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THE DEFINITION OF SELECTED LANGUAGE CERTIFICATES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING GENERAL ENGLISH AS PART OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSE AT UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Streszczenie: w referacie zamierzamy przedstawić podstawowe założenia wybranych systemów certyfikacyjnych: FCE, CAE, CPE, TOEFL, IELTS oraz TELC wyselekcjonowanych jako najbardziej dopasowane do potrzeb i wymogów lektoratów języków obcych na wyższych uczelniach. Pokróćce chciałobyśmy przedstawić ich strukturę, zasugerować materiał dydaktyczny, obowiązkowy i alternatywny odpowiadający wymogom CEF, jak również szczegółowo zaprezentować certyfikat, który wydaje się najbardziej odpowiadać potrzebom studentów uczących się języków obcych w ramach lektoratów na wyższych uczelniach. W końcowej części referatu chciałobyśmy zaprezentować i przybliżyć system nauczania języka i oceniania postępów według European Language Licence Quality Alliance.

1. DEFINITION OF SELECTED LANGUAGE CERTIFICATES

Living in a community integrating in the name of globalization, people of different nations and different cultural background are bound to communicate, contact, understand, and socialize with each other. Representatives of different nations are in a strong need to learn foreign languages, in accordance with clear and common procedures grouped within one system of language competence assessment and certification. At the universities and in colleges students learn foreign languages, most commonly, English, trying to achieve the highest level of competence. The period of obligatory language course in colleges or at the universities, utilized in an appropriate way, may become a chance for them to reach appropriate level of language competence, and as a result: read and listen with ease, more or less effortlessly participate in discussion, or describe different phenomena around, and at the same time reach the foreign language certificate, enabling them to undertake work in an international environment. In this paper we would like to review and briefly present the structure and main assumptions of “key” English Language Certificate systems recognizable in European academic environment, and most favorable among students at Polish universities and colleges.

1.1. FCE (First Certificate in English)

FCE is an intermediate level Cambridge ESOL exam, at level B2 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. FCE is ideal to work or study abroad or to develop a career which requires language skills. It is often defined as “sophisticated” as well as the other ESOL exams, and in order to pass it, candidate should take a course much longer than the foreign language courses offered in colleges. FCE

indicates sufficient proficiency in English to be of practical use. In fact the certificate itself checks thoroughly candidate's knowledge of theoretically only in use, complex, often miscellaneous and not updated grammar-lexical constructions. FCE has five papers: reading, writing, use of English, listening, and speaking. The Speaking Test is conducted by two locally based examiners, accredited by Cambridge ESOL. **Reading (Paper 1)** takes 1 hour 15 minutes. In this paper candidate is expected to be able to show understanding of gist, detail and text structure, and deduce meaning. **Writing (Paper 2)** takes 1 hour 30 minutes. This paper assesses candidate's ability to write non-specialized text types such as letters, articles, reports, compositions and reviews (120-180 words) covering a range of topics and target readers and also set texts. **Use of English (Paper 3)** takes 1 hour 15 minutes. This paper includes exercises like: filling gaps, transforming words and phrases, and identifying errors in texts. **Listening (Paper 4)** takes 40 minutes (approx.) and this paper assesses candidate's ability to extract gist and meaning from spoken text. The texts are usually: interviews, discussions, lectures and conversations. **Speaking (Paper 5)** takes 15 minutes and assesses candidate's ability to interact in conversational English in a range of contexts: an interview section, individual section of about one minute, a discussion. There is stimulus material included e.g.: photographs and drawings. There are two candidates assessed at the same time. Each component carries 20% of the total marks. There are three pass grades (A, B and C) and certificates are awarded to candidates who achieve these grades. Exam scripts are sent to Cambridge ESOL for marking and grading and the results are sent back to the centers.

1.2. CAE (Certificate in Advanced English)

CAE is the second highest level Cambridge ESOL exam, at level C1 of CEF. The exams are based on realistic tasks. Similarly to FCE there are 5 papers to be completed by the candidate during the exam: **reading (Paper 1)** takes 1 hour 15 minutes. This paper assesses candidate's ability of understanding gist, main points, detail, text structure or specific information. **Writing (Paper 2)** takes 2 hours and assesses candidate's ability to write non-specialized text types such as letters, articles, reports and reviews for a given purpose and target reader (about 250 words). **English in Use (Paper 3)** takes 1 hour 30 minutes. In this paper, knowledge and control of the language system is assessed by completing various tasks at text and sentence level, based on authentic text: gap-filling, error correction, word formation, and register transfer and text completion exercises. **Listening (Paper 4)** takes 45 minutes. It checks candidate's ability to extract detailed and specific information from the spoken text and to understand speakers' attitudes and opinions like: interviews, discussions, lectures and conversations. **Speaking (Paper 5)** takes 15 minutes and contains four parts, including an interview section, individual long turns, a collaborative task and a discussion. There are stimulus materials such as photographs and drawings. It is conducted in pairs.

1.3. CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English)

CPE is the highest level Cambridge ESOL exam, at level C2 of CEF. Candidate is able to communicate effectively in almost any English-speaking context and similarly to an educated native speaker. As previously described types of ESOL exams, CPE also consists of 5 stages. **Reading (Paper 1)** takes 1 hour 30 minutes and assesses candidate's ability to read and understand texts like: fiction and non-fiction books, journals, newspapers and magazines. **Writing (Paper 2)** takes 2 hours and checks if candidate can write non-specialized text types such as letters, articles, reports and reviews for a given purpose, including questions on set texts (300-350 words). **Use of English (Paper 3)** takes 1 hour 30 minutes. In this section candidate completes tasks like: gap-filling, word formation exercises, comprehension

questions and a summary writing task. **Listening (Paper 4)** takes 40 minutes and in this part candidate listens to interviews, discussions, lectures or conversations. It tests the ability to extract information from a spoken text and to understand speakers' attitudes and opinions. Speaking (Paper 5) takes 19 minutes. **The Speaking Test** assesses candidate's ability to interact in conversational English in a range of contexts. This paper contains three parts: an interview section, a collaborative task and individual long turns with follow-up discussion. Candidate is provided with picture and written stimulus, also taken in pairs.

1.4. TOEFL

The **Test of English as a Foreign Language** evaluates candidate's ability to use and understand Standard American English at a college level. TOEFL only concerns North American English.. It is required for non-native applicants at many English-speaking colleges and universities. A TOEFL score is valid for two years, after it is deleted from the official database. The TOEFL is administered Educational Testing Service (ETS). There are three types of the exam: **Internet-based, paper-based and computer-based**. Since its introduction in late 2005, the Internet-based test (iBT) has progressively replaced both CBT and PBT tests. The iBT has been introduced worldwide in 2006, together with test centers. There are four sections in the exam: **reading-** usually academic reading passage (out of 3–5), and questions of different types under the text: paraphrasing, filling out tables, or completing summaries. In listening part there are questions which refer to the content and intent of the phrases, as well as to the speakers' attitude and meaning. **Speaking**. This section contains questions relating to personal experiences or preferences, as well as tasks that also involve reading passages and listening to short conversations and lectures. Candidate need to convey information, explain ideas, and defend opinions clearly, coherently, and accurately. **Writing**. In this part of the exam the candidate's first task is to defend a position relative to a specified general topic. The other task is a reading passage and a lecture, and candidate must answer a question relating the main points of both the passage and the lecture.

Computer-based. The computer-based test (CBT) was abolished on September 30, 2006. It is divided into four sections: Listening (45-70 min) : these are short conversations between two or more people in academic environments. Questions are mainly of the *who said what* type: Structure (grammar) (15–20 minutes). Candidate identifies the erroneous word(s) in the sentence, and also fills in the blanks using the appropriate word. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary (70-90 minutes). In this part of the test there are 3–4 passages, followed by questions about their content, intent of the author, and ideas presented. Essay Writing (30 minutes). In this part of the test candidate needs to write an essay on a given general topic and take a position toward it, e.g., "Is stem cell research necessary? Explain your stance.". The Listening and Structure sections are computer-adaptive, meaning that the difficulty level of each question depends on the correctness of previous responses.

Paper-based. Where the iBT and CBT are not available, a paper-based test (PBT) is given. The PBT tests' structure is the same as the CBT, the difference is only in higher number of questions and the score scales.

TOEFL, like many standardized tests, has come under increasing scrutiny as a measure of the ability to use English effectively. Until recently, TOEFL did not test the ability to speak English, so learners may neglect this part of their education. The TOEFL iBT has a part focused on assessing speaking skills of candidates but candidates complain about the TOEFL iBT speaking part, mainly because of the high noise level during the speaking section: everyone is responding orally to six questions at the same time.

1.5. IELTS

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a test of English language proficiency. It is jointly managed by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, British Council and IDP Education Australia. Candidates may choose either the Academic Module or the General Training Module: The Academic Module is for candidates who wish to enroll in universities. The General Training Module is intended for candidates in non-academic training gaining work experience, or for immigration purposes. IELTS is accepted Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa by most of academic and professional institutions. The test focuses on "International English", which includes British English, American English and other varieties. IELTS tests the ability to speak, read, listen and write in English. IELTS is scored on a nine band scale. The Band Scores are in either whole or half Bands. The nine bands are from: 9- Expert User to 1- Non User with essentially no ability to use the language.

2. SUGGESTED LITERATURE AND SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

2.1. Oxford University Press

Landmark

3 levels: Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate, and Advanced

An intelligent course that takes students seriously.

New English File Elementary

Elementary

The Elementary course book that gets students talking, and that helps teachers and students more than any other.

New Headway Beginner-Advanced

Completing the New Headway English Course, a completely new edition from beginner to advanced level to challenge and stimulate learners.

Proficiency Masterclass, New Edition

Advanced (CPE)

updated edition of course for the revised Cambridge Proficiency exam.

Towards Proficiency

Advanced (CPE)

A course which bridging the gap between FCE level CPE.

2.2. Cambridge University Press

Cambridge First Certificate in English CD-ROM Second edition plus tests

CD-ROM with a set of exam papers.

Cambridge First Certificate Listening and Speaking WRITING

Creative skills training and preparation for FCE Papers 4 and 5.

New Progress to First Certificate

Updated to conform to the revised FCE specifications.

Voices Video

Resource for the classroom relevant to students' needs.

CAE Listening and Speaking, reading, listening Skills

Practices the skills relevant to CAE Papers 4 and 5.

Common Mistakes at CAE... and how to avoid them

Real mistakes students make in the exam and how to avoid them.

Common Mistakes at Proficiency ... and how to avoid them

Mistakes students make in the exam and how to avoid them.

New Progress to Proficiency

Fresh and lively approach while preparing to 4 stages of the exam.

Cambridge Grammar for IELTS

Grammar reference and practice for the IELTS test.

Insight into IELTS

Insight into IELTS prepares candidates for IELTS and is arranged by paper.

Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL® Test, Fourth edition

A new edition designed to prepare students for the TOEFL® iBT test, administered online only.

2.3. Pearson&Longman

First Certificate Gold

Available for PET, pre-FCE, FCE, CAE and CPE exam preparation, various exercise types, updated topics.

Advanced Gold

Enjoyable lessons. Mainly for adult and young adult students, mixture of engaging activities and exercises with a thorough exam syllabus.

Proficiency Gold (for the revised CPE Exam)

Enjoyable course mainly for adults and young adult learners. A stimulating language syllabus with thorough exam practice and technique, suggested for mixed classes.

Longman Complete Course for the TOEFL® Test

Set of skill-building exercises for advanced learners, multimedia course helps students prepare for both versions of the TOEFL® Test. A perfect supplement to general course,

Longman Introductory Course for the TOEFL® Test all versions

Comprehensive course for *intermediate* students with all TOEFL skills, strategies, practice, and confidence, including the Test of Written English (TWE)

3. EUROPEAN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE LICENCE QUALITY ALLIANCE

The CEF provides criteria for learning, teaching and assessment which make it possible to compare language proficiency. It offers valuable advice and creates clear way of structuring of language teaching. The concrete structure, such as course planning, goal descriptors, etc., remains the responsibility of those involved in the language teaching.

There are six levels of language proficiency for learners in EU. Three main proficiency levels are sub-divided in two-competency grades



Pict. 1 Levels of language proficiency for learners in EU in accordance with CEF

For the ELCL Quality Alliance CEF is not only a recommendation, but a basis, and

a standard of quality to be achieved. Membership of the ELCL Quality Alliance stands for high quality of foreign language teaching, and may be an enhancement for the learner.

3.1. Background and The Alliance

The grading scales and approaches and methods of teaching foreign languages vary from educational institution to educational institution and from country to country. The ELCL Quality Alliance is defined as an international quality interest group with representatives in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Poland, Hungary and Italy. These countries refer in their activity to CEF, as standards of quality of language teaching.

3.2. The ELCL Quality Alliance

The ELCL addresses private and state-run educational institutions, as also foreign language teachers, who are able to join Alliance through membership.

ELCL Quality Alliance Membership seems an equivalent of pedagogical approach in foreign language teaching in adherence with CEF and Council of Europe recommendations. This membership is also an access to different services.

All members declare to adhere strictly to the recommendations of the CEF in: methods of teaching, language programmes and assessment. National Representatives already exist in many countries.

3.3. Services

-Bronze Membership

Membership is free of charge and includes listing on the ELCL Quality Alliance membership database.

-structure of language training programme is in accordance CEF recommendations

-Silver Membership

The use of the protected ELCL Quality Alliance logo (stamp/seal) and listing with a detailed profile, in the ELCL Quality Alliance homepages is allowed as well as:

-upgrading of individual certificates.

- publishing on individual websites, brochures, displays, etc.

-Gold Membership

The right to use the ELCL Quality Alliance certificate layout at no extra charge (global recognition).

-copies of certificates available for every foreign language programme,

-security code ascertaining authenticity.

3.4. Monitoring

The national representative monitors the implementation of the CEF recommendations. Members of the ELCL Quality Alliance undergo regular random checks to ensure that the CEF recommendations are adhered to.

Monitoring is process-oriented. Checks (executed every 6 months) examine if:

- programmes have been adhered to,

- language entry tests have been based on the CEF recommendations,

- candidates have been informed about the CEF recommendations in detail

- teachers have fulfilled the minimum requirement

- examination standards

4. “THE STUDENT-FRIENDLY ENGLISH LANGUAGE CERTIFICATE “

4.1. TELC

In 2001, Europe published the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which defines standards of learning, teaching and evaluation of the language competence in the European context. TELC is a system of examinations created for the purposes and in particular accordance with it. There are 6 levels of testing general English available: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, (in Poland excluding C1, C2). For many Academic Centers TELC is a rational solution of a certificate which is regarded as “CEF-oriented”, and relevant to it in every aspect from literature to assessment. This is commonly stressed that TELC is also “student-friendly” thanks to assessing candidates’ knowledge of practical language structures commonly in use instead of sophisticated, rarely used phrases and grammar elements. TELC is internationally known and highly regarded as a proof of language competence for citizenship applications, as well as school-leaving language qualifications, it is carried out in state schools, and recognized by the Ministry of Education. B1 and B2 levels are also recognized as an entry requirement for civil service. TELC is commonly carried out by a number of universities, and is statistically said to be the most commonly selected by students in short period of time.

4.1.1. English A2

TELC exams are directed to all those who need a proof of competence in foreign language field, adjusted to the requirements of CEF. Candidate can pass A2 after about 150-200 full hours of learning which equals from 2 to 4 semesters of foreign language course in college. The written examination has similar structure as B1 although the tasks differ slightly. The oral test consists of three sub-tests: getting to know each other, exchanging information, and consensus finding.

4.1.2 English B1

This exam is needed by candidates who have already reached A2 level according the CEF, and want to use English language for work, education, or for personal needs. In order to reach B1 English level you need about 300 full hours (aprox. 4 semesters in WSB). This number is approximate and depends on many other factors, because the level measures the acquired knowledge, not the time of learning.

-Written Examination:

Test 1: Reading Comprehension

Part 1: Reading for Gist For five newspaper articles headlines have to be chosen (out of 10).

Part 2: Reading for Detail five multiple-choice questions on one or two authentic newspaper or magazine articles of 350-400 words.

Part 3: Selective Reading. The candidate finds the most suitable small advertisement for each of 10 situations (out of 12).

Test 2: Language Elements

Part 1: A letter, fax or e-mail with 10 gaps has to be completed with the help of multiple-choice questions on grammar and vocabulary.

Part 2: Again in a letter, fax or e-mail 10 gaps have to be filled, this time with the help of a multiple matching box which has five more words than needed.

Test 3: Listening Comprehension

Part 1: Listening for Gist

This listening comprehension test requires the candidate to decide whether a statement is correct or not e.g.

Part 2: Listening for Detail: This part tests the detailed understanding of what people say (usually the recording is a conversation, an interview etc.). There are ten statements which have to be verified. (5 to 6 min.). It is played twice.

Part 3: Selective Listening: In five brief listening situations which may occur in everyday routine activities, candidates select particular information. The recordings are played twice.

Test 4: Letter Writing

In this part of the examination candidates are given 30 minutes to write a letter to friends, acquaintances or to a business address (mail order company, hotel, voluntary organization etc.) following up a piece of information. Marks are given for the treatment of four guiding points, the communicative design of the letter and language correctness.

-Oral Examination

Test 5: The Oral Examination is with two candidates at a time. The candidates are required to carry out language tasks together and thus prove that "they can handle a certain range of language patterns ("scenarios") competently".

Part 1: Social contacts:

In the first part the candidates ask each other about where they live, work, study as well as about their families hobbies etc. An additional topic may be brought in by one examiner

Part 2: Topic-based conversation: The task sheet includes stimulus material. Candidates hold a conversation on the topic, exchanging info and giving their opinions.

Part 3: Task: Here candidates negotiate ideas in order to draw a conclusion and solve a particular task e.g. arranging a party, an excursion.

The structure of TELC was created exactly in accordance with CEF assumptions, considered by authorities to be very clear and coherent. Thus at the end of our presentation we would like to stress that the strongest and most attractive feature of TELC exams, drawing students' attention and convincing them to choose this system of certification, is clear and understandable structure of TELC, analogical to its source: CEF, including way of assessment together with standardized marking criteria applied in an objective way. Students are able to reach foreign language certificate level in accordance with the requirements of CEF, after 2 to 4 semesters of language course in college without the necessity of acquiring sophisticated language structures, in friendly and motivating academic atmosphere, in accordance with the new concepts of European Community integration assumptions, where certificate of foreign language knowledge is simply a tool for communication and cooperation.

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Summary. The main assumption of this paper is to present briefly the structure and main ideas of selected language certificate systems: FCE, CAE, CPE, TOEFL, IELTS, and TELC particularly popular in the academic environment in Poland. In this paper we would like to present the variety of suitable literature and supplementary material, useful in the process of preparing students to these exams. We would like to select one of them, as the most suitable, convenient, useful, and “friendly” exam for students to take. In this paper, we would also like to present the new system of learning and assessing students knowledge of foreign language (European Language Licence Quality Alliance) in accordance with CEF requirements, preparing, students directly and effectively for the chosen certificate.