

# THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR CAREER GROWTH PERSPECTIVE OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN THE NITRA REGION

Lubomíra Moravcová<sup>1</sup>, Ludmila Maďarová<sup>2</sup>, Serhij Moroz<sup>3</sup>

Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra

Department of Languages

Tr. A. Hlinku 2

Nitra, Slovak republic

e-mail<sup>1</sup>: lubomira.moravcova@uniag.sk

## Abstract

*The world of business is dramatically expanding, businesses compete in both domestic and foreign markets. Every day, more and more domestic companies move into international activities such as joint ventures, oversees investments, imports and exports, as well as expansions into foreign markets. Many companies are trying to compete in the field of international trade, even on the global level. The growth in the area of international marketplace can provide exciting career possibilities for university and college undergraduates. More and more opportunities are open for students in international careers. The article reflects changes in the current workplace regarding many business companies within the country of Slovakia. It also attracts one's attention to changes regarding students' familiarity with searching for attractive jobs on the one hand, but on the other hand it is related to changes in companies' familiarity with searching for potential candidates, especially university graduates mastering one or more foreign languages. Bilingualism and multilingualism offer a competitive advantage to both companies operating in the domestic and international business markets as well as to university graduates who pursue their career in them.*

**Keywords:** foreign languages, career development, workplace, university graduates

**JEL classification:** I00, I23, F15

## 1 Introduction

University graduates often want to work in big international companies, prestigious firms with good a reputation and image, if it is possible. Diploma holders – when looking for jobs - are usually more advantageous over other applicants. Thanks to their completed studies, they can choose from a wider range of job alternatives.

They are more attracted by the opportunity of exciting work with a certain career growth perspective. They are looking for jobs offering higher pay scales and more advantageous benefits. They are excited about learning new things, working with modern technologies, they are also eager to learn about new cultures. Many university graduates are attracted to international companies because of business travel opportunities. Travelling and exploring new cultures can be a kind of exciting prospect.

On the other hand, there are employers looking for more narrowly specialized experts, but they often have to fight with a poor command of the required language skills of their potential candidates. It is still quite difficult to find appropriate candidates with sufficient foreign language skills on the Slovak labor market.

"The situation on the Slovak labor market tends to be more favorable for university graduates, which means that up to 90% of employers would require higher education of their potential applicants. However, it is very true that candidates without the knowledge of at least one world language often have a serious problem to find a job on the labor market. What does an ideal and most demanded candidate look like? The answer is – an economically oriented graduate with B2 English language level and knowledge of another European foreign language or a graduate mastering both English and German languages on B2 communication level" (Hlavačková, 2017).

The chances to get a job abroad or in an international company knowing just the Slovak language are minimal and so the interest of students in studying foreign languages is constantly growing. Most employers prefer offering interesting work to people who are able to speak English and some other European languages. Bilingualism and multilingualism are becoming an exposed labour market requirement in the international integration process. Foreign language competencies are the basis for intercultural tolerance and for respecting all human and ethical values.

"Foreign language competence is regarded as one of the basic skills that all EU citizens need to acquire in order to improve their educational and employment opportunities. The EU therefore supports the idea that every citizen should master

two Foreign languages in addition to his or her mother tongue“ (Holúbeková & Fardosová, 2017).

## 2 Research and Discussion

In 2017, we monitored job offers of businesses and enterprises in the Nitra region with the goal to identify the employers' requirements, related to their potential applicants, for mastering different foreign languages. One of the stated conditions was to have graduated from university on the 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> degree levels. Since we were aware of the fact that most graduates want to get employed as soon as possible after they have completed their study, e.g. in the summer months, this was the reason why we narrowed our survey in its final stage and focused on the months of September and October, 2017.

The offers have been selected for graduates of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra from the following websites:

- <https://www.profesia.sk/praca/nitra>,
- <https://www.nitra.sk/zobraz/sekciu/zamestnanie>,
- <https://kariera.zoznam.sk/pracovne-ponuky/vsetky/nitra>,
- <https://www.careerjet.sk/zamestnanie-zamestnanie/nitra-224758.html>,
- <http://praca.sme.sk/praca/nitriansky-kraj>.

We have recorded 118 job offers.

In September and October 2017, we carried out research about available job positions in companies and banks in the Nitra region. In order to do this, we used information about job vacancies posted on their websites. Altogether, we found 118 job announcements, including 98 (83.1%) economic job positions and 20 (16.9%) non-economic job offers (Table 1). With respect to available economic jobs, 67 jobs were offered in banks and insurance companies, and 20 positions were offered in other economic sectors. Considering all the found job possibilities, knowledge of English and other foreign languages was required in 36.4% and 11.0% of cases, respectively. This requirement did not exist in 52.6% of vacant positions.

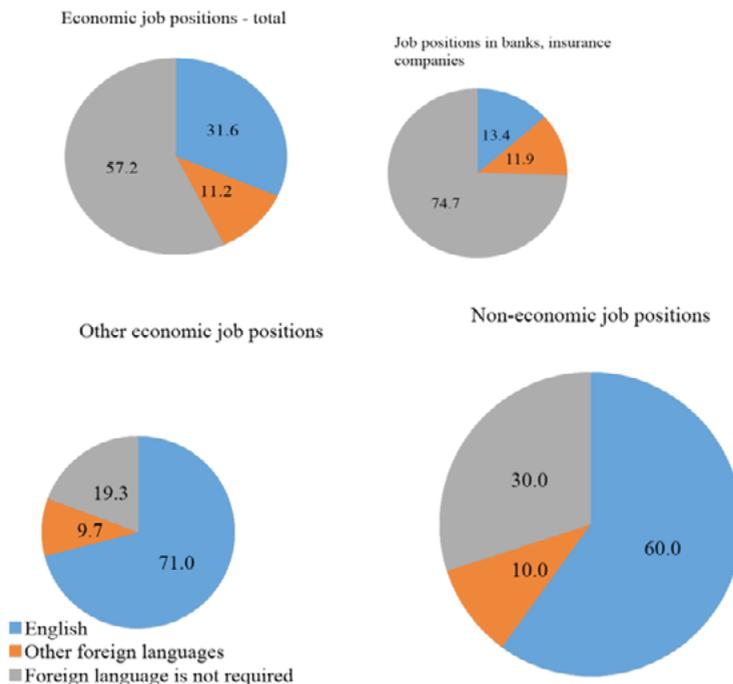
Table 1 **Information about available job positions in companies and banks in the Nitra region**

	Required knowledge of foreign language			Total
	English	other languages	knowledge of foreign language is not required	
<b>All job positions</b>	43	13	62	118
<b>including:</b>				
<b>1) economic job positions - total of which:</b>	31	11	56	98
- job positions in banks, insurance companies	9	8	50	67
- other economic job positions	22	3	6	31
<b>2) non-economic job positions</b>	12	2	6	20

*Source:* Authors' calculations based on information placed on websites of companies and banks.

It should be noted that the required knowledge of foreign languages differed significantly for the above-mentioned job categories (Figure 1). For economic job vacancies, knowledge of English and other languages was needed in 31.6% and 11.2% of cases, correspondingly. At the same time, this condition was absent in 57.2% of the announced jobs. It was quite unexpected for us to see that, concerning available jobs in banks and insurance companies, knowledge of English and other foreign languages was required only in 13.4% and 11.9% of cases, respectively. Moreover, for 74.7% of their vacancies, this requirement did not exist at all. Higher requirements were discovered with respect to other job economic vacancies. The corresponding shares were 71.0%, 9.7%, and 19.3%. Somewhat another situation was observed regarding foreign language requirements for non-economic job positions, namely: English - 60.0%, other foreign languages 10.0%, knowledge of foreign language was not required - 30.0%.

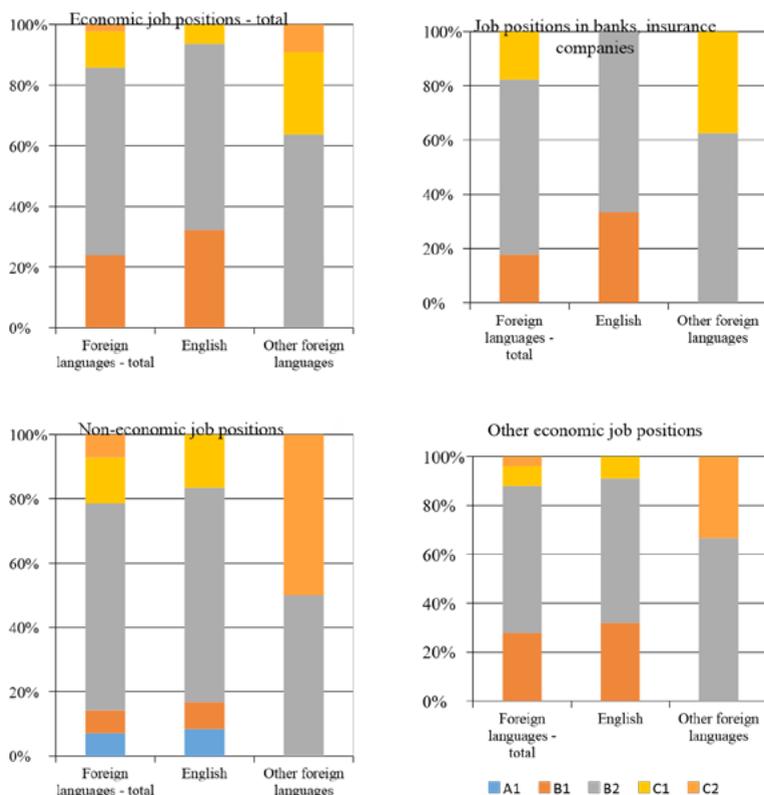
Figure 1 **Required knowledge of foreign languages regarding job positions in companies and banks in Nitra region (%)**



*Source:* Authors' calculations based on information placed on websites of companies and banks.

As for the level of knowledge of all foreign languages for economic job vacancies, it was mostly required at the B2 (61.9%) and B1 (23.8%) levels (Figure 2). While a similar situation was observed for English, it was somewhat different for other foreign languages, with the higher share of B2 (62.5%) and C1 (37.5%) levels concerning job vacancies of banks and insurance companies and B2 (66.7%) and C2 (33.3%) levels with respect to other economic job offers. For non-economic vacant positions, the B2 (64.3%; 66.7%) and C1 (14.3%; 16.7%) levels were mostly required regarding all foreign languages and English. For job offers connected with knowledge of other foreign languages, requirements were substantially higher. For example, knowledge of foreign language at the C2 level was demanded in 50.0% of cases.

Figure 2 **The required level of knowledge of foreign languages regarding job positions in companies and banks in Nitra region (%)**



Source: Authors' calculations based on information placed on websites of companies and banks.

According to the ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA survey and the Slovak-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry performed in June 2017, out of 141 participating German and Austrian investors operating in Slovakia, up to 96.5 % consider the knowledge of foreign languages very important for career opportunities. Seven ( out of ten ) survey participants report that the main profession language for top management is German (43.3%) or English (26,%). Up to 27.7% of the interviewed companies put their emphasis on the fact that their employees had to master both English as well as German languages. Although English is considered the most important international business language in Slovakia, the survey shows that knowledge of German means a real advantage for the career

in Slovakia (Slovensko-nemecká obchodná a priemyselná komora, 2017). A great advantage of English is that it is the top language that can be spoken almost all over the world.

However, if a job seeker wants to work in Europe, his / her options will be limited to countries where English is an official language (England, Scotland, Ireland) or to countries where a large part of the population can communicate in the language. In the countries where English is not an official language, there will be also much less interest in employment possibilities.

In biographies, people mostly claim that their knowledge of the language is active or on the advanced level. However, using the language does not lie only in everyday communication, but in particular in reading foreign publications, viewing films in a given language, etc., which is in fact an excellent experience and the possibility of learning, but it cannot be considered an active use of the language "[3]. To determine the degree of control we now use a scale from level A to C, which means from the basics to the specialized language. Employers are already aware of clear specification of requirements according to this scale.

### **3 Conclusion**

We can conclude from the above monitored results that Slovak companies and enterprises place increasingly more emphasis on a good command of foreign language skills of their applicants. There are more reasons for this. Slovakia has opened up to the world, opening up a gateway to unrestricted opportunities on the labor market. If a job seeker in an international firm wants to apply and be a compatible part of it, if he or she wants to work on the career development, get integrated into the team and become an equal partner in other cultures, it is essential that he or she possesses foreign language skills. Every other foreign language opens up new chances and new opportunities, even where it has not been possible before. The more languages a job seeker knows, the greater the chance for him or her to get an original and well-paid job. And finally, Slovak companies and enterprises want to get a much better access to international or global business markets than it was the case in the past.

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