of communication whenever they had questions. After a short discussion concerning the organization of the course we proceeded to the following activity.

To get the idea of students` language skill, and also to break the ice and approach the students, I asked them to talk about their previous experiences with the language and tried to identify the ration of complete beginners. Some volunteers were asked to introduce themselves to the class. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed.

Next, the attendance sheet was passed around. In case the students had passed any exam, they were asked to note that down.

To investigate a level of English within the class, the students were assigned a grammar test. The students were explained the investigatory nature of the test and were asked to keep silent and work individually. Those who claimed to be complete beginners were not requested to write the test, and they were allowed to take time off.

While writing the test, a part of the students repeatedly made attempts to ask for answers or discuss them with their classmates. Unfortunately, especially due to a large size of the group, I was not quite able to secure a perfect discipline.

After completing the test the students could take a 15 minutes break.

Next on the agenda was a basic grammar revision/introduction. I decided to start with the most elementary issues as greetings, the present simple form of the verb *to be*, alphabet, numbers from 0 to 100, and basic introductory sentences. According to my favourite method, I asked the students for explanation of particular details and tried to make them compare their skills and ideas. Finally I provided a sum up of the covered issues.

As a next step, each student was given a piece of paper with a short personal description, including name, age, address, and job. The job vocabulary was explained in Czech and written on the board, so that the students got familiar with them first. Each five or six descriptions were identical, so the students` task was to use the previously introduced English phrases to find classmates with the same description. At first, when the task was assigned, the students were reluctant to stand up and take a tour around the class in search of their partners. However, as soon as the majority of them left their seats and began their search, the class soon began to enjoy the activity.

Quite naturally, to keep the conversation going in English required permanent teacher`s supervision. The activity was rather loud and it obviously very surprised the secretary, who entered the class to bring some papers. However, though a little wild, the students enjoyed the activity and had fun learning English, which was the primary goal.

After the students were asked to get back to their seats, I randomly asked a few of them to tell what their name, age, address, and job was.

As the end of the session was approaching, the students were given their homework, which included the self- study of unit 1 in Step by Step book. With regard to the complete beginners, the unit 1

vocabulary pronunciation was demonstrated. The students were invited to repeat the words.

3.3.2.2 Evaluation

Although I found teaching such a giant class truly exhausting, I was quite satisfied with way the class objectives were realized. Although students expressed a certain degree of scepticism at the beginning, as the class proceeded most of them cooperated with enthusiasm. Some may argue the class could have been made more efficient if more grammar practice and work with text had been involved. My intention, however, was to make the students see they were able to use the language and to enjoy their learning at the first place. With the positive feedback I received from some of them, I felt more motivated for further teaching.

3.3.3.1 The Class Description - January 15, 2010

- 1) Brief revision – c. 15 minutes
- 2) End-of-term test – c. 25 minutes
- 3) Homework check – c. 20 minutes
- 4) Listening, Reading activity – c. 30 minutes
- 5) Break – c.15 minutes
- 6) New topic introduction – c. 30 minutes
- 7) Communication game – c. 40 minutes
- 8) Homework assignment – c. 5 minutes
- 9) Pronunciation demonstration – c. 5 minutes

The second class of the semester took place on the 20th January 2010. During the class the students took an end-of-term exam, which tested the topic of the previous class and unit 1 of the book. As agreed previously, the students who proved they had passed an exam were not required to take the test.

Before the test a short revision took place. The students were invited to bring up problem topics and some grammar items were reviewed. The test consisted of three parts and focused on vocabulary, grammar use and translation.

In the first part, the students were asked to complete different day times with proper greetings. However I considered the exercise simple, the students had problems understanding the idea of it and the instruction had to be repeated more than once.

The second part featured a conversation, which the students were supposed to put in the correct order. Generally speaking, the task was not difficult for most students and majority of them got it right.

The last part included a translation exercise. Students were asked to translate simple sentences into English. It tested mainly personal and possessive pronouns, forms of the verb *to be*, and vocabulary of unit 1. Only few students got the right answers, most of them made either spelling or grammar mistakes including incorrect use of pronouns and wrong word order.

Following the test, the homework assignment was checked. Each exercise was consulted individually. Students were randomly asked to give correct answers to the questions. Majority of them displayed good understanding of the topic.

Next activity dealt with the Unit 1 article and related exercises. First, to introduce students to proper English pronunciation, they were asked to follow the text while listening to the audio record. Especially beginners claimed to have difficulties understanding a native speaker, therefore I read the article out loud to provide a “more comprehensible” demonstration. Next, the students were randomly asked to read a sentence or two of the article. Most of them exhibited a strong influence of German pronunciation and frequently made mistakes.

To keep the students alert, I decided to avoid translation. Instead of that students were (again randomly) asked to answer questions on the article content in English. Most of them tried to give correct answers, however a few of them made some minor grammar mistakes. A number of students tended to shout out the answers, which caused a minor disturbance.

Next the class proceeded to the conversation on page 7 of the SbS book. First, the students listened to the record while following the text. After a male and female student were asked to read and “act out” the dialog.

The following activity featured the exercise 1 on page 9. The students’ task was to read statements and, based on their previous readings, correct the wrong ones with their own words. Some of the students had problems to understand the content of the article, so in case their answer was not correct, they were invited to check the text again to search for the details. Generally speaking, although committing some minor mistakes, students showed a good effort.

Before the break a short sum-up of vocabulary was made.

Following the short retreat a new topic was introduced. First the students were told about how to make noun plurals. Majority of the class seemed to be familiar with the topic to certain extent; therefore chiefly the irregularities of the pattern were brought into focus. The explanation was followed by the SbS exercise 6 on page 17.

Next grammar point we proceeded to was the verb *to have got*. According to the Unit 2 content, the students were explained the use and the meaning of the verb. As it became obvious during the explanation, some students had a vague idea of the use, frequently confusing the grammar patterns of the verbs *to have got* to and *to have*. To avoid any further confusion, at this point the students were explained the rules of the use of *to have got* only. A detailed use of the

verb *to have* was introduced later together with other present simple tense verb forms. After the grammar demonstration the class went through exercise 5 on page 16- 17 in SbS. Despite the former detailed explanation the students displayed certain confusion. They seemed to understand the rules however they were not always able to give the correct answer.

To reinforce skills concerning the use of the newly introduced grammar forms, the students were assigned a communication activity. Each student was given a piece of paper with a basic noun in either plural or singular form, which included Unit 1 vocabulary. Similarly to the communication activity carried on at the previous lesson, the expressions repeated. By asking and answering the students were supposed to find other classmates with the identical expression. Again, it was necessary to push the students forward a little bit and sometimes prompt them to use English. After the students completed the task, they were told to keep their papers and go back to their seats. During the second part of the activity again the skills of using *to have got* was practised again. The activity took place in three rounds. Sitting in long rows, students formed simple sentences when answering and asking their classmates. The question-answer pattern consisted of the following steps: The question-answer series started from the student sitting first in the row.

Round 1:

Teacher (to student A): "What have you got?"

Student A (to the teacher): "I have got a ..."

Student A (to student B): "What have you got?"

Student B (to student A): "I have got a ..."

...the sequence repeats...

The second round practised the 3rd person form

Teacher (to student A): "What have you got?"

Student A (to the teacher): "I have got ..."

Teacher (to the class): "She has got ..."

Student A (to student B): "What have you got?"

...the sequence repeats...

In the third round the students formed negative sentences:

Teacher (to student A): "I have got car. Have you got a car?"

Student A (to the teacher): "No, I have got two pictures."

Teacher (to the class): "She hasn't got a car, she has got two pictures."

Student A (to student B): "I have two pictures. Have you got two pictures?"

...the sequence repeats...

The aim of the activity was to make all students form questions, answers, and negative sentences. A few times the students sitting next to each other happened to have the same expression. In that case they answered according to the situation and did not form a negative answer. At the beginning of the activity the students found it easy. As more steps were added gradually, students became more concentrated at their questions and answers. Although the activity appeared to be a little confusing at some points, when provided guidance, majority of the students were able to follow the steps properly and give correct answers.

After the communication activity a sum up was made and students were invited to ask questions.

At the end of the class homework was assigned. The students were assigned to study Unit 2, learn the vocabulary and complete the exercises practising the new grammar. As the Unit 2 also includes the introduction on countable and uncountable nouns, the students were asked to pre-learn the use of expressions “some” and “any”. A detailed explanation was planned to be delivered at the following class.

The class finished with the demonstration of Unit 2 vocabulary pronunciation.

3.3.3.2 Evaluation

Compared to the previous one, the class of January 11 put considerably higher demands on students` ability to stay focused. Some of them expressed serious concerns about their test results, which might have been a cause of further intermittent inattention. The grammar topic included several parts and thus required the students to absorb an extensive amount of information. Especially the very elementary students showed certain gaps in understanding. To reinforce their understanding, the communication activities were included. However time-consuming they might seem, these activities provided the students with a greater self-confidence when using the grammar structures in spoken dialog. Again, most students seemed to enjoy the tasks and appreciated unconventional form of practise. At the end of their long school day, the communication games served as convenient stimuli.

3.4 AMSK Description

The AMSK concept is very similar to that of SAJK. The students are provided a two-semesteral course of English during their first year. Although the class almost exclusively consists of nursery school teachers, there is no syllabus reflecting on it. According to this fact, a course plan similar to SAJK1 was applied.

In comparison to SAJK1 schedule, AMSK1 classes were organized into shorter, 90 minute lasting sessions, which were held 4 times during the semester. I personally find such arrangement more favourable, as it gives a more frequent opportunity to learn new and refresh the previously acquired. The more intensive interaction with the students resulted in a better teachers` orientation within the group. It was also less difficult to reassume the previously covered topic. In contrast with SAJK1 class, the better balanced schedule enhanced a more consistent cooperation with the students.

Figure III: MS Schedule for the Winter Semester 2009/2010

PÁTEK		HODINA								
		1. 9:00	2. 10:00	3. 11:00	4. 12:00	5. 13:00	6. 14:00	7. 15:00	8. 16:00	9. 17:00
4.9.	8:00 Info o studiu u Svobod.	Úvod do pedagogiky KPE/ÚPEK (Prokešová) D 319			Cizí jazyk AJ KAJ/AMSK1 (Synková) D319 Cizí jazyk NJ KNJ/NJMKA (Durajová) D221		Metodika hrových činností KPE/MHČK1 (Svobodová) D319			
18. 9.	8-10 hodin Zápis do studia Dostavte se včas!	Osobnostní a sociální výcvik KPE/OSVK (Zormanová) A D319			Sociální a pedagogická komunikace KPE/SKOK (Suda) D 107 B		Sociální a pedagogická komunikace KPE/SKOK (Suda) D 107 B			Osobnostní a sociální výcvik KPE/OSVK (Zormanová) D319 A
2. 10.		Cizí jazyk AJ KAJ/AMSK1 (Synková) D319 Cizí jazyk NJ KNJ/NJMKA (Durajová) D221		Pedagogická praxe průběžná KPE/PPXK1 (Kimrová)D319	Speciální pedag. KPE/SPEK1 (Suchánková) D319 Řízení šk.a manag. KPE/MANK1 (Polčáková) D223 Estetická výchova KPE/ESTK1 Váchová D107	Kurz integrovaných naukových předmětů I. (ČJ) KPE/KIPK1 (Ševčíková) D319				
16. 10.		Cizí jazyk AJ KAJ/AMSK1 (Synková) D319 Cizí jazyk NJ KNJ/NJMKA (Durajová) D221		Osobnostní a sociální výcvik KPE/OSVK (Zormanová) D319 A		Sociální pedagogická komunikace KPE/SKOK (Suda) D107 B			Osobnostní a sociální výcvik KPE/OSVK (Zormanová) D319 A	
30.10		Dovednostní minimum výchovných předmětů KPE/DOMK1 (Hv+Vv) (5+5hod) (VV-Kimrová - D319, HV-Holec - katedra HV, Na Sadech 10*)								
13. 11.		Výuka PPEK1 začíná cca od 9,20 Předškolní pedagogika KPE/ PSPK1 (Uhlířová) D319			Základy filosofie a sociologie KPE/ZFSK1 (Somr) D319		Kurz integrovaných naukových předmětů I. (ČJ) KPE/ KIPK1 (Ševčíková) D319			
27. 11.		Úvod do psychologie KPE/ÚDPK (Dastlík) D319			Speciální pedag. KPE/SPEK1 (Suchánková)		Metodika hrových činností			

		D319	KPE/MHČK1 (Svobodová) D319	
		Řízení šk.a manag. KPE/MANK1 (Polčáková) D223		
		Estetická výchova KPE/ESTK1 (Kimrová) D107		
11. 12.	Úvod do pedagogiky KPE/ÚPEK (Prokešová) D319	Základy filosofie a sociologie KPE/ZFSK1 (Somr) D319	Kurz integ. nauk.předm. I. (ČJ) KPE/ KIPK1 (Ševčíková) D319	
8. 1.	Výuka PPEK1 začíná cca od 9,20 Předškolní pedagogika KPE/ PSPK1 (Uhlířová) D319	Pedagogická praxe průběžná KPE/PPXK1 (Kimrová) D319	Cizí jazyk AJ KAJ/ AMSK1 (Synková) D319 Cizí jazyk NJ KNJ/NJMKA (Durajová) D221	
21. 1.	Úvod do psychologie KPE/ÚDPK (Dastlík) D319	Technika mluvené řeči KPE/TMŘK (Suchánková) D319		
22.1.	Rozvrh bude upřesněn podle možností lektorů: Doc.Hana Dvořáková, Mgr.Hanka Švejdová, Mgr. Eva Svobodová	Rozvrh bude upřesněn podle možností lektorů: Doc.Hana Dvořáková, Mgr.Hanka Švejdová, Mgr. Eva Svobodová Mgr. Karel Daňhel		
23.1.	Rozvrh bude upřesněn podle možností lektorů: Doc.Hana Dvořáková, Mgr.Hanka Švejdová, Mgr. Eva Svobodová	Rozvrh bude upřesněn podle možností lektorů: Doc.Hana Dvořáková, Mgr.Hanka Švejdová, Mgr. Eva Svobodová		

Generally speaking, I find teaching the group a slightly easier compared to SAJK1. Except for shorter and more frequent classes, the main reason seemed to be a suppler nature of the group.

The class consisted of 39 female students. Majority of them seem to be in their 30`s. Most students work as nursery school teachers. Compared to the SAJK1 class, more students reported to be on a maternity leave. Majority of the 14 students who claimed to have passed a language exam of intermediate or higher level had lived and worked in Anglo-Saxon countries as Au-pair. In comparison with the SAJK1 group, the group was considerably smaller featuring a higher ratio of elementary students. Perhaps due to the absolute prevalence

of women, majority of students seems to be shier and more reserved compared to their SAJK1 colleagues, although they tend to disturb less and display a slightly higher concern with their studies. As most of the students claimed to be elementary learners of English, starting from the very beginning was a natural choice.

An important fact to be mentioned is that there was no investigatory test carried out in case of AMSK1 group. Some of the primary reasons were connected to the course organization. First of all, as I had not been provided any information about the class size, the number of students was rather a surprise to me. However, as soon as the class was divided into two groups, the number of in-class students dropped by approximately a half. At this point, the majority of the group appeared to display similar level of skills. Thus, to define the students` needs did not appear to be a difficult task. The vast majority of the class attendants displayed either zero or very basic knowledge of English, which naturally created a need for an elementary course concept.

3.4.1 AMSK1 Class Plan

The AMSK class plan followed a similar structure as the SAJK classes.

The first meeting with students took place on September 9, 2009. All 38 students were present. 14 students claimed to have passed an English language exam of intermediate or higher level. The rest of the students mostly proved English skills of elementary level.

3.4.1.1 The Class description – October 2, 2009

The first meeting with the AMSK1 group was assigned on 9th September 2009. Unfortunately, due to inconvenience in organization, the class did not take place.

The introductory seminar was held on 2nd October 2009. The class was scheduled to take 90 minutes. It started at 9 a.m., all students were present. The lesson structure was the following:

1. Formal introduction – c. 15 minutes
2. Grammar Introduction – c. 40 minutes
3. Communication activity – c. 25 minutes
4. Homework assignment – c. 5 minutes

First a brief introduction talk was given. I introduced myself to the students, explained the aim and purpose of the course, and presented the class with the course requirements. The students had already created their common e-mail address, which was agreed to be used for communication and instruction. The students were also acquainted with my intention to divide the class into two groups in order to provide more favourable conditions for their learning. As it turned out, ten of the students proved high proficiency in English, while most of the rest defined their language skills as very basic. This situation led me to take the same measures as in case of SAKJ1. The advanced students were guaranteed credits and freed from the class attendance in return for an official prove of passing an English exam. Consequently, the students were allowed to leave the class, which reduced the group to a reasonable size of over less than 30 students.

After a short inquire of the students` skills a basic grammar introduction followed. Considering the minimal knowledge of the majority, the explanation included alphabet demonstration, an instruction on English pronunciation and phonetic transcription, greetings, the verb *to be*, possessive and personal pronouns etc.

After a short spelling activity, when students were asked to spell their names, the students were explained the form and use of the verb to be as well as specific aspects of the English word order.

As some of the learners demonstrated a basic knowledge of the language, they were then invited to make a list of greetings and match them with proper daytime. Next we proceeded to basic introductory sentences. The students learned how to introduce themselves, how to ask somebody's name or how to say where they are from. To practise these, we first started with a simple introduction game. As the students were sitting in long rows, each student was invited to introduce her self, repeat the name of the classmates who introduced themselves previously, and asked the next student about her name. The answer-question series repeated until all sitting in a row introduced themselves and repeated names of their classmates. The following scheme gives an exact idea of the activity:

Teacher (to the class): "Hello, my name is Karolina".

Teacher (to student A): "What is your name?"

Student A (to the teacher/class): "Hello, my name is..."

Student A (to student B): "Her name is Karolina, my name is ..., what is your name?"

Student B (to student A/class): "Hello, my name is ..., her name is Karolina, your name is ..."

Student B (to student C): "What is your name?"

As the example shows, the game not only practised social expressions, but also tested students' memory. The number of students sitting in each row ranged from about ten to approximately fifteen, so not all students remember all names while concentrating at proper sentence structure. Despite minor grammar mistakes and memory failures, most students tried hard and proved to be supportive to their mates.

After the game the students were given hand outs of Unit 1 and the vocabulary pronunciation was practised. After that the focus was moved onto the article reading and translation. First the students listened to my reading while following the text. After the demonstration they were randomly asked to read a sentence or two out loud.

At the end of the lesson the students were assigned their homework, which consisted of self-study and exercise completion of Unit 1.

3.4.1.2 Evaluation

Compared to the SAJK1 group, the average level of MAJKS1 students was slightly lower. On the other hand they seemed to be devoted learners who showed great concern about their study results. The overall impression on the class was very positive, though at some points an intensive stimuli was required to make the students participate actively. The communication activity proved some of them to be a little hesitant when asked to speak English, reassured me about the students` need for frequent verbal activities. According the students` feedback most of them enjoyed the communication activity, especially for two reasons: 1) they had a chance to use what they learned, and 2) the activity provided them usual study experience which boosted their interest in the language. The essential problem appeared to be the pronunciation of written expressions and related to that also the phonetic transcription. Generally speaking, although great part of the class did not consist of complete beginner, the students` basic skill definitely needed to be refreshed and gathered up.

3.4.1.3 The Class Description – October 16, 2009

1. Homework check – c.15 minutes
2. Grammar comprehension check – c. 5 minutes

3. Article reading and comprehension – c. 30 minutes
4. Unit 2 grammar intro and practise – c. 30 minutes
5. Pronunciation demonstration and homework assignment
– c. 10 minutes

The class began with the homework check. Each exercise of was discussed in details. Most students displayed good understanding of the grammar patterns.

Following the grammar comprehension check a listening activity was introduced. To acquire the proper pronunciation students listened to the record while watching the Unit 1 article. After a double listening I read the article to the students. Next some of them were randomly chosen and invited to read a sentence or two. Similarly to the SAJK1 group, the students had difficulties to pronounce correctly. After completing the reading task students were asked simple questions to prove their comprehension. In fact, only few students were able to give a correct answer immediately. Quite frequently the question had to be repeated in a very slow manner, yet the students tended to secure their understanding by translating the question into Czech.

A short dialog related to the article provided another listening task. To practice the students understanding, this time they were exposed to the record without any textual support. As few students showed enough understanding, before listening the record for the second time some basic questions were put on the blackboard to provide a contextual support. This turned out to be a useful practise as more students were able to answer the question. The free times the listening was sent forth the students were allowed too watch the text. As they claimed, with this arrangement their understanding increased by a considerable level. As a next step volunteers were asked to read the dialog out load. To sum up the activity the students were asked simple questions related to both the article and the

dialog. Most students answered correctly, though with minor grammar mistakes.

Then we proceeded towards the topic of Unit 2. The students were introduced the meaning, use, and grammar properties of the verb *to have got*, which was followed by a grammar exercises 2 and 5 on page 16 in SbS. As the exercise showed, most students seemed to understand the grammar rules, though they tended to omit a part of the expression or ignored the 3rd person form. The considerably easier topic of noun plural forms was covered consequently.

According to the settled habit the final part of the lesson was devoted to the pronunciation demonstration and homework assignment. The students were asked to pre-study Unit 2, complete the additional grammar exercises, and most importantly, to study for the upcoming test.

3.4.1.4 Evaluation

As the lesson showed most of the students found pronunciation and spoken word understanding their main problem. Especially during the listening exercise some students displayed a slight irritation due to their inability to understand the content. To follow text while listening most of them considered more comfortable arrangement. Same as in case of SAJK1 group a few students expressed confusion about the use of *to have* and *to have got* structures. This is considered a frequent feature of particularly so called chronic beginners who possess some though very shallow knowledge these grammar patterns.

Perhaps the most questioned topic became the upcoming test. Although very limited amount of study material had been covered, the students expressed a strong concern about the test requirements.

3.4.1.5 The Lesson Description – January 8, 2009

The last lesson of the winter semester featured the end-of-term test. As the students did not have a chance to consult the Unit 2 content previously, the exam covered the Unit 1 only. Before the actual test writing a brief revision of the covered grammar features was done. To release the stress after the exam a conversational activity was introduced. The remaining time was sent on further grammar explanation.

1. Grammar review – c. 10 minutes
2. Test – c. 20 minutes
3. Conversation activity – c. 20 minutes
4. Grammar explanation and practise – c. 20 minutes
5. Homework check and new homework assignment – c. 20

To answer students` potential questions and refresh their knowledge a little warm up review was done before the test. The test was identical to the one sat by the SAJK1 group. As it has been described previously, it consisted of 3 parts including filling in correct greetings, dialog re-ordering, and basic translation.

To calm down the students` excitement the test was followed by a relaxing conversation activity. The students were given pieces of paper with personal description including name, age, address, and personal belonging. The each two cards were identical. The students` task was to find the person with the identical description. After getting back to their seats, the students were randomly asked about descriptions they had been given. The activity practised the use of the verb “*to be*” and “*to have got*” as well as basic social expressions.

The short refreshment was followed by the introduction of the expressions “*some*” and “*any*”. As it became clear, the elaborate nature of these grammar features put high demands on students understanding and was better understood by students with some

previous experience. Surprisingly though the SbS presents such a demanding topic already in the second Unit, it provides rather a limited opportunity for practise. Being aware of this insufficiency, I searched for complementary exercises to fill the gap. However, as the vast majority of textbooks and practise books introduce the topic to pre-intermediate students, it was impossible to find materials that would have matched the students` level. Due to the obvious necessity for further practise I provided the students materials of more advanced level, though I was aware of its partial irrelevance.

Towards the end of the lesson the homework check was done and new task was assigned. For their homework the students were supposed to complete supplementary exercises taken from *English Grammar in Use*.

3.4.1.6 Evaluation

As anticipated, the central issue of the class became the end-of-term test. However a number of students had showed increased worries over their possible failure, most students did well in the test. After the testing procedure some of them tended to share their emotions with their classmates, which seemed to be a proper time for a relaxing communication activity. The new grammar introduction caused confusion among the students. Especially complete beginners had difficulties understanding the ambiguous nature of the term “*any*”. Unfortunately, I was not able to provide the group with sufficient grammar practise that would have fully suited their level.

3.5 The End-of-Term Test Results Overview

As described in chapters 3.2.2.3 and 3.3.1.5, at the end of the winter semester both groups sat an end-of-term test. The purpose of the exam was to review students` study achievements after the first semester and provide feedback information for the subsequent assessment. Despite a numerous worries most students performed

well. The failure rate statistics showed low figures with only 2 AMSK1 and 3 SAJK1 students not passing the test.

Generally, students of both groups found the first exercise to be the most difficult. In my opinion, an unusual structure of the exercise might have been the major cause for misunderstanding the instruction, which consequently resulted in students' poor performance. However I consider the exercise easy, according to the feedback of several disinterested individuals, the structure of the exercise might have been caused perplexity with students. To avoid any further confusion at the re-sit, the character of the exercise was changed.

The second part of the test consisted of disordered dialog sentences. Students were instructed to put the sentences in correct order, which proved to be no difficulty to vast majority of them.

The third exercises proved to be the most demanding. The goal of the exercise was to translate 10 basic sentences into English. Though only basic vocabulary was required, frequent misspellings occurred. Wrong word order and incorrect use of personal and possessive pronouns represented other common mistakes. The overall ration of students who succeeded in completing the exercise without mistakes did not reach high numbers.

The test was designed with respect to the covered subject matter, which included in-class notes and the content of Unit 1 in SbS. The form of the exercises was chosen to test the students' ability to understand and use of elementary English. The exercises featured different structures including filling in missing information, sentence reordering, and translation. All 3 parts were assessed with equal significance and the overall result represented the average of the 3 figures. As there was no need for an exact assessment scheme, the

final results were graded as either *passed* or *failed*. The minimal required score to pass the exam was set to 61%.

On average, both groups scored good results. The AMSK1 group featured 13 students with result no worse than 90%, while the SAJ1 group scored slightly lower with 12 students performing 90% and better. If transferred into fractions, more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the AMSK1 students and less than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SAJK1 students scored excellent results of no less than 90%. As for the AMSK1 group, 5 students were assessed between 80-89%, while the same number of students achieved 70-79%. 2 students failed and were required to take a re-sit. With the SAJK1 group 10 students got between 80% and 89%. 5 students completed the test with results between 70% and 79%. 3 students did not pass, with final result 60% or less. As the figure 3 illustrates, opposite to my expectation AMSK1 students achieve a slightly better results compared to their SAJK1 colleagues.

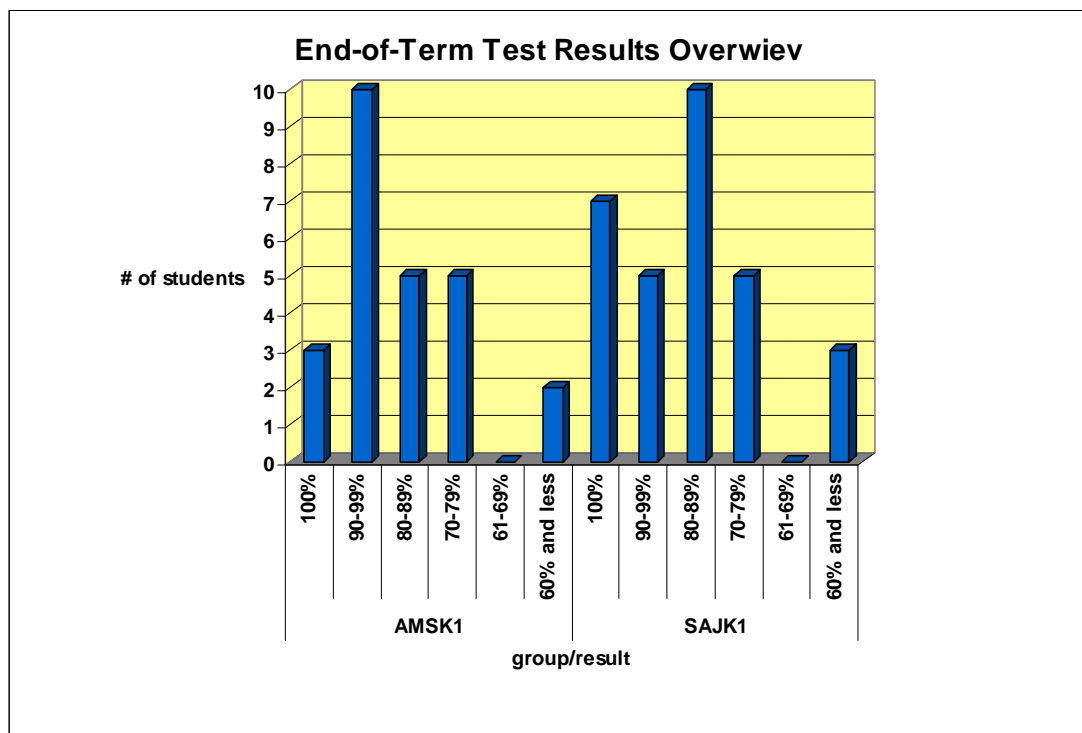


Figure IV: End-of-Semester Test Results

Generally, most students passed the test with very good results, though, considering elementary nature of the tasks, minor mistakes occurrence exceeded satisfactory level. Surpassing my expectations the AMSK1 students performed better than seemingly more skilled SAJK1 group, which might have resulted from AMSK1 taking place more frequently.

All those who had failed achieved excellent results in their re-sits. This proved the test requirements to be fairly undemanding, as none of them asked for extra help, though all 5 had claimed to be complete beginners.

3.6 The Second Semester Plan Overview

Being aware of a number of gaps that needed to be filled, I realized the necessity to introduce changes in the upcoming semester. In a discussion with students some new arrangements to enhance the class efficiency were suggested and agreed on. Although only slight changes have been done at the AMSK2 course plan, the SAJK2 has gone through a major improvement. The reason for two different arrangements subsisted mainly in the difference in the groups' schedules and their approaches towards the existing course design.

While the majority of AMSK2 students expressed no desire to change the class organization, particularly the advanced students of the SAJK2 group pronounced their request to attend classes especially arranged to suit their needs. Regarding the group's new schedule which again features long sessions of 180 minutes, it has been agreed to provide both elementary and advanced students with a 90 minutes class. While the elementary students have been proceeding with the SbS book, the advanced students required conversation classes. To guarantee a catchy discussion issues for each class, the students were invited to suggest a list of topics. According to their interest in particular issues, they have been divided into groups of usually 3 people and assigned to give presentations on selected

subjects. Besides giving speech, the students are supposed to introduce a list of related vocabulary, and carry on a short discussion within the group. The list of suggested topics includes the following:

- Sexual harassment
- Legalizing drugs
- Education free of charge – Yes or No
- Gypsies and crime
- Gay families
- The unemployed in the Czech Republic
- People on the edge of society
- Women in today's society
- Single parents
- Abortion

The in-class discussions have been welcomed by vast majority of advanced students. They particularly appreciate an opportunity to practise and cultivate their English communication skills as well as a chance to share and contrast ideas while discussing controversial issues of contemporary society. A variety of contradictory approaches frequently becomes a stimulus for further debate, and at the same time it often happens to be a source of many amusing situations. The fact that students' performance will be considered a fundamental base for the final assessment reinforces their motivation.

As regards the AMSK2 course, beginning with the new semester only slight changes in the course structure have been implemented. Due to shorter classes there has not been much space for a double-class arrangement similar to the one applied

with SAJK2. To compensate absence in class, the advanced students have been assigned to write an essay. In addition, equally as their beginner colleagues, they will sit a test of basic grammar at the end of the semester. Generally, the AMSK2 advanced students showed little interest in attending English class mainly due to two basic reasons; 1) most of them possess above-average knowledge of English resulting from their foreign experience, and 2) with these skills they can easily fulfil their professional requirements, if there are any.

So far, the students seem to view the current arrangement convenient. Although a more radical change could have been implemented, considering the limited conditions of language distance courses at the University of South Bohemia, I see not many options unless a huge system transformation takes place.

4. The Need Analysis

While being in constant process of syllabus creation and modification through out the 1st and 2nd semester, I have been attempting to carry out a need analysis which would provide an information base for further improvements in designing English distance courses. The need analysis has been conducted through two independent surveys which attempt to define students` needs in terms of their private and professional requirements.

In case of survey that has been carried out among the potential employers only nursery school has been approached. Due to various professions held by SAJK students, it was not quite possible to define and contact the potential respondents.

4.1 The Student Questionnaire

To address both AMSK and SAJK students a special open-answer bilingual questionnaire has been designed. It consists of nine questions. The students have been asked to answer in English if possible, however the Czech translation has been provided to reach those with limited command of English. The questionnaire has been distributed and sent back by the e-mail. So far, out of the total number of all students approximately 50% have filled in and handed back the questionnaire. The vast majority of 56 respondents answered in English, while only 2 students completed the questionnaire in Czech. Generally, though with various mistakes, the students managed to answer in a simple but clear way.

The goal of the enquiry is to find out the students private and professional needs in terms of English language use, as well as to explore the degree of satisfaction with the current course design. The questions investigate the importance of English in students` private and professional lives, their particular language interests, and their

perception of the current course syllabus. The figure V provides the actual questionnaire as presented to the students.

Figure V: Student Questionnaire

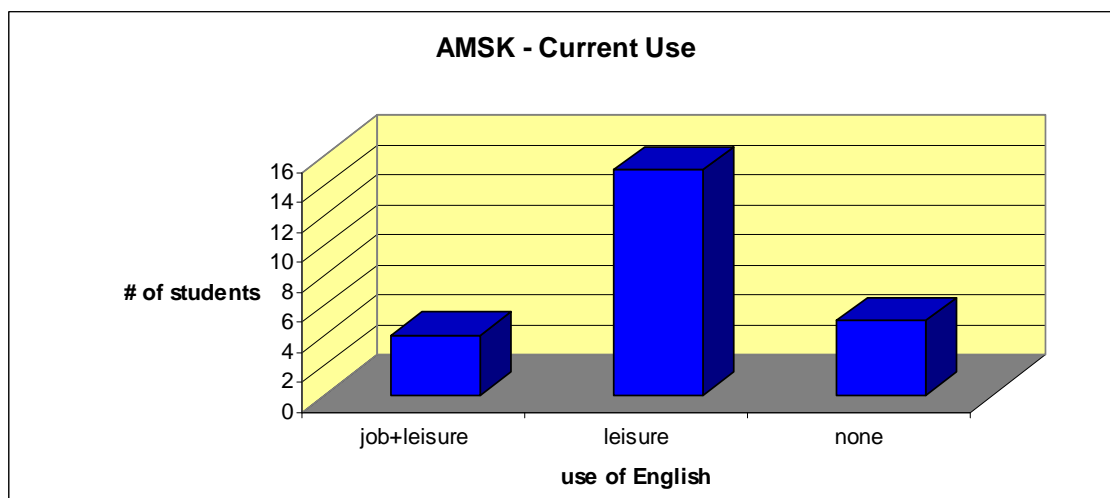
<u>QUESTIONNAIRE/DOTAZNÍK</u>
1) What have you needed English for in your personal life?
<i>K čemu jste ve svém dosavadním osobním životě potřeboval(a) angličtinu?</i>
2) What have you needed English for in your professional life?
<i>K čemu jste ve svém dosavadním profesním životě potřeboval(a) angličtinu?</i>
3) What will you need English for in future?
<i>K čemu bude potřebovat angličtinu v budoucnu?</i>
4) What particular vocabulary are you interested in?
<i>Jaká konkrétní slovní zásoba vás zajímá?</i>
5) What particular language skills would you like to acquire? (writing e-mails, speaking – e.g. business or general communication, listening and understanding, pronunciation, grammar...)
<i>Jaké konkrétní jazykové dovednosti byste si rád(a) osvojil(a)? (psaní e-mailů, konverzace – např. obchodní nebo obecná, poslech a porozumnění, výslovnost, gramatika...)</i>
6) What do you expect from the course?
<i>Co od semináře očekáváte?</i>
7) What do you think are the positives of the course?
<i>Jaká jsou podle Vás pozitiva semináře?</i>
8) What do you think are the negatives of the course?
<i>Jaká jsou podle Vás negativa semináře?</i>
9) On the scale 1-5 evaluate the difficulty of the course.
1=idle, 2=quite simple, 3=suits my level, 4=challenging, 5= too difficult <i>Na stupnici 1-5 ohodnoťte obtížnost semináře.</i> <i>1=zbytečný, 2=docela snadný, 3=vyhovuje mojí úrovni, 4=náročný, 5=těžko zvládnutelný</i>

4.1.1 The Student Questionnaire Results

As seen above, questions 1 and 2 investigated the purpose the students need to use English for. Only few AMSK students reported necessity to use English at work. According to their answers, vast majority of the students use English for private purposes, the most frequently mentioned subject areas included travelling and communication with foreign friends. Within the AMSK group 4 students reported they use English neither for private nor professional purposes.

Figure Q.1 provides detailed information on number of AMSK students and the rate of the language use within the group. Three students reported they use English at work as well as for private purposes. Fourteen students use English at their leisure time only, 4 students do not use English at all.

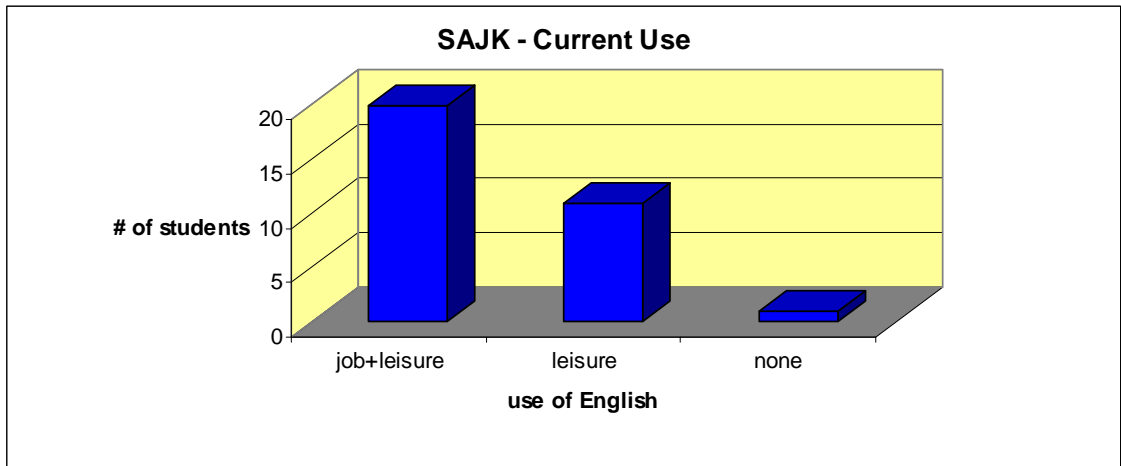
Figure Q. 1: AMSK - Current Use of English



Within the SAJK students, some differences regarding the current use of English can be seen. As figure Q.2 shows, the number of students who claimed English to be part of their professional competence was considerably higher. Also, in contrast to a few AMSK students who stated a zero use of English, except for one all SAJK students use English either at work or for private purposes.

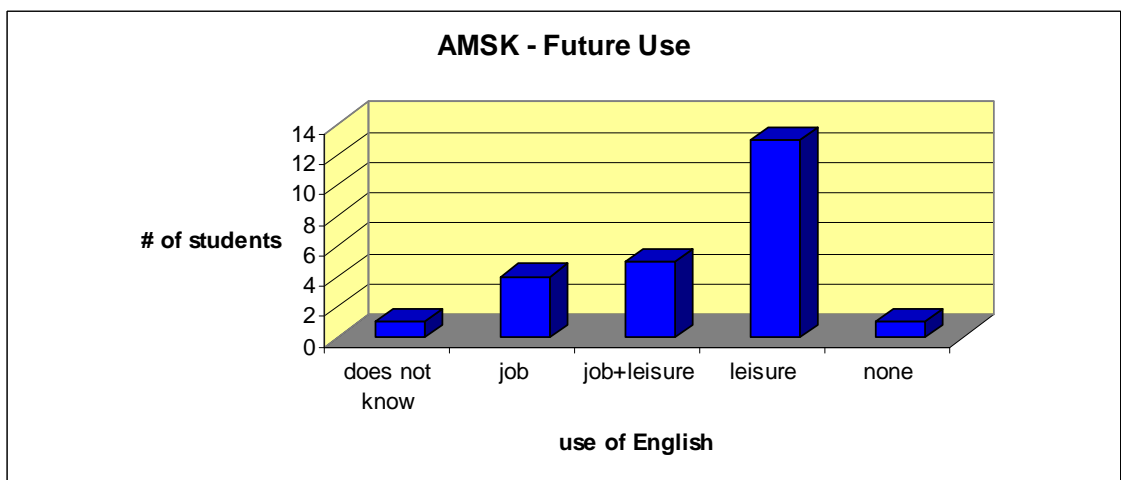
Generally, the results accord to my impression of SAJK students being more experienced in the use of English.

Figure Q. 2: SAJK - Current Use of English



Question 3 enquired the future purpose the students might need to use English for. Again, the overall results display similar tendencies that have been discussed previously. While SAJK group showed more carrier oriented approach towards the use of English, AMSK students expected to use more for private than professional purposes. The difference of interest between the two groups can be noticed when comparing figures Q.3 and Q.4.

Figure Q. 3: AMSK - Future Use of English



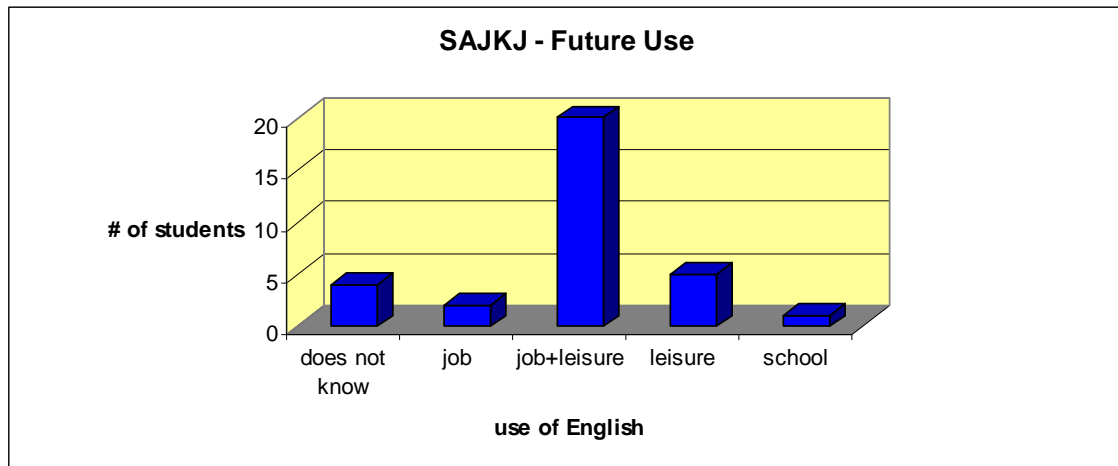


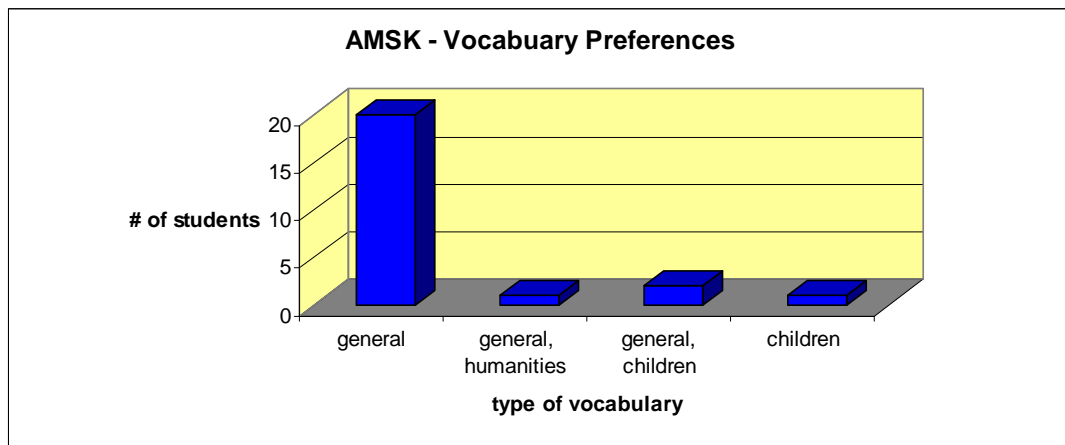
Figure Q. 4: Future Use of English

One of the AMSK respondents reported to expect no need to use English in future, which seems to be particularly alarming in regard to the omnipresent importance of English in today's globalized society.

In their answers to question 4, students provided information concerning the vocabulary they are interested in. Despite my previous expectation the overall results showed vast majority of students to be interested in general English. Only few learners expressed interest in specialized vocabulary connected to their professional needs. In case of AMSK group, their interest in specialized vocabulary is almost exclusively related to teaching English to pre-school children. On the other had, the SAJK students displayed a miscellaneous variety of interests in different fields of vocabulary, depending on their particular job types. While some of the students provided exact definitions of the particular language of their interest related to e.g. business, military or social issues, others offered rather general answers when referring to professional vocabulary without any further specification. As figures Q.5 and Q.6 show, most SAJK students, though generally more carrier oriented in their language learning, expressed prevailing interest in general vocabulary same as majority of AMSK group. At this point, SAJK group appears to contradict their answers to questions 2 and 3. Although current and

possible future professional use of English has been frequently reported, most of the SAJK students do not seem to express any deeper interest in professional vocabulary. One of the possible explanations might be an insufficient level of students` language skills, since most students generally prefer to manage basic language first before they proceed to specialized language learning.

Figure Q. 5: AMSK - Vocabulary Preferences



The low interest in specialized vocabulary among the AMSK students can be explained by insignificant language requirements from the side of potential employers, as it will be discussed later in the following section.

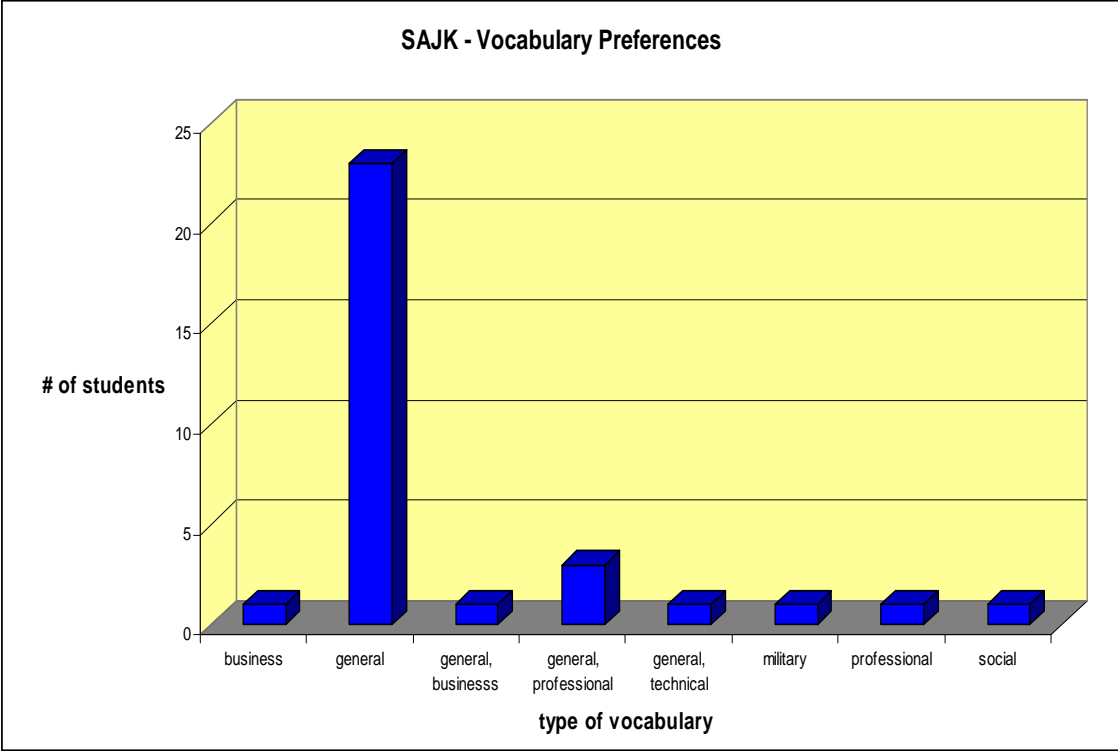
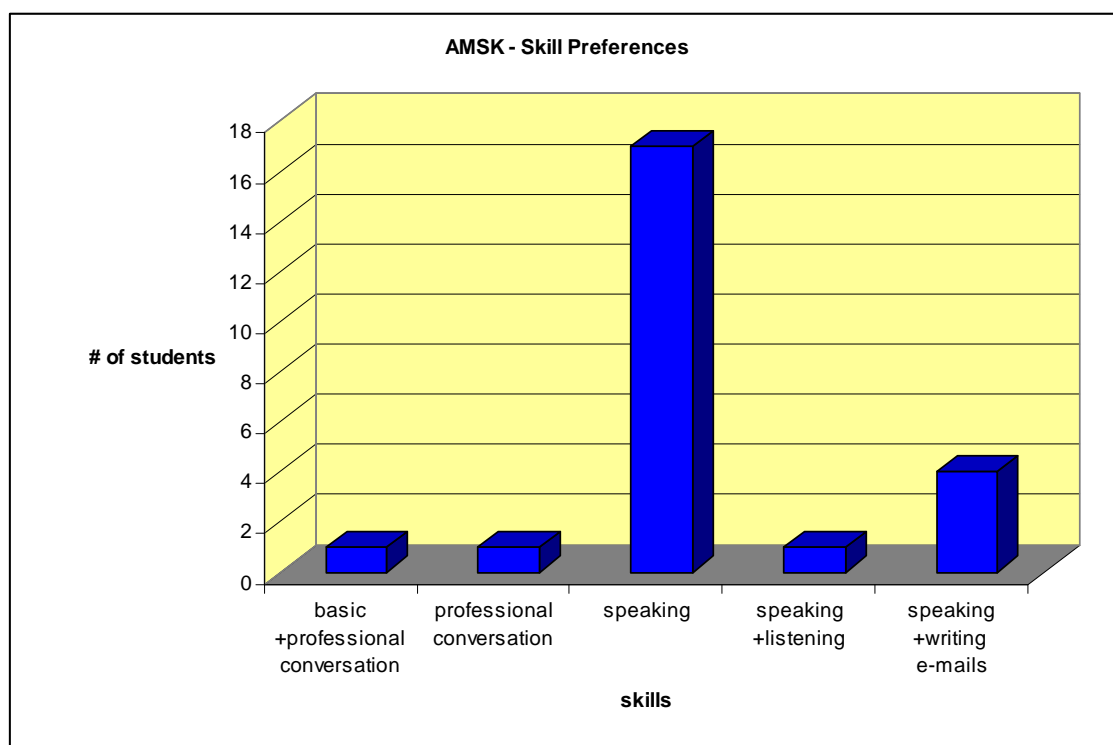


Figure Q. 6 - SAJK Vocabulary Prefereces

Partially related to questioned number 4, question 5 has been inquiring particular language skills the students are interested in. Again, though with minor differences, the majority of all students in both groups reported speaking to represent the most essential skill for them. Writing e-mails has also proved to be a subject of students' interest in number of cases. On the other had, no students seemed to be interested in grammar issues. In contrast to what appeared to cause the greatest problems to most students at the lessons, not even a single notice on pronunciation appeared among the answers. At this point the students' needs as viewed by the teacher and the students themselves differ to a large extend. While the teacher perceives the students' needs not only form the point of view of their interest, but also in terms of the students' shortcomings, students tend to prioritize subjects they regard as important though not always these issues correspond to their actual needs.

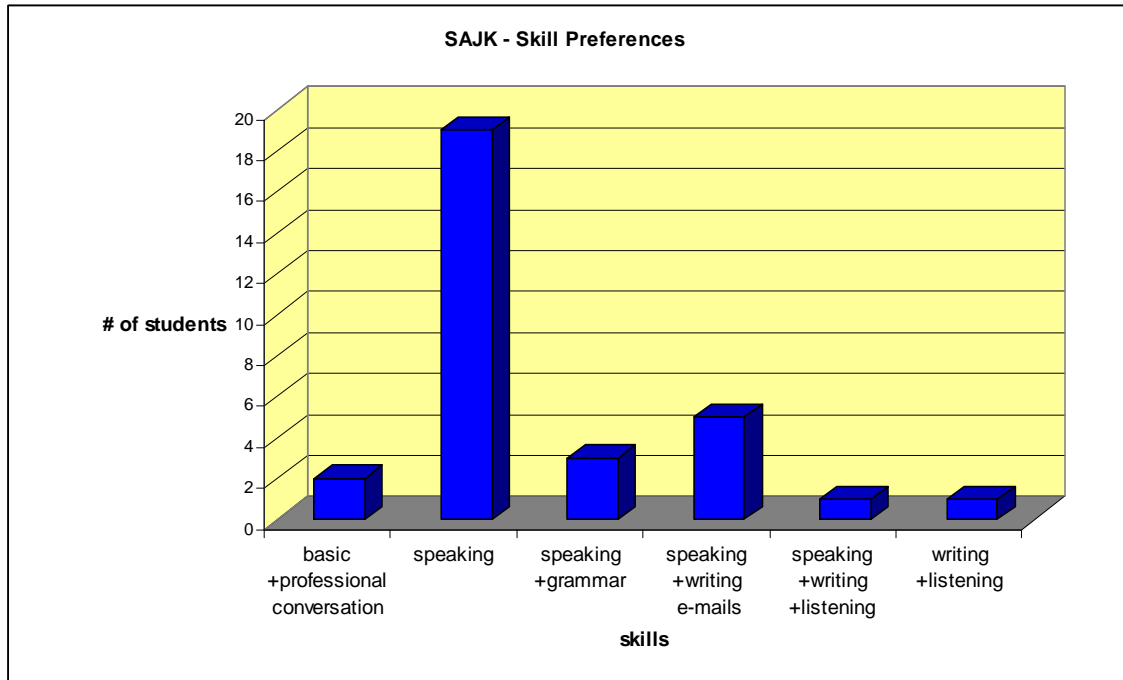
Figures Q.7 and Q.8 illustrate the scope of the preferred skills as referred to in students' questionnaire answers.

Figure Q. 7 - AMSK - Skill Preferences



As it can be seen, the most frequently mentioned skill both AMSK and SAJK students would like to acquire proved to be speaking.

Figure Q. 8 - SAJK - Skill Preferences



Showing answers to question 6, figures Q.9 and Q.10 list students' English class expectations. This is of course a widely general question, yet most students answered with very precise ideas of how the course should contribute to their English learning process. Quite naturally, majority of all students expect to improve. Another fairly large group expects revision of their previously acquired knowledge. Surprisingly within the AMSK group 3 students pronounced no expectations at all. One of the AMSK students expected to receive training for pre-school English teaching. Both groups displayed similar proportion of responses concerning improvement and revision.

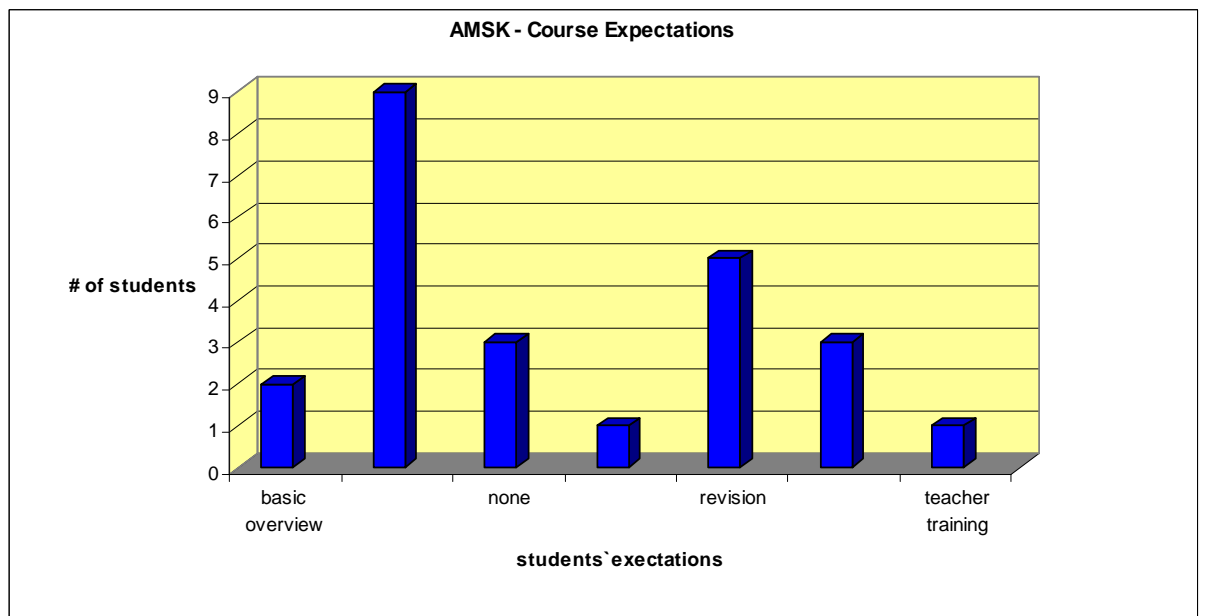


Figure Q. 9 - AMSK Course Expectations

The answers might reflect students' perception of the first semester course to certain extent, as the questionnaires were distributed towards the end of the winter term.

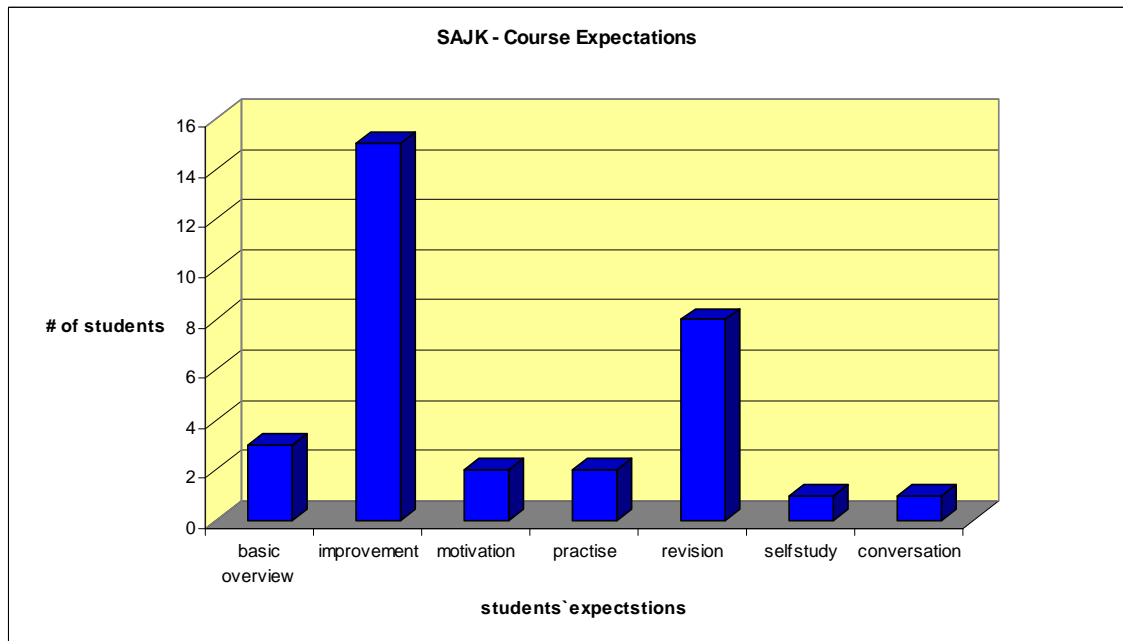


Figure Q. 10 - SAJK Course Expectations

The received answers to questions 7, 8, and 9 represent a particularly valuable feedback to the current course design and teaching methods. In question 7 students have been asked to list positive aspects of the current course arrangement, while question 8 provides space for any negative comments. In question 9 students have been assigned to evaluate the course with a total mark from 1 standing for "idle" to 5 which stands for "too difficult".

Regarding the positives of the course, it should be noted that many students appreciate a number of aspects ranging from an opportunity to speak, nice atmosphere, a chance to practise their skills to motivation to study English or the beginners focused approach.

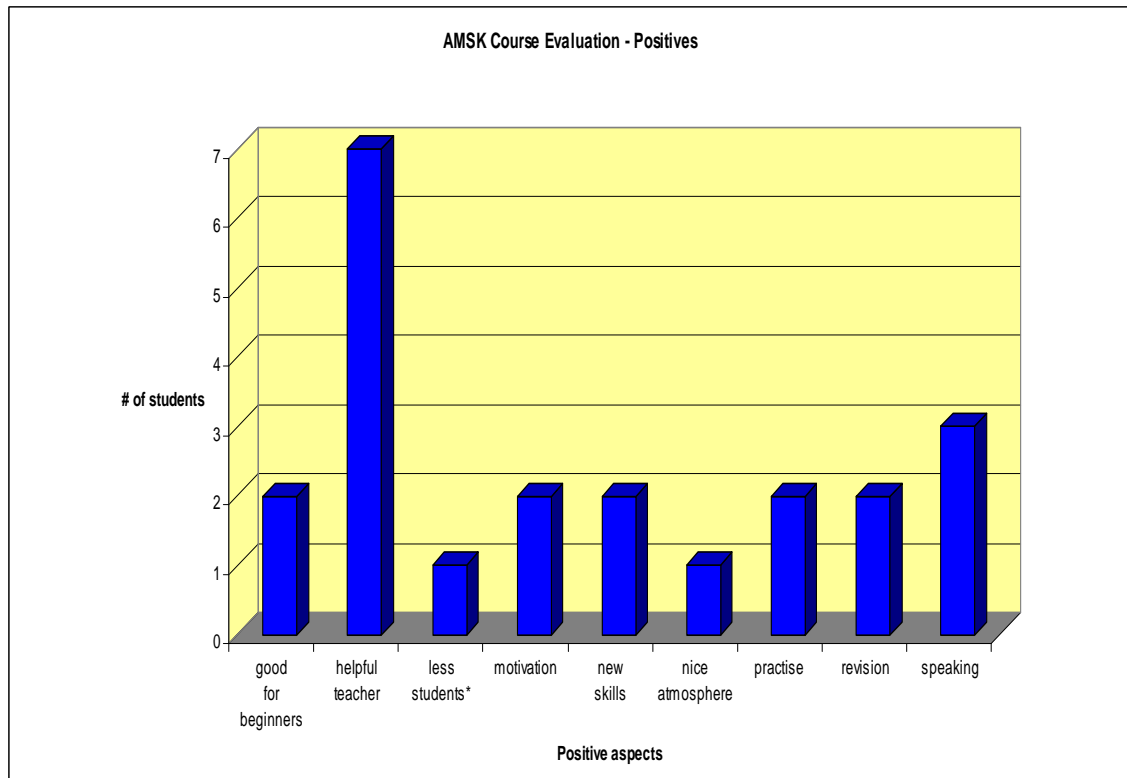


Figure Q. 11 - AMSK - Couse Positives

Most frequently mentioned appraisal within both groups regards teacher`s help to students. Quite surprisingly, despite limited opportunity for in-class learning, many SAJK students appreciated language improvement they have achieved. On the contrary, according to their answers only 2 AMSK students have improved their skills. One student particularly pointed out the class division arrangement which resulted in lower number of class attendants. One of the frequently appreciated features included a chance to reinforce students` communication skills. Number of SAJK respondents perceived frequent team work tasks to be the greatest advantage of the course. Significant number of students favoured an opportunity to either revise or practise their skills, while others stressed nice atmosphere of the lessons. Charts Q.11 and Q.12 provide a more detailed insight into students` responses.

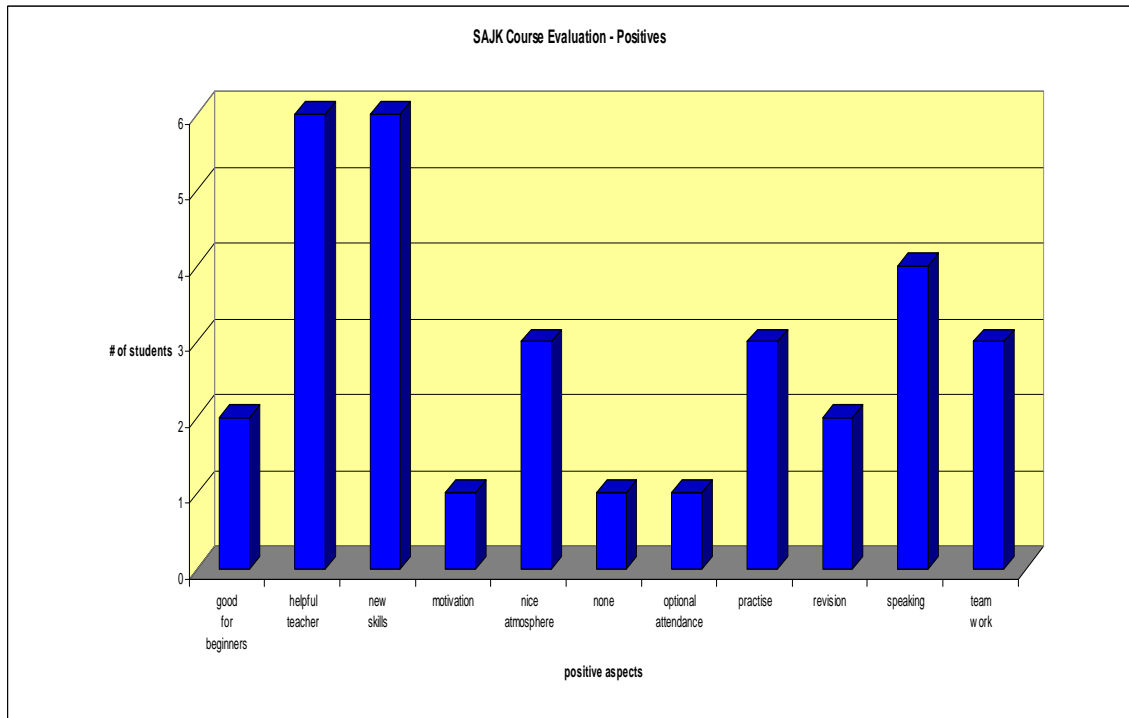
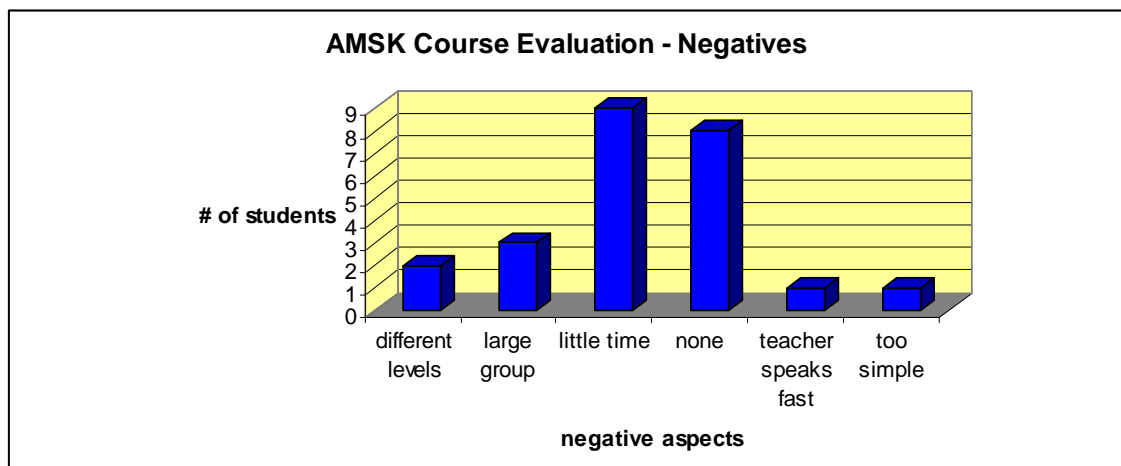


Figure Q. 12: SAJK - Cousee Posetives

The answers concerning negative features of the course prove to be less diverse. As charts Q.13 and Q.14 show, most frequently the students complained about large groups, little time devoted to classes, and different levels of English among the students. Quite a number of students reported to see no negatives about the course which might have resulted from the reduced requirements for advanced students during the first semester.

Figure Q. 13: AMSK - Course Negatives



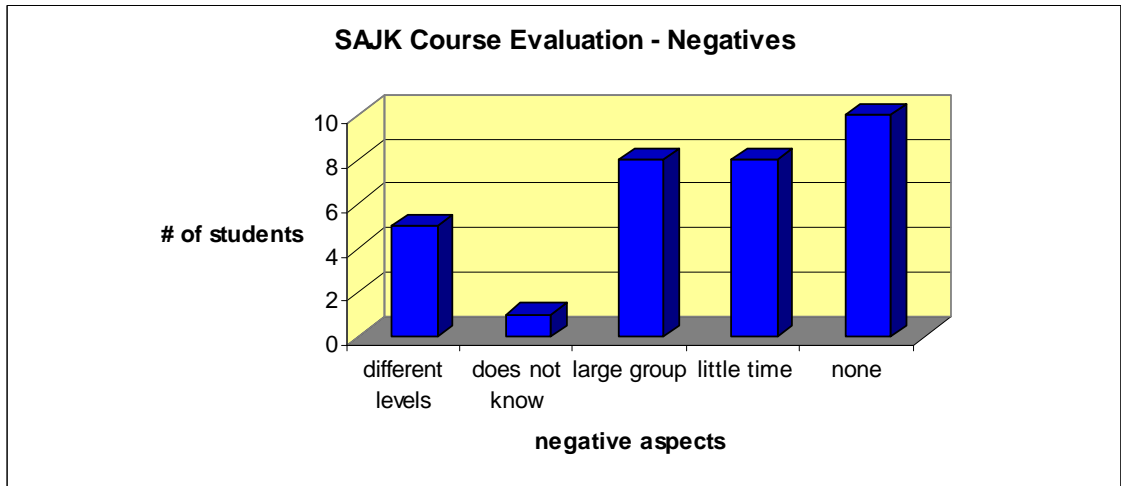
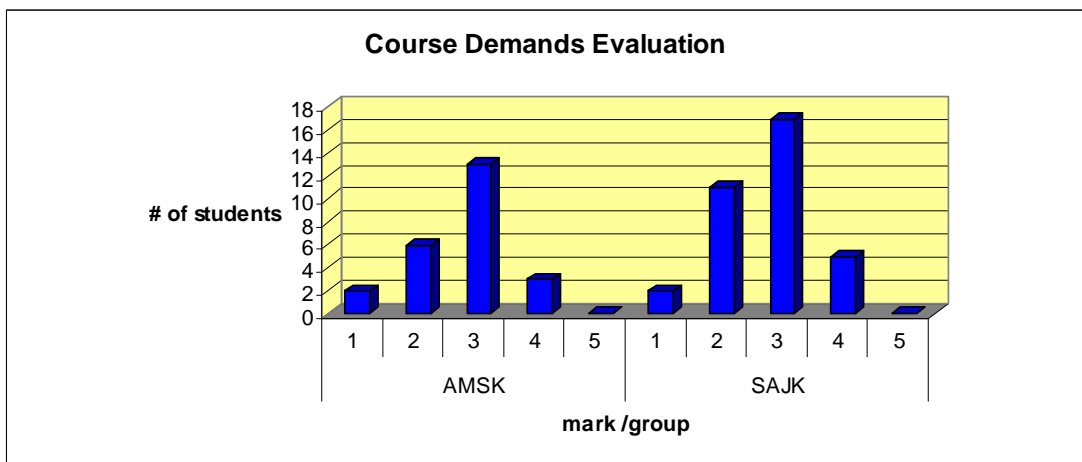


Figure Q. 14: SAJK - Course Negatives

In question 9 students have been asked to evaluate the course in terms of study demands. the students chose from the following gradin scale: 1=idle, 2=quite simple, 3=suits my level, 4=challenging, 5= too difficult

As seen in figure 6.15, most students viewed the course to be suitable to their level. According to second most frequently given mark, to number of students the course was quite simple. Out of the total number of respondents, 10 students graded course with 4, meaning it has been quite a challenge to them. So far nobody has chosen grade 5, while few students think the course has been of no use to them. The overall results indicate an average to lower difficulty of the course.

Figure Q. 15: Course Demands Evaluation



According to the questionnaire results it becomes clear that students' perception of a course might not always accord to that of a teacher. Also, different students possess different needs and therefore require a distinct course design and teaching approach.

Despite some of my former expectations, the students have not displayed a particular need for a highly specific course design, though certain specialities should be considered when approaching each group. While AMSK students seem to favour basic vocabulary they possibly might use when dealing with pre-school children, SAJK class displays higher requirements in terms of professional language skills. As referred to by students, lack of time and large, heterogeneous groups seem to be the cause of major nuisance. Obviously the urgency to divide students into smaller, homogenous groups takes over other concerns. As the results showed, some of the introduced arrangements have proved to be appreciated by majority of students. Chance to practise communication together with opportunity to enjoy learning seem to be the right motivation tools. So far, there has been only a limited opportunity to apply the result in second semester syllabus, however I believed they can be used as a source of inspiration for further professional course designing.

4.2 The Nursery School Questionnaire and Its Results

To explore the real demands of the nursery labour market, I designed a special questionnaire to investigate the requirements nursery schools expect of their potential employees in terms of language skills. The motivation to reach an objective answer was driven mainly by contradictory information I had received on pre-school English teaching. As an English teacher I am aware of growing demand for English classes focused on pre-school children. Regardless of relevancy of such courses, many parents wish their children started learning English even before they enter school. Recognizing the economic potential of such education, many private language schools try to fill the market gap when providing pre-school English courses.

Quite naturally, not to stay behind, both private and public nursery schools have gradually been introducing English classes for young learners as well. Despite these facts, many AMSK students deny English to be an important condition of current nursery school teaching. To discover the real state of matters I designed and a questionnaire which has consequently been distributed to approximately 30 nursery schools in Ceske Budejovice and surrounding. The aim of the questionnaire is to collect objective data concerning English teaching in nursery schools. The questionnaire has been provided in Czech and included the following questions:

<u>DOTAZNÍK pro MŠ</u>
<i>1. Zajišťuje Vaše mateřská škola výuku některého cizího jazyka?</i>
<i>2. Projevují rodiče zájem o výuku angličtiny pro děti?</i>
<i>3. Pokud se ve Vaší mateřské škole vyučuje angličtina, jakou má učitel(ka) kvalifikaci k výuce jazyka?</i>
<i>4. Požadujete od uchazečů o práci učitele/učitelky ve vaší mateřské škole znalost angličtiny? Pokud ano, na jaké úrovni?</i>
<i>5. Pokud vyučujete v mateřské škole angličtinu, jakým tématům se ve výuce věnujete?</i>

Figure VI: Nursery School Questionnaire

Overall more than 50 nursery schools have been addressed through email, however up to now only 7 have sent their answers back.

According to their answers, 6 out of 7 nursery schools currently provide or previously provided English classes. The questionnaire results have also proved that parents often show interest in English being taught at nursery schools. As these findings suggest, there is

an urgent need for nursery teachers to receive a proper language teaching training.

Regarding the teachers qualification, most institutions have reported to expect their language to be especially trained for teaching English to children, though less than half of them would require their teachers to either trained or experienced in teaching pre-school children.

As anticipated, pre-school English teaching deals with very basic and limited area of language. Naturally, the narrow scope of topics has proved to be similar to most schools. The repeatedly mentioned subjects include family, transport, body parts, numbers, colours, food, animals etc. Although the listed topics suggest no necessity for deep language knowledge, pre-school language teaching involves a profound understanding of the appropriate methodology.

On the other hand, none of these schools have reported a need for teacher applicants to know English. Obviously, foreign language knowledge is still perceived to be an extra skill rather than a part of basic education.

The following chart provides a summary of all received responses.

Table II: Nursery School Questionnaire Results Overview

Nursery School	Teach English	Parents' Interest	Teacher's Qualification	Request English from Applicants	Topics
MŠ SEDMIKRÁSKA, České Budějovice	yes	yes (very much)	pre-school language teaching certificate	no	plants, family, transport, numbers, colours, food, body, weather, animals
MŠ Dolní Bukovsko	yes	yes (40%)	degree in primary school language teaching	no	0
MŠ Kamenný Újezd	0	rare	0	0	0
MŠ Dubné	yes	yes	degree in primary school language teaching	no	basic
MŠ Barborka	yes	yes	pedagogical training, previous experience in pre-school language teaching	no	colours, numbers, body, animals
MŠ Karla Štěcha, České Budějovice	yes	yes	language pre-school teaching certificate	no	colours, numbers, family, food, animals, seasons, clothes, transport, body, verbs, festivals, greetings
Církevní MŠ, České Budějovice	no (last year)	yes	native speaker + nursery school teacher with English	no	colours, body, home, at the nursery school, verbs, songs, greetings

5. Conclusion

The central idea of the thesis is to provide insight into the contemporary distance education at the university level. Although experiencing a rapid development, distance education has not been receiving a full recognition among a huge number of educators and learners. Due to a gloomy blanket of scepticism, distance education receives little public appreciation, which consequently results in potentially low level of distance courses. The aim of the thesis is to provide feedback on particular distance courses at the Pedagogical Faculty, JCU, point out the urgency of necessary changes, and introduce ideas for future improvement. Besides the previously mentioned, with this work the author hopes to bring distance education to the focus of attention of the academics at JCU.

The motivation to devote the thesis to distance education came with the opportunity to teach English distance courses at the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Pedagogical Faculty, JCU. As the practical experience preceded the theoretical research at some points, it was necessary to change some of the initial ideas which proved to be beyond the scope of the work. With new understanding of both theoretical and practical issues of distance course the primary intention to design an effective course for distance learners turned out to be rather naïve. For this reason it has been decided to collect information and ideas which could help to realize and possibly solve some of the particular problems.

The necessary theoretical background to illustrate the basic issues of distance education has been collected at the theoretical part. The fundamental question has proved to be defining the term of distance education. Due to number of various methods and approaches, a large scope of outside-class concepts exist, some of which not always fully conform to the Central European tradition. Within the various

terms, distance education seems to align best to the local understanding of education outside class.

The following sections provide a peek into distance course design features and requirements. The chapters are particularly based on the theoretical and practical findings of Moore and Kearsley, which results from authors' highly effectual presentation of problem view. To introduce the major elements of distance education class, individual sections are devoted to the element feature description. These include technology means, teacher's role, student profile, and course content discussion as regarded within DE.

The theoretical background undeniably represents a valuable source of knowledge, though it often was not possible to bring theory into practice. Facing different difficulties throughout the semester, I was not able to put many of the theoretical ideas into practise particularly due to some fundamental shortcomings of the current course structure.

As the practical part suggests, English distance courses at the Pedagogical Faculty need a profound change of design. The essential problems the classes have been facing are 1) enormous number of students, 2) high heterogeneity of the groups, and 3) inefficient, out-of-date course design.

After realizing the situation, I recognized the urgency to carry out a student need analysis, which would provide fundamental data for course redesigning. The need analysis has proved to be a complex research and has not been completely finished up to now, however useful findings have been derived. In fact, the process started with a placement test of SAJK students.

Due to the large size of the group, the test was introduced to provide information on students' English skills. Although not fully objective, the results illustrate the overall group's situation. As anticipated, the students within the group displayed huge heterogeneity of language

levels, which made efficient teaching of such a huge group extremely difficult. Due to the hopeless situation group division has been introduced. Although chiefly in favour of the elementary students, the arrangement has proved to be more efficient than the previous one. The same measures have been taken at the AMSK class, too.

The second part of the research consists of a survey carried out among students and part of their potential employers. Both groups have been provided specially designed questionnaires, which investigate the students' needs and potential employer's requirements in order to provide an answer to the question of what particular skills and topics are most useful for students. A part of the student questionnaire provides feedback to the current course design.

As the results have showed, there is an urgent need for course resigning. As each group possesses different features, they need to be provided differently organized education. While AMSK students might appreciate English courses focused mainly on pre-school teaching, the SAJK students would probably welcome more professional language oriented lessons. In both case, however, it is necessary to divide the groups into smaller units reflecting different levels of language proficiency.

On the other hand, students appreciated some of course features as group work conversation activities, an opportunity to practise spoken language or review basic grammar. Among the positives, as referred to by students, belong pleasant class atmosphere and teacher's helpful approach.

From obvious reasons, distance education represents a true challenge to the teacher. The effort to substitute in-class interaction represents the essential issue within the field. Last two decades has provided us with new technological advances that can help DE reach and perhaps even outdo the standards of conventional education.

However, at this point the JCU distance courses stay far behind the modern tendencies. Neither MS nor SOP programmes have taken advantage of modern IT options. According to students' reports, the vast majority of teachers never use the internet to distribute materials or communicate with students, however convenient it proves to be. It would be completely foolish to expect a net based course. However, as I have learned through my teaching experience, modern communication technologies represent the only possible way to maintain any significant improvement in DE efficiency.

To sum up the findings, a number of steps need to be done to provide distance students with high standard education. First of all, a serious need analysis must be carried out in order to reform the current course designs.

The need analysis provided by the thesis can only serve as a clue to further extensive research, since as proved in both theory and practise, the entire course design preparation and subsequent creation require a team of experienced specialist. Also, for being an elaborate process on its own, distance course syllabus design can never be properly done by an individual teacher, particularly because deep IT skills are needed to maintain the education software. In addition to that, designing an internet based course puts high demands on the methodology guidance. Same as Rome was not built in a day, such significant changes cannot be done over night. Most probably, a system change of such extend would require a whole specialized department to be founded. However, these are not impossible ideas. As showed on the examples of Roy and Trajanovic, universities world-wide have successfully approached DE. Within the Czech Republic, the Technical University of Liberec seems to an example to follow. The University's Faculty of Economics has been using a learning management system called Moodle. Available on the internal net, the system provides students with various resources and activities including text resources, assignments, forums, and

interactive exercises, which make education at a distance much more enjoyable.

Besides the radical course design change, the entire distance education system within JCU is calling for innovation. The seldom meetings and very poor student support result in students' reluctant approach towards their responsibilities. The distance students usually have very small chance to get to know their classmates and teachers. Due to the rare interaction with other participants, communication gaps and frequent misunderstandings prove to be a common feature. At this point, it is necessary to assist students whenever they need, since lack of motivation is more probable to occur compared to daily students. Especially first year students who are not quite sure about their duties, course requirements, and administrative rules need to be provided complex instruction. In order to do that, the university should provide counsellors who would inform students and help them make decision about their learning.

It is obvious that any future change would take much deeper research than the scope of the work allows. However, I hope the thesis will stimulate more profound investigations, which would facilitate high standard distance education to be achieved at JCU.

From a point of view of a fresh teacher graduate, teaching English at a distance has been a valuable experience of significant professional meaning to me. I am grateful to have encountered new challenging situations. I also hope my effort has motivated my students for their further distance study of English language.

6. Resumé

Základním cílem diplomové práce bylo poskytnout detailnější pohled na současný stav dálkového studia na vysokoškolské úrovni. Výstupem pak měla být zpětná vazba jednotlivým dálkovým kurzům na Pedagogické fakultě JČU a upozornění na zjištěné nedostatky související s tímto druhem studia.

Vzhledem k velkému počtu výkladů termínu “dálkové studium” v odborné literatuře bylo primárním úkolem stanovit přesnou definici výše uvedeného. Fenomén dálkového studia, tak jak je chápán ve středoevropském prostředí, lze tedy nejlépe vyjádřit prostě jako výuka mimo třídu.

Kromě teoretické části, která se především zabývá popisem současného stavu dálkového studia u nás i v zahraničí a na základě konkrétních příkladů uvádí některé trendy v oblasti tohoto způsobu výuky, praktická část se prostřednictvím empiricky založeného výzkumu snažila poukázat na jednotlivé nedostatky, se kterými se autor nebo studenti museli potýkat. Předpoklad, že budou vyžadovány určité změny v koncepci výuky, se potvrdil v souvislosti s následujícími problémy:

- 1) Nadměrný počet studentů
- 2) Vysoká heterogenita skupin ve smyslu pokročilosti
- 3) Nedostatečná a zastaralá koncepce výuky

Na základě zjištění těchto nedostatků bylo nutné provést analýzu potřeb studentů, která by posloužila jako odrazový můstek pro plánované změny ve výuce. Prvním krokem byl tudíž rozřazovací test poskytující informace o úrovni znalosti angličtiny jednotlivých studentů SAJK. Ačkoliv výsledky tohoto jednoho testu nemohly sloužit jako zcela objektivní zdroj informací, přesto svědčily o obrovské rozdílnosti v úrovni jazyka studentů. Tato skutečnost velmi

stěžovala výuku a v tak velké skupině studentů zásadním způsobem negativně ovlivňovala kvalitu výuky. Z tohoto důvodu bylo přistoupeno k rozdělení studentů do skupin dle úrovně znalostí. Stejné opatření bylo učiněno i v případě studentů AMSK.

Druhá část výzkumu byla založena na dotazníkovém průzkumu, zaměřeném na studenty a jejich případné zaměstnavatele. Otázky v dotazníku byly zaměřeny na zjištění, jaké dovednosti a tematické celky jsou pro studenty nejpřínosnější. I tento druh informací představoval určitou zpětnou vazbu pro případnou reformu výukové koncepce. Nutná je například kategorizace kurzů dle jednotlivých studijních oborů. Zatímco studenti AMSK ocení kurz angličtiny zaměřený na předškolní výuku, studenti SAJK logicky spíše uvítají hodiny s poněkud odlišným zaměřením. V každém případě je nezbytné rozdělení skupin do menších jednotek dle úrovně jazyka. I v těchto menších skupinách je ovšem vhodné částečně zachovat charakter vzájemné spolupráce jako např. skupinová konverzace, která byla studenty kladně přijata.

Z výše uvedených důvodů je patrné, že výuka dálkového studia představuje pro vyučujícího opravdovou výzvu. Skutečnost, která jeho práci značně stěžuje, je absence využití IT technologií resp. Internetu. V době, kdy je Internet téměř neoddělitelnou součástí života velké části populace, je tento nedostatek obzvlášť palčivý. Dle sdělení studentů převážná většina vyučujících ignoruje používání Internetu k rozesílání studijních materiálů či komunikaci se studenty. Přitom používání moderních komunikačních technologií představuje jediný možný způsob, jak dosáhnout efektivních výsledků v oblasti výuky dálkového studia.

Aby bylo možné poskytnout dálkovým studentům kvalitní formu výuky, je nutné učinit řadu kroků. Prvním z nich je vytvoření komplexní analýzy potřeb, vedoucí následně k reformě stávající koncepce kurzů. Zmíněná analýza potřeb provedená pro potřeby této práce může posloužit pouze jako vodítko či odrazový můstek pro

koncepti rozsáhlejší, vytvořenou nejlépe skupinou zkušených odborníků. Změnou by měla projít i koncepce sylabu, na jehož tvorbě by se také neměl podílet pouze jednotlivec, nýbrž opět skupina osob, mj. také z důvodu nutnosti použití IT znalostí, jež nelze u vyučujících jazyků vždy předpokládat. Cílem by samozřejmě mělo být převedení veškeré dokumentace, studijních materiálů a návodů právě na univerzitní web, kde by studenti měli snadný přístup ke všem informacím. Tento krok pochopitelně vyžaduje značné úsilí a čas. Investice do tohoto opatření by se ovšem určitě vyplatilo, už jenom z toho důvodu, že za několik let bude tento druh výuky samozřejmostí a přechod na tento systém bude stejně nezbytný. Příkladů, kdy tento přístup úspěšně funguje, je již dnes celá řada. V rámci Česka je to např. Ekonomická fakulta Technické univerzity v Liberci, kde je aplikován vyučující systém Moodle. Zde jsou studentům poskytovány studijní zdroje, diskusní fóra a interaktivní cvičení, jež činí formu dálkového studia mnohem zábavnější.

Kromě nutnosti změny koncepce kurzu vyžaduje inovaci i výukový systém jako takový. Studenti dálkového studia mají často velmi malou šanci přijít do kontaktu s ostatními studenty i vyučujícími. Díky této nízké interakci dochází u studentů k informačním nedostatkům, informačním šumům a nedorozuměním. Vzhledem k tomu, že na rozdíl od studentů denního studia je dálkové studenty mnohem obtížnější motivovat, je nutné poskytovat dálkovým studentům více podpory, mj. v administrativních záležitostech. Především během prvního roku studia, kdy studenti vzhledem k nedostatku informací mohou mít potíže administrativního charakteru, má toto opatření své opodstatnění. Proto by měl být studentům k dispozici univerzitní konzultant, který by je instruoval a pomáhal se studijní agendou.

Do budoucna je zřejmé, že jakákoliv změna bude vyžadovat hlubší zkoumání, než jaké bylo možné realizovat v rámci této práce. Přesto doufám, že diplomová práce bude podnětem pro detailnější výzkum,

který by pomohl zajistit dostatečnou kvalitu dálkové vzdělávání na JČU. Z pohledu čerstvého absolventa učitelství pro mne výuka angličtiny v distančních programech představovala cennou profesní zkušenost. Skutečnosti, že jsem měla příležitost zabývat se vysoce podnětnými situacemi, si proto velice vážím. Doufám také, že moje profesní snaha motivovala mé studenty k další distančnímu studiu anglického jazyka.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ROZŘAZOVACÍ TEST/PLACEMENT TEST

1. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Já jsem tady"

- I here
- I is here
- I am here

2. Množné číslo od slova "day" je:

- Days
- Dai
- Dais

3. Jak zní v angličtině otázka "Kolik stojí slovník?"

- How many money cost the dictionary?
- How much money is the dictionary?
- How much is the dictionary?

4. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Bob je v práci"

- Bob is in job
- Bob is at work
- Bob is at job

5. Opakem "He speaks French" je:

- He no speaks French
- He doesn't speak French
- He don't speaks French

6. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta:

"Často se dívám na televizi"

- I always watch TV
- I often watch TV
- Sometimes I watch TV

7. Co je správně:

- on Friday
- at Friday
- in Friday

8. Jak zní v angličtině věta: "Mohu jít s tebou."

- I can to go with you
- I go can with you
- I can go with you

9. Co je správně?

- We were in London
- We was in London
- We were be in London

10. Jaký je minulý tvar slovesa "stop"?

- Stopd
- Stoped
- Stopped

11. Jak zní v angličtině otázka "Kam jsi šel?"

- Where did you go?
- Where you went?
- Where did you went?

12. Doplňte větu "I was on the internet ..."

- two hours
- for two hours
- until two hours

13. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Byla jsem tu před deseti lety"

- I was here before 10 years
- I was here 10 years ago
- I was here 10 years efore

14. Co je správně?

- Do they have any car?
- Do they have some car?
- Do they have car?

15. "I'd like to have some coffee" je totéž, jako

- I did like to have some coffee
- I could like to have some coffee
- I would like to have some coffee

16. Na množství mléka se zeptáte:

- how much milk
- how many milk
- which milk

17. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Tom je starší než Bob"

- Tom is older than Bob
- Tom is the oldest Bob
- Tom is the older than Bob

- Právě odešel
- Už odešel

18. Jestliže vidíte, že Lara právě běží, použijete tvar:

- she runs
- she's ran
- she's running

19. Jak zní v angličtině otázka "S kým mluvíš?"

- Who do you talking to?
- Who are you talking to?
- With who you are talking?

20. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "To je její"

- It's hers
- It's heres
- It's her thing

21. Které vyjádření má stejný význam jako "She can swim well"

- She's well swimming
- She does fine swimming
- She's good at swimming

22. Doplňte správný konec věty "We can hear you..."

- Easily
- Easiest
- Easy

23. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Nebyla nikdy vdaná"

- She was never married
- She has never been married
- She haven't been married

24. Věta "He's just left" znamená:

- Ještě neodešel

25. Máte-li v plánu koupit si auto, řeknete:

- I'll buy a car
- I'd like to buy a car
- I'm going to buy a car

26. Co je správně?

- I like to playing bowling
- I like playing bowling
- I like play bowling

27. Nabídka pomoci zní takto:

- I'll help you
- I helped you
- I'll helping you

28. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Jsem velký jako ty"

- I'm tall like you
- I'm as you tall
- I'm as tall as you

29. Vyberte podobné vyjádření k "They must hurry":

- They have to hurry
- They might hurry
- They should hurry

30. Jak zní v angličtině tato věta: "Zavolám, až skončím"

- I'll call after I finish
- I call after I'll finish
- I'll call after I'll finish

APPENDIX B

End-of –Winter-Tem TEST AMSK1/SAJK1

2009/2010

NAME: _____

1. Write the correct greetings:

Coming:

Leaving:

8:00 _____

11:00 _____

16:00 _____

22:00 _____

2. Put in the correct order:

Oh, I am fine, thanks. How are your wife and children?

See you!

Hello John, how are you?

OK, see you later!

They are fine, thank you.

Fine, thank you, fine. And how are you?

Hello Peter!

3. Translate:

Jsem Čech/Češka. _____

Jsme v Plzni. _____

Chuck a Ted jsou moje děti. _____

Jejich dům je velký. _____

Jmenuje se Giorgio. _____

(On) je Ital. _____

(Oni) nejsou v Německu. _____

Tvůj přítel je Američan. _____

Vaše taška není těžká. _____

(Ona) je z Prahy. _____

APPENDIX C

DOTAZNÍK MŠ

- 1. Zajišťuje vaše mateřská škola výuku některého cizího jazyka?**
- 2. Projevují rodiče zájem o výuku angličtiny pro děti?**
- 3. Pokud vyučujete v mateřské škole angličtinu, jakou má učitel(ka) kvalifikaci k výuce jazyka?**
- 4. Požadujete od uchazečů o práci učitele/učitelky ve vaší mateřské škole znalost angličtiny? Pokud ano, na jaké úrovni?**
- 5. Pokud vyučujete v mateřské škole angličtinu, jakým tématům se ve výuce věnujete?**

ZŠ Dolní Bukovsko

1. Ano, Aj dohodou o práci.
2. Ano, 40%
3. Pro 2. stupeň ZŠ
4. Ne.
5. Nevyučuji.

MŠ Dubné

1. Ano – anglický jazyk.
2. Ano.
3. Vyučuje učitelka s aprobací Aj pro základní školy.
4. Ne.
5. základní témata

MŠ Kamenný Újezd

1. -
2. Ojediněle
3. -
4. Ne.
5. -

MŠ Sedmikráska, České Budějovice

1. Ano.
2. Ano- velmi.
3. Osvědčení o absolvování dvouletého studia učitelek MŠ výuky anglického jazyka, osvědčení o absolvování ročního studia „Konverzace v anglickém jazyce pro učitelky MŠ“-postupné zvyšování náročnosti v době 4 let. Využívám nabídek Oxford University, pobočka Praha, Britského centra v Českých Budějovicích – k absolvování seminářů zaměřených na výuku AJ u předškol. dětí, Dále se systematicky vzdělávám soukromě – po dobu 10 let – minimálně 1-2x týdně- jazykové školy, soukromé kurzy. Snaha –složení jazykových zkoušek.
4. Ne.
5. Tematický plán celoročně s názvem NAŠE VESELÁ ANGLIČTINA, který je sice variabilní, ale obsahuje témata – jako: BARVY, ČÍSLOVKY, POTRAVINY, ČÁSTI LIDSKÉHO TĚLA, RODINA, POČASÍ, ZVÍŘATA, ROSTLINY, DOPRAVA...a to nejen holá slovní zásoba, ale ve snaze o co největší zábavu a zaujetí dětí – písně, básně, dramatické hry, obraty v konverzačních větách, komunikace mezi dětmi...provokování radosti z učení, základ pro celoživotní vzdělávání.

MŠ Karla Štěcha, České Budějovice

1. Ano.
2. Ano.
3. Kurz AJ pro učitelky MŠ (64 hod), Kurz konverzace v AJ (60 hod), Konverzace v AJ pro mírně pokročilé (60 hod), chystá se na seminář První krůčky s angličtinou (6 hod).
4. Ne.
5. Barvy, číselná řada 1-10, rodina, jídlo, ovoce, zelenina, zvířata domácí i exotická, roční období, oblečení, doprava, tělo, činnosti – slovesa, Vánoce, slavnosti, pozdravy.

MŠ Barborka, České Budějovice

1. Ano, angličtinu.
2. Ano, u nás učíme děti od 4 let.
3. Státnici, pedagogické minimum a zkušenosti s výukou dětí od 3 let.
4. Ne, nepožadujeme.
5. Témata jsou různá. Učíme děti angličtinu hrou. Učitelka na ně mluví pouze anglicky. Učí se: barvy počítat, části těla, zvířata, prostě základy.