

**Mixed evaluation of the zero year of preparatory studies
for academic Czech in psychology**

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Introduction. The zero year is one of the proven mechanisms in the Czech university environment for preparing foreign applicants for study in Czech in fields with high demands on professional communication. Psychology requires at least a B2 level according to the CEFR and up to C1 in selected programs, while at the same time careful work with terminology and ethics of communication [1; 8]. The framing of goals and evaluation is based on the CEFR and the Companion Volume [1]. The described cohort lacked functional Czech and English and shared a single mediating language that could only be used as a temporary didactic support. This initial situation required the adaptation of the preparation models, the reduction of dependence on the third language and the design of a bridge to the Czech language with a controlled reduction of interference phenomena.

Context and participants. The program takes place at a branch of the University of Social Sciences and Security in Prague and is aimed at applicants for single-subject psychology. The curriculum combines intensive language preparation with content modules in general and clinical psychology, methodology and ethics of communication, with academic skills and with communication simulations with OSCE elements [2; 3; 4; 5]. The cohort consists of twenty-six applicants aged approximately twenty-two to twenty-five years, without functional knowledge of Czech and English. The shared intermediate language is used only in the early stages and is being replaced by Czech. The objectives after ten to twelve months include functional academic Czech at the A2 B1 level as an intermediate step to B2, mastering the core terminology, the basics of professional writing and presentation,

and communication competencies for educational and para-clinical situations verified by rubrics.

Objectives and research questions.

The main goal remains to verify whether the one-year zero year will ensure that the described cohort achieves functional academic Czech and the basics of professional communication for entry into regular studies [1; 8]. The research questions follow the measurable linguistic shift in CEFR, the growth of the scope and accuracy of terminology, changes in communicative competencies in simulations with OSCE elements, and the perception of learning adaptation [1; 4; 5]. The sub-questions map the benefits of curriculum phasing, CLIL, formative assessment, simulations and tutoring support [2; 3; 7].

Intervention design. Curriculum phasing forms the backbone of the program. Phase I in weeks one to eight is aimed at the rapid acquisition of basic Czech in A2, with a high input, controlled repetition and visual and situational support. Phase II in weeks nine to twenty-four strengthens the content of language integration and introduces CLIL modules in psychology, methodology and ethics of communication, mediating strategies are limited to brief explanations [2; 3]. Phase III in weeks twenty-five to forty transitions to the predominance of Czech in input and outputs, with academic writing, presentations and standardized interview simulations, with two-week cycles of formative feedback and microcorrection plans [7]. Phase IV at weeks forty-one to forty-eight adds short internships and shadowing, with OSCE-inspired scenarios focused on interview structure, terminological accuracy, pragmatics, and ethical adequacy [4; 5]. The weekly subsidy includes a minimum of twenty hours of Czech and six to eight hours of content modules and skills seminars, with structured breaks and alternating receptive and production activities to manage cognitive load [7]. Multimodal supports include graphic organizers, concept maps, glossaries and guided reading, peer learning, tutoring and study coaching support pace and mental hygiene. The versatile design for learning provides multiple forms of

input and output. Ethics and security rules regulate anonymization, confidentiality and the possibility of interrupting the simulation with debriefing.

Assessment methodology. The evaluation takes place in a pre-mid post design with time points T0, T1 and T2 tied to Phases I to III. The quantitative part uses tasks linked to the CEFR in the domains of listening, reading and grammatical lexical competence [1], terminology test and simulations with OSCE elements evaluated by a single rubric in five dimensions with an aggregate score [4; 5]. A double rater ensures inter rater reliability, compliance is verified by ICC and kappa. The analysis uses pair comparisons and linear mixed models, results are reported with ninety-five percent confidence intervals and effect magnitudes. The qualitative part includes semi-structured phased interviews, a final focus group and reflective portfolios, with thematic analysis and dual coding. Ethical and data aspects cover informed consent, pseudonymisation, storage of data on an encrypted server in the EU and rules for working with audiovisual recordings.

Results. The linguistic trajectory confirms phased growth. The entry level corresponded to A0 and A1. The mid-term measurement confirmed the achievement of A2 for the entire cohort. Final measurements after ten to twelve months documented B2 to C1 in ninety-six percent of participants, with homogenization of performance and no ceiling effect [1]. The average listening score rose from zero to about sixty-eight full five-tenths of a percent in T1 and to about eighty-nine full five-tenths of a percent in T2, with narrow confidence intervals and high effect sizes. A similar trend was shown by reading and grammatical lexical competence. The terminology test proved the expansion of the vocabulary, the biggest errors initially consisted of polysemic and conceptually close terms, but the end of the year showed their noticeable reduction. Communication simulations with OSCE elements confirmed the growth of aggregate scores across dimensions, the strongest contributions to the overall change were made by the structure of the conversation and terminological accuracy, pragmatic indicators and active listening grew smoothly and steadily [4; 5].

Discussion. The set of findings suggests that the combination of a phased curriculum, content-language integration and guided practice forms a stable backbone of effective intervention [2; 3]. Phasing made it possible to escalate demands without a jump in cognitive load, which corresponds to the principles of cognitive load management and the recommendation of short blocks with structured pauses [7]. The integration of CLIL has translated the growth of language competence into an understanding of subject concepts, which has translated into more accurate terminology and the ability to conceptually summarize [2; 3]. Regular formative feedback accelerated the correction of errors in pronunciation, links, and pragmatics. An important role was played by the early and explicit restriction of the intermediate language, which supported the transition to thinking in Czech. The transfer to real situations was strengthened by short internships and shadowing. Braking factors include high-intensity fatigue and persistence of interference errors at close terms. Implementation recommendations include a fixed milestone for the transition to full Czech at the interface of Phase II and Phase III, a two-week cycle of formative assessment, targeted micro-interventions in pronunciation and pragmatics, and scheduling with regard to cognitive renewal [1; 7; 8].

Limitations and Implications. A sample size of twenty-six reduces the statistical power and accuracy of the intervals. The absence of a control group limits causal interpretation, although triangulation across metrics and phase-linked measurement points strengthen internal validity [6]. The contextual specificity of the field and the population limits generalization beyond preparation for psychology. For future runs, it seems appropriate to expand the sample, consider a quasi-experiment with a comparison group and include follow-up in the first year of follow-up studies to verify the sustainability of the effects [6; 8].

Conclusion. Year Zero offers a transferable framework that combines a phased curriculum, CLIL and simulations with OSCE elements with two-week cycles of formative assessment [2; 3; 4; 5; 7]. Preliminary results show rapid and statistically significant growth in CEFR-linked metrics, expansion and refinement of terminology,

and improvement of communication performance in model situations [1; 4; 5]. The strongest mechanisms are precise phasing, multimodal supports and controlled restriction of the intermediate language. The next step is to follow the same cohort in the first year of follow-up studies in a longitudinal way, in order to verify the sustainability of language and communication gains and to adjust the timing of milestones and the scope of practices [6; 8].

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