

# English Language Certification in the Recruitment Processes of the Republic of North Macedonia

Maja Pavlovska<sup>1</sup>, Ivana Trajanoska<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>XDT Marketing, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

<sup>2</sup>School of Foreign Languages, University American College Skopje, North Macedonia

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## ABSTRACT

The English language plays a crucial role in the business world and considerably influences employment opportunities and job positions. The capacity to effectively use the English language is required to become and remain employable. This is especially true for a small economy like the Macedonian one. Thus, the aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of the role of English language certification in the recruitment processes in the R.N. Macedonia. Our research objectives are to examine the practices of Macedonian recruitment agencies with regard to the assessment of knowledge of the English language of candidates in the recruitment process. The research conducted is based on the qualitative method and provides a qualitative descriptive analysis of primary and secondary data such as relevant laws and bylaws regarding employment and career advancement in the public sector, namely public administration in Macedonia, with regard to the eligibility criteria for employment and promotion in the public sector in reference to the knowledge of the English language. The primary sources that enable us to provide answers to the main research questions regarding the role of international certification in the English language in the recruitment process in Macedonia and the practices of the recruitment agencies in the Macedonia with regard to English language testing and verification of the knowledge of the English language of candidates, are the data gathered through a survey conducted with recruiters from four recruitment agencies from the country. The gathered data indicate that formal international language certification plays a crucial role and is indispensable for employment and promotion in the public sector. However, in the private sector, the role of these certifications is considerably smaller and they are rarely required. Nevertheless, the knowledge of the English language is very important for acquiring employment in both the private and the public sector.

**KEYWORDS:** *English language, English language testing, international language certification, recruitment, R.N. Macedonia*

## INTRODUCTION

Recruitment is a complex process composed of several steps, even processes of their own, such as: identifying, attracting, interviewing, selecting, hiring, and onboarding employees. Recruitment actually involves a variety of activities from the identification of a staffing need to filling it. Depending on the size of the organization, a range of workers can be responsible for recruitment. Bigger organizations usually have entire teams of recruiters, while smaller organizations might only rely on a single recruiter. However, many organizations outsource recruiting to specialized agencies which deal with recruitment as their primary activity. Organizations can recruit candidates via traditional channels like advertisements. However, new digital channels have become more and more popular such as job boards and social media sites. In addition, organizations might use recruiting software that enables the more effective and efficient sourcing of top candidates. Regardless of the manner, recruitment is an indispensable part of Human Resources Management. Thus, HRM systems are considered crucial in the managing processes of the workforce in order to ensure that the right person is placed in the right job position (Malik and Ullah, 2013).

On the other hand, English is one of the most commonly used languages in the corporate world. The knowledge of the English language is very important for finding employment in today's globalized world. It is even more so when it comes to a small economy such as in North Macedonia. The ability to use the English language efficiently is required to become and remain employable which means having the relevant skills to remain competitive on the job market. Thus, the knowledge of the English language remains an important asset and even an indispensable skill for finding a job in R. N. Macedonia.

In R.N. Macedonia, recent statistics show that 42 per cent of employers are worried that they won't be able to find adequate talent for their open job positions. Moreover, 73 per cent of the unemployed people are passive job seekers, while top candidates stay available for approximately 10 days before they get hired (Josimovski, 2019). In the Republic of North Macedonia, 39 per cent of companies recruit through their websites, while 71 per cent of companies utilize online job boards. The most popular job boards are "vrabotuvanje.com.mk" with 94 per cent and "najdirabota.com.mk" with 86 per cent (Kiselichki, 2016, cited in Josimovski, 2019).

By reviewing the available research regarding the recruitment processes in R. N. Macedonia, we noticed that the role of the English language in the recruitment process has not been included. Valuable data on the recruitment practices in R.N. Macedonia can be found in the works of several researchers such as Miloshevijk, Josimovski, and Kiselichki. However, scant data can be found on the role of the English language in the recruitment processes in the country. In Miloshevijk et al. (2020) research on recruitment and selection methods in SMEs in the Republic of North Macedonia was conducted among SMEs in the Republic of North Macedonia to examine their most practiced recruitment and selection methods. The findings of the research revealed that SMEs were applying a variety of traditional recruitment and selection methods. However, Miloshevijk et al. (2020) concluded that SMEs in our country needed to develop a more comprehensive recruitment strategy and seek additional alternative recruitment channels. Furthermore, in the work of Josimovski et al. (2019), the SNWs' e-recruitment practices in R.N. Macedonia are being reviewed. According to Josimovski, corporate website recruiting is reserved for large enterprises, which comprise only 0,3 per cent of the total active business entities in the Republic of North Macedonia, thus this type of

recruitment is not the most common in the country. The other two channels for e-recruitment – online job boards and recruiting through SNWs (that is social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook) are more common and their research focuses on the advantages when recruiting through SNWs. The role of the English language in the process was not part of the research.

Therefore, the present research deals with the role of English language certification and testing in the recruitment processes in the R. N. Macedonia. The research objectives are to examine the requirements concerning the level of knowledge of the English language and whether international certification is indispensable for the candidate to prove that they know the language and get hired. We also aim to examine whether or not an international certification is necessary to get employment. Thus, primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed to achieve the research aim and objectives, to provide answers to the research questions, to draw conclusions, and provide recommendations.

Answers will be suggested for the following research questions:

Main research question: What is the role of English language testing in the recruitment process in R.N. Macedonia?

Auxiliary research questions: What is the role of international certification in the English language in the recruitment process in the R.N. Macedonia? What are the practices of the recruitment agencies in the R.N. Macedonia with regard to English language testing and verification of the knowledge of the English language of candidates?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research presented in this paper is based on the Master thesis titled *The Role of English Language Testing in the Recruitment Process in the R.N. Macedonia* prepared and defended by Maja Pavlovska. The research rests upon the qualitative research method and consists of two main parts:

a) Analysis of secondary data: the most relevant terms and concepts regarding the present thesis were outlined and explained. Moreover, the most relevant international certifications of the English language were outlined and described. In addition, a qualitative analysis of secondary data such as laws and bylaws was conducted to describe the eligibility criteria for employment and promotion regarding the knowledge of the English language primarily in the public sector. Previous, current and prospective draft versions of laws were analyzed and compared in order to be able to draw conclusions and predict future developments in terms of the role of the English language testing and certification in the country.

b) The second part is empirical research; In the empirical research, four recruitment officers from R.N. Macedonia were surveyed in order to gather data on the recruitment practices of Macedonian recruitment agencies with regard to the requirements for English language proficiency and assessment in the private sector. The empirical research is qualitative and relies on the descriptive method.

The recruitment officers were surveyed through the survey technique online questionnaire due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The gathered data were then analyzed and qualitatively and quantitatively presented, summarized, and discussed providing answers to the research questions.

## **English Language Testing**

Ancient China is considered to be the first nation to introduce standardized testing on a large scale. The main aim was to pick applicants for specific government employment and was known as the Imperial Examination created during the Sui Dynasty. Furthermore, from their introduction in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.) until they were abolished during Qing attempts at modernization in 1905, Imperial exams, or Keju, were an important part of Chinese government administration. In the 16th and 17th centuries, testing was introduced in Europe through newly established universities, and by the late 18th century, it had spread throughout the continent, particularly in France and Prussia. When the British establishment realized that they wanted to recruit people based on their abilities rather than patronage, testing became a bigger problem in the 19th century. The Oxford University Commission, which contributed to the implementation of exams in the educational system in 1850, and the Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1853) to Parliament followed the introduction of competitive examinations to the civil service in the United Kingdom.

Modern language testing starts in the early twentieth century, with significant developments on both sides of the Atlantic. The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate initiated the Cambridge Proficiency Test (CPE) in 1913 in the United Kingdom (UCLES). The exam assessed the language efficiency of colonial subjects seeking to join the British education system. In the three decades following the implementation of the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), the production of general proficiency examinations continued. What is nowadays known as language testing results from the constant, credible and unfailing efforts of scientists and experts to create an integrated system that measures the language ability of people. Spolsky (2000) in his article "Language Testing in the *Modern Language Journal*" presented a precise scan over the development of the language testing era in which language testing evolved significantly. A series of tests for university entrance in English, German, and Spanish was developed during the early years of the twentieth century, before the World War by the Association of Modern Language Teachers' committee, which placed a distinct emphasis on oral and ancient language tests. Later, Spolsky (2000) differentiates this growth in testing from three aspects. Firstly, he believes that the oral-aural test emphasized spoken language over written language. Secondly, he argues that, in terms of the test's workability, practicality has taken precedence over principle. Thirdly, tests have a higher level of objectivity and are more widely accepted in terms of standardization. The Committee on Resolutions and Investigations of the Association of Modern Language Teachers of the Middle States and Maryland founded in 1917 that, while the test was given adequate attention, it lacked a true oral test. Candidates who did not receive adequate oral and aural skills training struggled to pass the test (Fulcher, 2003). At the same time, circumstances on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean were different. Despite the undesirability and impracticality of testing speaking in the United Kingdom, Cambridge University testing center (UCLES) included a subtest to measure spoken English in the certificate of English proficiency when it was first adopted in 1913 (Roach, 1945). According to Brannen et al. (2014), scholars approach language issues in business from many different angles, so three facets feature most prominently: national languages spoken in multinational corporations (MNCs), officially mandated corporate languages, and English as the language of global business. It is important to use English in the workplace and it differs from general conversational English. In every work domain, there are special requirements related to communication.

The pre-employment testing has been linked to higher quality hiring of staff, greater workplace engagement, and lower employee turnover, however, it does not substitute regular recruitment, but only simplifies it. The pre-employment testing includes several categories such as personality questionnaires; culture fit assessments, cognitive ability assessments, job knowledge tests, soft or hard skills assessments, and situational judgment tests. In this Master's thesis, the focus is on the language test, which belongs to the category of hard skills assessments. The language tests evaluate the applicant's capacity to function in diverse situations in the target language and mainly they aim to assess the capacity of the structure, vocabulary, and grammar through the foundational skills that we previously mentioned. Today's international business scholars treat language as an issue at the heart of their subject area (Brannen et al., 2014). In foreign companies where international relations are getting more complex, it is a high priority for employees and applicants to become proficient in one or more foreign languages.

### *Overview of English language proficiency tests/international certifications*

The CEFR organizes language proficiency in six levels, A1 to C2. These six levels can be grouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User. The levels are defined through descriptors outlining what the foreign-language user can do. A1(Beginner) language proficiency is for workers who need to comprehend basic (personal) sentences when they speak slowly, or can even read simple words (such as inscriptions and posters).

A2 (Elementary English) level language proficiency is required for workers who need to know the fundamentals of orientation and personal details, as well as understand short and concise communications and announcements.

B1 (Intermediate English) language skills are for those employees who have to understand the essence of clear speech on familiar topics in the work environment or environment, and who need to understand everyday text in a letter or event description.

B2 (Upper-Intermediate) language skills are for employees who must attend a training or conference in which the materials are partially or completely in English, or those who need to write reports or analyzes in English.

C1 (Advanced English) level of English covers a full range of capabilities for social, academic and professional purposes.

C2 (Proficiency) level of English is equivalent to a native level. It enables any type of reading and writing on any subject, nuanced expression of emotions and opinions, and active participation in any academic or professional setting.

The majority of certifications in the English as a Foreign Language rely on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Further in this section we will review the most commonly required language certifications in the English language in the Republic of Macedonia as regulated with a series of laws. The acknowledged English Language Certifications in the R.N. Macedonia, required for employment and career advancement in the public sector, as stipulated across various laws and bylaws, are: the TOEFL iBT test - recommended validity 2 years, the British degrees in English according to the European Language Framework: Cambridge English International - KET, PET, FCE (lifelong), BULATS, IELTS - recommended validity 2 years, and the British Council's test, for internal use – Aptis (British Council, 2022).

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is considered as a high-stakes American standardized test in which the purpose is to assess nonnative English speakers' English skills. It is utilized for admissions reasons in more than 9,000 institutions in more than 130 countries, and it is largely used to assess overseas students' capacity to use English in academic settings. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) is in charge of administering the test. TOEFL was created at Stanford University's Center for Applied Linguistics under the guidance of Dr. Charles A. Ferguson, an applied linguistics professor. The Modern Language Association first conducted the TOEFL test in 1964, with funding from the Ford Foundation and the Danforth Foundation. Formalized paraphrase for the TOEFL evaluation two test formats are available and include the TOEFL iBT Test based on the Internet and the TOEFL PBT Test based on paper. The TOEFL test has undergone a number of modifications. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) began computerizing the traditional pen-and-paper tests in 1998. Reports at the time indicated that when students were computer literate, the differences were minimal, and as a result, the Computer Based TOEFL (CB TOEFL) (Netten, 2000; Banerjee & Clapham, 2003) was implemented and operational by 2001. As the test components became richer over time, an audiovisual repertoire was included as prompts in the test. The recent TOEFL includes useful reading, writing, listening, and speaking components, as well as a combination of them.

Cambridge Assessment English offers a series of certifications according to the CEFR. They are as follows: Pre-A1 Starters (YLE Starters), A1 Movers (YLE Movers), A2 Flyers (YLE Flyers), A2 Key for Schools (KET), B1 Preliminary for Schools (PET), B2 First for Schools (FCE), A2 Key (KET), B1 Preliminary (PET), B2 First (FCE), C1 Advanced (CAE), C2 Proficiency (CPE), B1 Business Preliminary (BEC Preliminary), B2 Business Vantage (BEC Vantage), and C1 Business Higher (BEC Higher). We will refer to the KET, PET, FCE, BEC, BULATS, and IELTS tests in English since they are required for employment in the public sector as prescribed by several Macedonian laws. Moreover, we will briefly outline the Cambridge Certifications ILEC (now canceled) and ICFE which are still mentioned in several laws and public institutions' bylaws.

The A2 Key (KET) - KET is formerly known as Cambridge English, nowadays A2 Key is one of the Cambridge English Qualifications. All-new English learners may find this entry-level qualification as a great point to start. An A2 Key for Schools qualification suggests that a scholar can use English to speak in easy situations. It's a logical subsequent step after our Cambridge English Qualifications designed for younger students and an awesome area for older kids to begin studying English too. The examination offers college students the self-assurance to move directly to having a look at higher-degree English exams, which include B1 Preliminary for Schools. A2 Key for Schools is focused on the equal CEFR degree as A2 Key, however with content material geared toward school-age rookies in preference to adults. An A2 Key for Schools qualification indicates that a student is capable of understanding and using basic phrases and expressions, simple written English, introducing themselves and answering basic questions about themselves, and interacting with English speakers at a basic level. One of the reasons for choosing A2 Key for Schools is that it helps students to achieve the language skills which are essential to succeed in study and work, at home or abroad.

B1 Preliminary (PET) - B1 Preliminary, formerly known as Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET), is one of the Cambridge English Qualifications, which is the English language exam that confirms that the basics of the language have been mastered and that practical language skills for everyday use have been gained. A B1 Preliminary qualification indicates that the learner is successful in studying easy textbooks and articles in English,

writing letters and emails on ordinary subjects, taking assembly notes, and displaying consciousness of critiques and temper in spoken and written English. Choosing B1 Preliminary will develop the learner's capacity to speak in English for sensible responsibilities and situations, gain a valuable qualification accepted worldwide and improve the learner's work, study, and travel prospects.

The B2 First (FCE) - One of the most popular exams among Cambridge English Qualifications is B2 First, formerly known as Cambridge English: First (FCE) adopted by thousands of businesses and educational organizations worldwide. A B2 First qualification validates the language skills required to live and work independently in an English-speaking country or to study on English-language courses. In addition, it also proves that the learner is able to communicate effectively in person, willing to express opinions and arguments, follow current affairs, write concise, detailed English, compose letters, reports, stories, and a variety of other forms of content. Some of the benefits of choosing B2 First are the learners accepted for undergraduate programs in non-English-speaking countries that are taught in English.

The B1 Business Preliminary (BEC Preliminary) - In order to gain the practical language skills, required to start doing business in English, in Cambridge English Qualifications the most suitable exam is B1 Business Preliminary, formerly known as Cambridge English: Business Preliminary (BEC Preliminary) A B1 Business Preliminary qualification shows companies the excellent command of the English language for practical, everyday business use. Cambridge English Qualifications have three tests for business. The first of these tests is the B1 Business Preliminary, which is aimed at a different level. Each exam's material is focused on regular work and business responsibilities, and it is created to help in improving business English skills. A B1 Business Preliminary certificate enables learners to discuss business subjects, master charts and graphs, write business emails and lead or follow short telephone conversations. The advantages of B1 Business Preliminary provide growth in business-related studies with English language skills, develop career opportunities, getting accepted by prominent worldwide corporations such as Procter & Gamble, HSBC, and AstraZeneca, as well as educational organizations and business schools around the world.

Business Language Testing Services (BULATS) - The Business Language Testing Services (BULATS) is a multilingual evaluation exam that covers English, Spanish, French, and German. It is a flexible online tool that assesses English language skills for business, industry and commerce. The aim of BULATS is to contribute to the development of a workforce that is confident in communicating in international business environments. The test is administered through our network of authorized BULATS agents around the world. The University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (now Cambridge English Language Assessment), the Universidad de Salamanca, the Alliance Française, and the Goethe Institut collaborated to establish it. BULATS is intended to determine candidates' ability to operate and interact in an international business environment. Companies, colleges, universities, and immigration programs all over the world use the exam to determine language abilities. This may be for a number of purposes, including language proficiency tests, recruiting, continuing professional development, or admission to business-related training and study programs. BULATS can provide an excellent snapshot of a company's workforce's Business English skills and level. The United Nations, Tesco, Hitachi, and Glaxo SmithKline are only a few of the companies that have used BULATS. The BULATS outcome of a nominee is permanent. Employers and agencies can, however, need an up-to-date score since an individual's English level can increase or decline over time. The modular nature of BULATS enables testing of all four language skills:

Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing. The test can be used in any combination for specific needs. There is no set amount of questions in the Reading and Listening module because it is an adaptive test. The algorithm gains a better understanding of the candidate's level with each question they answer. The test is completed when the candidate has correctly identified their level by answering all of the questions. The Speaking test is conducted using a microphone and a computer. Candidates must write answers on a computer keyboard in the Writing test. Answers are written down and given to examiners to be graded. However, the BULATS has been retired since 2019 and is replaced with Language skill Business. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) - International student recruitment at higher education institutions around the world is based on the assumption that students will be prepared in English if they perform well in tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). IELTS was created by some of the world's foremost language assessment experts and assesses the entire range of English skills required for success in a new job or study placement abroad. IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training are the two IELTS assessments available. IELTS Academic is a test that determines whether a person's level of English language proficiency is appropriate for an academic setting. It tests whether the candidate is ready to begin training or learning by reflecting aspects of academic language. IELTS General Training is a test that assesses English language proficiency in a real-world environment. Both workplace and social conditions are reflected in the tasks and assessments.

The International Legal English Certificate (ILEC) is a qualification that proves to employers that you have the necessary advanced English skills to work successfully in international law. Cambridge English continually updates and revises its services and as a result, decided not to continue to offer ILEC. The last examination session took place in December 2016.

International Certificate in Financial English (ICFE) - The International Certificate in Financial English (ICFE test or Cambridge English: Financial) is an advanced English language proficiency exam. The exam, which is administered by Cambridge ESOL, the University of Cambridge's non-profit English proficiency assessment wing, is designed to certify that candidates are not only confident in their use of English in everyday situations but are also capable of using their language skills in a wide range of accounting and financial contexts. As a result, the ICFE exam is primarily aimed at those who have studied finance or accounting and want to further their studies in an English language setting. Similarly, candidates with previous accounting or finance qualifications who want to work or grow in an English-language financial environment frequently use it. Aside from being a general-purpose proficiency exam – successful applicants must, for example, have a level of English of B2 standard on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference – the ICFE's unique focus on finance and accounting makes it an appealing choice for international professionals. Although the ICFE is not a financial or accountancy test, it does measure a candidate's ability to interpret English in the kind of professional contexts that they may encounter in their careers. As a result, an ICFE certification is accepted by employers all around the world. Furthermore, as Cambridge ESOL actively expands the reach of its professional exams, an increasing number of professional organizations, educational groups, and enterprises want its seal of approval. The ICFE exam is a paper-based test that assesses the four key language abilities of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. All four sections are equally weighted, but their lengths, forms, and examination conditions differ. While the Reading, Writing, and Listening tests are all taken as written exams, the Speaking exam is graded in person by a pair of on-site examiners. As a result, due to scheduling issues, it



may take place separately. Despite these distinctions, all four components of the exam use practical financial and accounting material as the foundation for their assessments.

The Aptis Language Test - The Aptis test has a credible assessment of the employees' English language skills in one company. Aptis is created by relevant professionals of the British Council and is utilized by government institutions and organizations in over 85 countries to define and improve English language standards. Aptis also allows assessment of the English language proficiency of teachers, and students in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; obtain an accurate assessment of whether individuals possess the required level of English language proficiency; determine the need to improve the language, employ, and promote true talents; determine if students are ready to attend English classes, and enable a credible selection process. Recruitment of administrative staff in the public sector in Republic of North Macedonia and the English language – analysis of relevant laws and bylaws.

A number of laws in the R.N. North Macedonia require public administration employees in all sectors and across institutions to demonstrate foreign language proficiency with an internationally recognized certificate. This is required both for current employees in the eligibility criteria for promotion and advancement in their careers and for future employees. International certifications, which are specified in several Macedonian laws and bylaws, are used in the workplace, in the recruitment of new workers, in the continuous assessment of current employees, in the preparation of studies for employee training needs, in the planning and development of training programs, and in the annual planning of training budgets in public institutions. The level of English (or other) language proficiency required, and thus the required test to pass, is determined by the following factors: the individual needs of each institution, the type of position, the need to use English, and whether the position requires the exchange of information in the English language or a working visit to a country where English is the official language. The European Language Portfolio (EPP) was created by the Council of Europe to promote and accept-language learning and intercultural interactions at all levels. Language skills, which include listening, reading, speech interaction, speech processing, and writing, are at the heart of the European language portfolio, as previously discussed.

From the enactment of the first Law on Civil Servants in 2000 until today, the legal requirements that regulate the method of employment, appraisal, and reward of civil servants have undergone numerous revisions. In order to increase the quality of public administration, the criteria has been strengthened in the hiring process and changes have been made to the review process in current legislation. The full status of public sector employees is regulated by a special law - (the Law on Public Servants of the Republic of North Macedonia from 2010, which regulates the scope of the public service, common principles and bases of employment, rights and duties, responsibility, evaluation, termination of employment, protection and deciding on the rights and obligations and the register of public servants. According to the Law on Public Sector Employees: "Public sector employees are people who have established employment in state and local government bodies and other state bodies established in accordance with the Constitution and by law and institutions that perform activities in the field of education, science, health, culture, labor, social protection and child protection, sports, as well as in other activities of public interest determined by law, and organized as agencies, funds, public institutions and public enterprises established by the Republic of North Macedonia or by the municipalities, from the city of Skopje, as well as the municipalities in the city of Skopje." Since the adoption of the Law on Civil Servants in 2000, the Republic of North Macedonia, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union, has been

attempting to apply meritocratic principles in the processes for employment and work in the civil service in order to select the best candidate for the job. Merit recruitment refers to hiring based on competitive examinations to find the best candidate for a specific position. Merit recruitment has a long tradition of public administration, and it has been a staple of Western public administration since the 19th century. The advantages of merit-based recruitment are linked to economic growth and development, reduced public sector corruption, and increased public confidence in government. Civil service meritocracies are a necessary component of the rule of law and functional democracy. The European Commission proposed public administration reform in 2014 as one of three main pillars of its Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans and Turkey, which included the development of specialist human resource management systems. Across the Western Balkans, complex examination systems have been developed. However, assessment standards are often underdeveloped. This leads to insufficient consistency and an incapability to screen examinations, especially their oral portion. The key failing of assessment systems is that the successful applicants have to meet relatively low standards. A promising strategy for overcoming this kind of problem has recently been the implementation of pool exams in Albania. If civil servants' qualifications are called into question, the first recommendation should clearly be to hire more skilled people. The most basic strategy will be to perform more thorough evaluations and lift the entry bar for civil service applicants. The entry evaluation itself should be organized by central civil service management units and should include thorough testing, such as the use of assessment centers and a variety of assessment methods, to genuinely measure the competencies required for civil service jobs.

In order to understand the role of the English language in the recruitment process for public servants in public institutions, several laws and bylaws will be analyzed further on. The Law on Civil Servants was adopted in July 2000. This law made a huge step forward in establishing the civil service system. The law defines the corpus of the civil service and defines the term civil servant. These are based on two criteria as organization and function. According to the first, there are employees in the state bodies, and according to the second, there are employees who carry out the functions of the state. In that way, the specifics of the civil servants as employees of the state are emphasized, by regulating their rights, obligations, and responsibilities. Moreover, with the enactment of the law and its bylaws, the foundations of the principles and standards for the general acts for internal organization and systematization of jobs in the state administration bodies have been laid. In addition, the manner, the procedure, and the criteria for conducting the employment procedure have also been determined in the law. The procedures for conducting the professional and internship exam for future civil servants have also been determined as an important segment of the procedures for employment of civil servants, as well as the procedures for their evaluation and collection and processing of data on civil servants, through the establishment of the Register of Civil Servants. However, to date, the Law has undergone a dozen amendments, two of which are more extensive and represent the introduction of significant improvements or innovations in the civil service.

In the Law on Civil Servants from February 2014 (Official Gazette of R. Macedonia, n'27, 5/02/2014), the categorization of the civil servants' positions are as follows: In accordance with the criteria from Article 21 paragraph (1) of this Law, the positions of Administrative officers are classified into four categories, as follows: category A - secretaries, category B - managing administrative officers, category C - professional administrative staff, and category D - auxiliary-professional administrative officers.

In the special criteria for the working positions within the B, C, and D category, the knowledge of English (or German/French) is prescribed in the law and it shall be proved by the following International English Certifications. The category B - managing administrative officers, distinguishes four subcategories: B1 - senior administrative officer of first level, B2 - senior administrative officer of second level, B3 - senior administrative officer of third level, and B4 - Managing Administrative Officer of fourth level. Thus, for the levels B1 and B2, the candidate should hold an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European testator, member of the ALTE Association of European Testers. The level required is B2 of the CEFR, i.e., IELTS with 5-6 points, FCE, BEK C, ILEC, ICFE, BULATS, or Aptis, or TOEFL PBT at least 500 points, TOEFL CBT at least 175 points or TOEFL iBT at least 60 points or DELF, TCF, TEF, or the Goethe Certificate, TestDaF (for the French and the German language). For levels B3 and B4, the candidate should hold an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European testator, member of the ALTE Association of European Testers. The level required is B1 of the CEFR, ie IELTS with 3.5 - 4.5 points, PET, BEC P, BULATS, or Aptis, or TOEFL PBT at least 450 points, TOEFL CBT at least 135 points, or TOEFL iBT at least 45 points, or DELF, TCF, TEF, or a Goethe Certificate. For the category C - professional administrative staff, the candidates are required to have special job competencies which apply to all levels such as: an active knowledge of computer office work programs, other special job competencies set out in the act for systematization of jobs for the respective job, as well as an active knowledge of one of the three most commonly used languages of the European Union (English, French, and German) by holding an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European tester, member of the ALTE association of European testers at A2 the level of the CEFR, that is KET, IELTS with a maximum of 3 points, BULATS, or Aptis, or TOEFL PBT at least 400 points, TOEFL CBT at least 95 points, or TOEFL iBT at least 30 points, or DELF, TCF, TEF, or a Goethe Certificate. For the category D - auxiliary-professional administrative officers, the candidates are required to have special job competencies which apply to all levels - active knowledge of computer office work programs, other special job competencies set out in the act for the systematization of jobs for the respective job, as well as an active knowledge of one of the three most commonly used languages of the European Union (English, French, German) by holding an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European testator, member of the ALTE Association of European Testers, or a Certificate from an international institution at A1 (A1) CEFR level, that is BULATS, Aptis; or TOEFL PBT at least 310 points, TOEFL CBT at least 35 points or TOEFL iBT at least 10 points, or DELF, TCF, TEF, or a Goethe certificate.

The law stipulates that each of these internationally recognized certificates has an unlimited time validity for the job position of the candidate and the administrative officer may use them when applying for an internal or public job opening announcement within five years from the date of issue of the certificate for other job positions unless the issuer provided a longer expiration date of the certificate. Furthermore, in the bylaws for the systematization of the working positions within various public institutions similar requirements are provided. For example, in the bylaw for systematization of the working positions at the Macedonian Ministry of Culture, besides the general eligibility criteria, the following foreign language criteria are mentioned: For managing working positions categorized as B, the knowledge of one of the three most commonly used languages of the European Union (English, French, and German) is required. For the positions categorized as B1 and B2 (that is, artistic officers) as far as the English language is concerned, it is required of the candidates to hold an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European tester in other words, a member of the association ALTE of European testers at B2 (B2) level of CEFR, that means , IELTS passed with

5-6 points, FCE, BEC B, ILEC, ICFE, BULATS, or Aptis, or TOEFL PBT at least 500 points, TOEFL CBT at least 175 points or TOEFL IBT at least 60 points. For the positions categorized as B3 and B4, an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European tester, member of the association ALTE of European testers at B1 (B1) level of CEFR, is also required with the following points: IELTS with 3.5 - 4.5 points, PET, BEK P, BULATS, or Aptis, or TOEFL PBT at least 450 points, TOEFL CBT at least 135 points, or TOEFL IBT at least 45 points.

However, in November 2020 an announcement was issued of the beginning of the process of drafting a new law on civil servants. In September 2021 a draft version of the new law was issued online. In the draft version, knowledge of a foreign language and written proof of it by holding an internationally recognized certificate is only explicitly required for the position of Director of the Agency for Civil Servants, as stipulated in Article 7. In the requirements for the administrative officers from the four categories A, B, C, and D, no conditions in reference to the knowledge of a foreign language are mentioned at all. Moreover, requirements regarding the knowledge of the English language can be found in various other laws. Some also affect private institutions such as the Law on Higher Education. In the previous Law on Higher Education from 2008 (Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia n'35/2008; 103/2008; 26/2009; 83/2009; 99/2009; 115/2010; 17/2011; 51/2011; 123/2012; 15/2013; 24/2013; 41/2014; 116/2014; 130/2014; 10/2015; 20/2015; 98/2015; 145/2015; 154/2015 and 30/2016), in the later amendments to the Law, special requirements were outlined in terms of the knowledge of the English language. These requirements were applied first to the members of Accreditation Board: "The member of the Board, if his / her mother tongue is not English, should fulfill the following condition: Shall hold one of the following internationally recognized certificates or attestations for active knowledge of English not older than five years: TOEFL IBT at least 74 points, IELTS - at least 6 points, ILEC (Cambridge English: Legal) - at least B2 (B2) level, FCE (Cambridge English: First) - passed, BULATS - at least 60 points or APTIS - at least level B2 (B2)". The same requirements were outlined for the General Secretary of the Board and the specific secretaries in relevant fields including their deputies.

When it comes to teaching and academic positions, knowledge of a foreign language was not in the requirements for the positions of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor. However, for the position of teaching assistant - a doctoral student, in Article 125 a, the candidate was required to hold one of the before mentioned degrees at the same level. In the new Law on Higher Education (Official Gazette of R. of Macedonia, n' 82, 8 May 2018) which also applies to both public and private tertiary education institutions, in Article 166, which applies to the general conditions for election into teaching and academic positions, for the three possible positions of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor, knowledge of one of the three most spoken languages in the EU is required. However, the manner and form of proving the knowledge is left to the higher educational institution to determine: "The foreign language, in other words, languages whose knowledge is required in order to fulfill the condition from paragraph (1) line 4 of this article, the level of knowledge and the manner of checking the knowledge of the foreign language, that is, languages, are more closely regulated by a general act at the university, in other words, with a general act of the independent higher vocational school".

## *Empirical research*

In the empirical research four recruitment officers from the R.N. Macedonia were surveyed in order to gather data on the recruitment practices of Macedonian recruitment agencies with regard to the requirements for English language proficiency and assessment in the private sector. The empirical research is qualitative and relies on the descriptive method. The recruitment officers were surveyed through the survey technique online questionnaire due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The gathered data were then analyzed and qualitatively and quantitatively presented, summarized, and discussed providing answers to the research questions. The targeted recruitment agencies were selected based on one criterion, to operate across the country so that we can have insight in the overall recruitment process in the country. The respondents were randomly selected according to their availability to participate in the research. First, emails were sent to several recruitment agencies. The ones that showed interest provided the contacts of their employees who would take part in the research. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the scheduled interviews were canceled, and an online questionnaire was distributed to them. Having used a customized Google form according to the needs of the research, the survey was conducted through a questionnaire, applying both open and close-ended questions. The research period was early autumn of 2021. The entire survey was strictly professional and anonymous, where personal information was fully excluded and irrelevant for the final results. The questionnaire consists of 23 questions divided into two parts: a demographic and a thematic one. The demographic part consists of eleven questions regarding the recruitment agency where the respondent works and the respondent's demographic data. The thematic part is composed of twelve questions regarding how often employers indicate the knowledge of English in their eligibility criteria for candidates, how often employers require a written proof of the knowledge of English in their eligibility criteria for candidates, whether a certificate of the knowledge of English issued by a domestic language center acceptable for employers, which standardized international examination is most required by employers, which standardized international examination is most taken by candidates, how often employers additionally test the knowledge of English of the candidates, whether the recruitment agency been ever engaged in providing or organizing language testing, how often interviews with the candidates by the employers are conducted in English, how often the recruitment agency where the respondent works conducts interviews with candidates in English. The respondents were asked to describe the requirement process and the procedures in your agency, how important the knowledge of the English language was for finding a job in the R. N. Macedonia according to them, and what advice would the respondent give to future candidates in order to successfully navigate through the job market in R.N. Macedonia. Except for questions number twenty-one and twenty-three, which are open-ended questions where the respondents were asked to write down their answers, all other questions are close-ended questions. The majority of the questions ask the respondents to mark the answer on a scale. The questionnaire was in English and was conducted through Google Forms. As far as the data analysis method is concerned, the descriptive method was used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire. The collected data from the closed-ended questions were quantitatively presented and described using charts and pies generated by Google Docs. The open-ended questions were qualitatively presented and described. Moreover, four anonymous profiles of the surveyed respondents were generated and described through a qualitative analysis.

### **3. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS FROM THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

The four respondents work in four different recruitment agencies in the R.N. Macedonia which we have targeted due to their operational scope and professional reputation. The respondents' professional profiles were: one recruiter, one HR specialist, an HR expert, and a psychologist and HR specialist promoted to head of recruitment and HR development. The respondents were employed in recruitment companies based in the R.N. Macedonia, mainly in Skopje, and Bitola and one also had a headquarters in Stuttgart with offices around the world. Three of the surveyed companies in the R.N. Macedonia operate across the country and one operates only in the capital. The surveyed companies deal with temporary work, HR consulting, outsourcing, HR services, HR consultancy, people development, and leadership programs, customised HR solutions, and HR strategies. The surveyed recruitment agencies generally operate in all industries, specializing in the retail, hospitality, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, FMCG; engineering, and manufacturing sectors. Three of the surveyed companies have more than ten employees, whereas one has from six to ten employees. The work experience of the respondents in their companies varies from six up to ten years and more, the same as their overall experience. The level of education of the respondents was as follows: three of the respondents hold a master's degree and one holds a Bachelor's degree. All respondents were female.

As far as the thematic questions are concerned, the gathered data showed that employers rarely required written proof of English language proficiency in their eligibility criteria for candidates. Moreover, a certificate of the knowledge of English issued by a domestic language center is generally acceptable for employers. An oral check of the candidates' English language proficiency generally takes place during the interviews. This is done by switching to English that is, continuing the interview in English in the last fifteen minutes if they are originally speaking in Macedonian. The interviews with the candidates by the employers are often conducted in English, as well as with the targeted employment agencies themselves. The majority of respondents believe that the knowledge of the English language for finding a job in the R. N. Macedonia is essential. Moreover, two of the selected recruitment agencies have been engaged in either providing or organizing language testing. According to the respondents' experience, among the most demanded and held standardized certifications are the TOEFL and the IELTS, after which the BULATS, the APTIS, and the TOEIC, although they are not generally listed in the eligibility criteria. In addition, the recruitment process rests upon a detailed methodology including various instruments and techniques, such as: the attraction of candidates through the agency's database, job advertising on social media, groups, and boards,; as well as: screening resumes; psychometric testing; behavioral interviews; shortlisting; and, final interviews with shortlisted candidates. However, the English language testing conducted during the recruitment process is informal and mainly oral.

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

The present research aims to examine the practices of recruitment agencies in the R.N. Macedonia with regard to the assessment of knowledge of the English language and whether it is a precondition for qualifying candidates. To achieve its aim and objectives primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed, using the descriptive method. The research questions to which the present research suggests answers were as follows.

The main research question this research addressed concerned the role of English language testing in the recruitment process in the R.N. Macedonia. Through the collected

and analyzed available secondary data and the gathered and analyzed primary data, we can conclude that English language testing has a considerable role to play in the recruitment process in the R.N. Macedonia. However, substantial differences are evident in the recruitment processes in the public and the private sector. Formal English language testing is rarely conducted during the recruitment process in both sectors. Generally, candidates are required to submit proof of their command of English through international English language certifications, which are more relevant, and even regulated with various laws, for employment in the public sector. Candidates who apply for positions in the public sector, as civil servants of various profiles and categories, are required to hold an internationally recognized certificate issued by an official European testator, member of the ALTE Association of European Testers. The required level of command of the English language varies from the position. The highest required level of English according to the Common European Framework is B2 and the lowest is A1 according to the categorization of the job positions for civil servants. The acknowledged English Language Certifications in the R.N. Macedonia, which are still active, and are required for employment and career advancement in the public sector, as stipulated across various laws and bylaws, are the TOEFL test with a recommended validity of 2 years; the British degrees in English according to the European Language Framework: Cambridge English International - KET, PET, FCE (lifelong), BULATS, IELTS with a recommended validity of 2 years, and the British Council's test for internal use the Aptis. However, some of the certifications mentioned in the laws like ILEC (Legal English) and ICFE (Finance English) are no longer active, thus should be removed from the laws when amended and or when a new law is drafted. The analysis of the draft version of the new Law on Civil Servants to be adopted, however, still mentions them. The analysis of the previous versions of the Law demonstrates a tendency to regulate the way how the command of the English language is proved in the recruitment process by a gradual introduction of the specific international certifications and the levels required for a particular position in the actual Law and the relevant Bylaws issuing from it. This tendency culminated in 2014/2015 when amendments across several laws were made and these requirements of holding an international certificate issued by an official testator were adopted. This was also evident in the Law on Higher Education which also included these requirements for members of the Accreditation Board and some teaching positions. However, recent developments, such as the draft version of the new Law on Civil Servants and the new, already adopted Law on Higher Education demonstrate a tendency which will probably decrease to a certain extent the importance of holding an international certificate. In the draft version of the Law on Civil Servants from 2020, only the director of the Agency of Civil Servants is obliged by law to hold an international certification. Still, the testing of the command of the English language will remain as an important aspect in the recruitment process. The eligibility criteria for many positions do contain knowledge of the English language. However, the manner of proving this command or knowledge is not prescribed by law but it is left on the institutions to prescribe it in its bylaws or other procedures and documents. Moreover, in the private sector, certificates of the knowledge of the English language issued by domestic private language centers are taken into account and are a valid and accepted way of proving the level of English in candidates. The nature of the private sector allows other ways of checking the knowledge of the level of the English language in candidates. The gathered data from the empirical research showed that recruiters evaluated the level of English in candidates through the interview. The interviews are either completely in English or the last 15 minutes are conducted in English. This indirectly shows that in the private sector the overall language and communication skills in English are valued moreover an international certification is rarely or practically never required. Through conducting a job interview in English, partially or completely, a recruiter who is not a language professional, could

not accurately assess the level of English in candidates. However, obviously, the needs of the private sector determine these practices and show that the overall ability to communicate in English successfully is what the job market requires. The empirical research, as well as the analysis of the secondary data, undoubtedly indicates that regardless of the way how the command of the English language is proven, a good command of the English language is not only an asset but a prerequisite to getting a job in the R.N. Macedonia. The empirical research showed that in the private sector, the knowledge of the English language is either always or often an item in the eligibility criteria.

The first auxiliary research question referred to the role of international certification in the English language in the recruitment process in the R.N. Macedonia. The analysis of the primary and the secondary data showed that international certification in the English language is drastically more important and actually required, for getting employment in the public sector in comparison to the private sector. The empirical research demonstrated that in the private sector written proof of the knowledge of the English language is rarely required from the candidate. A certificate of the knowledge of English issued by a domestic language center was acceptable for employers but rarely demanded. However, TOEFL and IELTS were identified as the most required, if at all, and the most often hold international certifications. In the public sector, as discussed previously, the role of international certification is crucial and is an indispensable part of the eligibility criteria prescribed by law.

The second auxiliary question to which the present thesis suggests answers refers to the practices of the recruitment agencies in the R.N. Macedonia with regard to English language testing and verification of the knowledge of the level of English language of the candidates. The empirical research was conducted through a survey of four recruiters operating in the R.N. Macedonia. The respondents' professional profiles were: one recruiter, one HR specialist, an HR expert, and one psychologist and HR specialist promoted to head of recruitment and HR development. The respondents were employed in recruitment companies based in R.N. Macedonia, mainly in Skopje, and Bitola, and one of the recruitment agencies also had a headquarter in Stuttgart with offices around the world. All respondents had relatively extensive work experience in the sector. The work experience of the respondents in their companies varies from six up to ten years and more, same as their overall experience. Their level of education was pretty high too in the sense that three of the respondents hold a Master's degree and one holds a Bachelor's degree. However, their education is not connected to English language assessment or testing. According to the respondents' answers, the recruitment agencies do not perform standardized language assessments or testing. The informal language assessment is conducted in the course of the interview if conducted in English, or in the last 15 minutes of the interview if conducted in Macedonian. All respondents answered that often the job interviews were conducted in English. One of the respondents named the process of verifying the English language skills of the candidate as "a simple language check" which, together with the other data, points to a very informal way of language assessment which is being employed in the recruitment process in the private sector.

However, the present research has its limitations. First, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a limited number of respondents were included in the empirical research. A wider scope could have given a broader perspective in the matter of English language testing in the recruitment process. Moreover, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the respondents would have provided more details about the mentioned informal language testing the recruiters perform.



## CONCLUSION

The English language tops the list of the world's most essential business languages. The present research undoubtedly shows that knowledge of the English language is one of the key aspects of the recruitment process and it is a prerequisite for finding a job, regardless of whether it is in the private or the public sector. However, we can also conclude that the role of international English language certification in the private sector is not a prerequisite, and it is rarely required. English language testing in the recruitment processes for the private sector is informal and carried out during the interview which is generally conducted in English. Even when the candidate applies to work in a foreign company in the R.N. Macedonia no special language tests are performed, as this is usually done verbally, during the interview. Holding an internationally recognized English language certification is required for employment and advancement in the in the public sector where holding an international certification is a requirement prescribed by law.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Concept of the manuscript was made by, Ivana Trajanoska and Maja Pavlovska; the methodology was designed by Ivana Trajanoska; the collection of data was carried out by Maja Pavlovska; analyses of data was performed by Maja Pavlovska; the draft of the manuscript was written by, Maja Pavlovska and Ivana Trajanoska;

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