



Perception of Students of the Degree in Tourism
Regarding the Importance of a Foreign
Language: English

Sónia Leite, Isabel Borges, Eusébio Costa, Fátima Matos Silva
and Stéphanie Mota

EasyChair preprints are intended for rapid
dissemination of research results and are
integrated with the rest of EasyChair.

May 24, 2022

Perception of students of the Degree in Tourism regarding the importance of a foreign language: English

Sónia Leite^{1,5,6}[0000-0002-6525-4322] Isabel Borges^{1,3,4}[0000-0003-4183-475X] Eusébio Costa^{1,2}[0000-0003-4167-2455] Fátima Matos Silva^{4,7}[0000-0002-1740-586X] Stéphanie Mota¹[0000-0001-5392-5128]

¹CIDI-IESF- Fafe Institute of Higher Studies, Fafe, Portugal

²CEOS - Polytechnic of Porto, S. Mamede de Infesta, Portugal

³CEGOT-Coimbra University, Coimbra, Portugal

⁴REMIT-Portucalense University - Infante D. Henrique, Porto, Portugal

⁵CeiEd-Lusófona University, Lisboa, Portugal

⁶N2i- Polytechnic Institute of Maia, Maia, Portugal

⁷CITCEM-FLUP - Porto, Portugal

sonialeite@iesfafe.pt; isabelborges@iesfafe.pt; eusebio-costa@iesfafe.pt; mfms@upt.pt; stephaniemota@iesfafe.pt

Abstract. Being the most widely used global language, English has been exerting a tremendous influence around the world in various spheres of our lives. These comprise, among others, travel, tourism, and hospitality industry, in all of which the use of English has become an imperative need. With its ever-growing importance, the role of English in travel, tourism and hospitality industry has been assuming greater significance, and also undergoing some functional changes.

This work aims to present the main results, of a quali-quantitative nature, after applying a questionnaire survey, carried out among students of the Degree in Tourism, in a Portuguese private higher education institution, to ascertain their perception of the importance of the English language in the Tourism sector.

From the data collection carried out with 32 students, it was possible to assess there is still a way to go for these students, future professionals, to feel secure in the proficient use of the English language, as the vast majority evaluates their performance in the English language as average.

Keywords: English language; Students; Tourism; Perception; Worldwide

1 Introduction

The advantages of learning foreign languages are mushrooming as the world becomes increasingly globalized and bilingualism is now perhaps the most useful real world skill to ever exist. Foreign language study is all about learning how to truly communicate and connect with others—an incredibly important life skill that can only be cultivated by interacting with people. When you master a foreign language, you can exercise your new superhuman power of being able to understand what someone is saying, recall the proper vocabular and grammar, put it into the proper context, and reply back—all on the spot and in a timely manner. You’ve connected. And that is what it’s all about.

It’s no secret that learning a foreign language can improve your employment prospects. Currently, more companies than ever are doing business in several—often dozens of—countries around the world, but they can’t do it without hiring people who have a grasp on at least one foreign language. Even in small, local companies, chances are that the ability to speak a second language will set you apart from other applicants.

In the field of Tourism it is of major importance to master foreign languages, especially the one that is seen as the worldwide language: English.

In this work we’ll inquire students attending the degree of Tourism, from the 1st to the 3rd year of studies to measure their perception regarding the importance of learning a foreign language: English.

2 The importance of contact with a Foreign Language (English) in human development

As described in Dal [1] and Rocha [2] the globalization of business and commerce as well as access to new technologies have led to an increased need for children and adults to acquire a second language. Several authors distinguish between acquisition and learning of the Mother Language, differentiating them, the first corresponding to an unconscious process, while the second requires full awareness [3].

The teaching/learning of foreign languages is in full proliferation in all European countries, with the learning of a second language starting at an ever earlier age [4]; [5], which responds positively to the concern expressed in the Council resolution [6], issued by the European Commission, regarding the early teaching of European Union (EU) languages. Here, it can be read that the early learning of one or more languages other than the mother tongue or languages and the awareness of languages, namely through a playful approach, can create the necessary and favorable conditions for the subsequent learning of foreign languages and thus contribute to the objective of learning two European Union languages in addition to the mother tongue(s). In 2009, this idea was reinforced, with the European Commission [7] issuing a favorable opinion on multilingualism for Europe, with the main objectives of promoting interculturality and the languages of migrants as well as the dissemination of European languages in cultural relations with third countries.

Strecht Ribeiro [8] refers to the importance of the contribution of a Foreign Language to the social development of human beings, namely with regard to their ability to interact with others, since the main objective of teaching/learning languages is that of opening a space for understanding between individuals in a given social context. As described in [9], this type of learning also allows the development of communicative competence, helping in socialization and contributing to the transformation of the person into a more responsible and aware being. It cannot, however, fail to mention that, when we speak of the Mother Tongue, we have an underlying natural acquisition, while when we speak in a Foreign Language we refer to a different process that involves not a natural acquisition, but the their learning, usually in a school context.

Learning foreign languages should start when the child is still young. The early learning of these languages allows children to develop their memory, reasoning and critical reflection skills, but at the same time they must take advantage of and expand their imagination and fantasy. For this, the methodologies used must be child-centred and associated to activities that are of interest to her [3].

Learning the English language takes on a dual character: as a transversal subject and as a compulsory subject.

The teaching of a foreign language is therefore not confined to the domain of acquiring strict communication skills, it also requires the acquisition of intercultural communication skills. In this sense, the Council of Education Ministers of Europe recommends that the curricular management of a foreign language should enable learners to use the language as a means of communication, thus enabling the development of various communicative skills; making the learner build their own social and cultural identity, through the discovery of another culture and leading them to reflect on their own, allowing them to develop values such as tolerance and respect for others, developing in them the use of certain skills that will allow you to be more autonomous and independent in terms of learning.

In Portugal, the possibility of legally addressing a Foreign Language in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education was introduced by the Curriculum Reform set out in Decree-Law No. 286/89 of 29 August. At the European Commission Summit held in Lisbon in 2000, learning of foreign languages was recognized as an essential key competence, which was validated at the Barcelona Summit in 2002. Portugal, as a Community country, follows these recommendations assuming the learning of LE as a guarantee of the future for current generations, providing the initiation of learning English in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education. It is intended that the teaching of the English language will become a curricular area, in accordance with the guidelines included in national and international [10]; [11] opinions.

As described in [1], learning an LE requires the student to be able to use their:

- analytical skills, so that you can understand the linguistic structures of LE learning;
- meta-cognitive abilities, thus allowing self-correction and error analysis;
- memory, for example to acquire new vocabulary.

A final aspect, related to those already mentioned, refers to the confidence that the student must demonstrate in order to use language in both a productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) way.

Considering the guidelines resulting from the Bologna process, which date back to 1999, and whose declaration emphasizes a focus on areas such as lifelong learning and employability, the command of several foreign languages is considered essential. The reference to language learning is also evident in several regulatory documents for several years [6]; [7], so it is important to analyse the way in which they are considered.

3 The importance of mastering the English language in the area of tourism

The tourism industry is one of the fastest growing areas, as well as an important source of income in several economies around the world. This industry is very diverse, since it includes workers and clients with different languages, ethnicities and cultures, which makes the English language essential for effective communication, and which will result in a better quality and efficiency experience for employees and tourists who visit us.

Tourism is also known as an important source of job creation, an activity that revalue culture, folklore, gastronomy, nature, etc. As English is seen as the “*lingua franca*”, it represents a basic tool in any of the fields tourism related, from tourist information to the management and promotion of destinations or tourist activities, through the intermediation, accommodation and transport company.

In terms of tourism business in today's world, with practically borderless economies, effective communication is essential for the good performance of any company. Within this globalization, the English language has become the standard language for business communications.

A study on job offers for the tourism sector, carried out to analyse the needs of the labour market, resulted in 79% of advertisements requesting knowledge of the English language as an essential requirement. The preferences of companies vary: some request competence of written English, other oral and, in many cases, require language proficiency in both directions. This sounds logical if we consider that English has become the global language of communication par excellence [12];

In this context, it was intended to analyse how the English language students of the Degree in Tourism of an higher education institution perceive the usefulness of learning the English language, the advantages and constraints they identify, as well as the expectations they hold for the future and for admission in the business market.

4 Study Purpose

The objective of this work was to analyse, through the application of a questionnaire, the perception of higher education students of the Degree in Tourism about the importance of learning the English language and its future application in the labour market.

Despite the various questions within professional education to which we could try to find an answer, we chose, in our research, to outline the following:

- a) What are the motivations and expectations of the Degree in Tourism students for attending the English Language Curricular Unit?
- b) What is the importance that the same students attribute to the use of the English language in their professional activity in the tourism sector.

5 Methodology

The choice of a certain methodology is fundamental for any investigation, as it defines the principles by which the researcher will be guided throughout his study, with a view to guaranteeing the validity of the knowledge he has arrived at. In this sense, we follow the statement of Quivy and Campenhout [13], who state that “for each investigation, the methods must be chosen and used flexibly, according to its own objectives, its analysis model and the hypotheses”. In this type of study, “we look for the detail of the interaction with its contexts” [14]. In Yin [15], we can read that this is the most used strategy when one wants to know the “how” and the “why”, when the researcher has little control over real events or even when this is non-existent, and when the field of research focuses on a natural phenomenon within a real-life context. The case study focuses on individual aspects. It is intended to know about the general looking at the particular, allowing us to discover the complexity of certain relationships. A case study can study things in detail. This methodology presupposes, in some cases, “the existence of a previous theory, which will be tested during the investigation”, and in other cases it admits the construction of a theory based on the research findings [15]. A theory is generalized to explain and predict similar rather than variable phenomena. The design adopted in this investigation is of the exploratory-descriptive type of qualitative-quantitative approach from the application of a questionnaire, aiming to assess the perception of Higher Education students, attending the Degree in Tourism, about the importance of learning and mastery of English language.

5.1 Sample characterization

In the present study, a convenience sampling process was used, as it is not a random sample, composed of students from the three years of the Degree in Tourism of a higher education institution. The sample was composed of 58 students and the questionnaire was answered by 32 students attending between the 1st and 3rd year of the Degree in Tourism (14 from the 1st year, 12 from the 2nd year and 6 from the 3rd year). Respondents' ages vary between 18 and 34 years. Their level of English varies between average (17), good (10) and master (5).

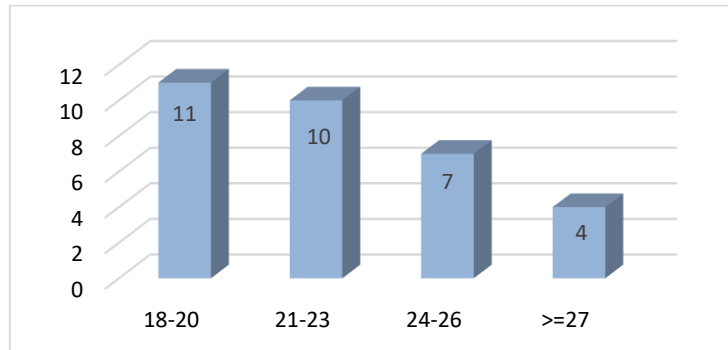


Fig. 1. Age of participants.

5.2 Data Analysis and Discussion

Given that we are dealing with the analysis of issues, we chose to carry out a quantitative analysis.

Thus, regarding the first question, Which do you consider to be the most spoken language in the world?, all respondents answered that it is English (100%), revealing that they are aware of the importance of the English language in the world.

As for the 2nd question, How often do you have contact with the English language?, the answers focused on the daily option, referring to the context of work, leisure and/or study.

Regarding the 3rd question, Do you consider that mastering the English language will bring you advantages in the labour market? In what way?, the responses were again unanimous, with all respondents responding in the affirmative (100%). As for the justification given for this, they referred to the fact that it is the universal language, most spoken in the world, the language used for commerce and business, and that it is through their mastery of the English language that they have access to scientific knowledge and a series of documents that could support your professional practice.

As for the 4th question, How do you think the English language allows you greater access to knowledge?, it was mentioned that books and publications are written in English, which is the universal language.

In the 5th question we can read, In your opinion, what is the weight of the English Language curricular unit in your course?, regarding this question, all respondents mentioned that it is a very important curricular unit in the course they attend (100%), referring that, for many difficulties that some students may demonstrate, the workload of the curricular unit should even be increased to be able to start from the basics and finish the course with full command of the language.

Regarding the 6th question, Would you be able to consider yourself a good professional in the area of Tourism without mastering the English language?, the responses were mostly negative (26 negative responses), however, 6 of the respondents reported

that, regardless or not of mastery of the English language, could be good professionals in areas related to tourism.

As for the 7th and last question, How would you rate your level of English?, the answers varied between enough (18 of the respondents), good (9 of the respondents) and very good (5 of the respondents).

6 Conclusion

English has been reasserting its 'World Language' status. As said before, some of the important roles played by the English Language point to the ever-growing relevance and importance of English. Good master of English highlights a much brighter future and ensures easy mobility and better communication skills for travellers, tourists, and for all those engaged in tourism industry.

In a globalized tourism world, English plays a crucial role in communication, being one of the most important tools all over the world. But it involves systematic and continuous process of speaking, listening, understanding and constant practice. As a tool for international understanding, it's not possible to work in tourism without knowing how to express clearly. Most of the tourist establishments require employees to speak English in addition to other languages, especially from the European tourism markets.

This study allowed us to see that the vast majority of students surveyed are aware of the importance of the English language not only in the area of tourism, but also in the world and in activities not only related to the labour market, with moments of leisure, through reading books, listening to music or watching series or films, as well as moments dedicated to study and knowledge, whether through technical books or scientific articles.

The answers given as to the importance of the English language differed only in the direct connection between the domain of the language and the fact that this influences their performance as professionals in the field of Tourism. It is noteworthy that, despite the recognition of the importance of the English language, when asked about their level of English, most respondents rate their level of language mastery only as sufficient, which demonstrates that there is still a way to go to that these students, future professionals, feel secure in the proficient use of the English language.

The biggest limitation to study was the sample size. Of course, other questions could also have been raised, allowing for a deeper analysis of the theme and answering other questions that the theme raises. However, the increase in the number of questions in the survey would certainly lead to a lower number of responses – the overload of questionnaires that we are all subject to, on the most varied subjects, has caused fatigue and natural difficulty in obtaining respondents. Despite the small sample of 58 students, and the number of responses being even smaller, 32 students, we managed to achieve interesting results. These results motivate us to continue this type of investigation in the coming school years, increasing the sample of respondents, reaching broader results, sustaining the results now obtained or changing them. It will also be possible to

carry out a comparative study and analyze the chronological evolution of the understanding of the themes under study by students in the area of Tourism. English for the future tourism is an elementary tool in any of the fields where the student's career is developed, from tourist information to the management or promotion of destinations or even tourist activities. It's crucial to meet all the requirements of the sector, especially in such a competitive world, making the difference in a better quality and efficiency experience for the tourists who visit the destinations.

References

1. Dal, M. (2008). *Dyslexia and Foreign Language Learning: The Sage Handbook of Dyslexia*. London: Sage Publications.
2. Rocha, C. (2009). A língua inglesa no ensino fundamental I público: diálogos com Bakhtin por uma formação plurilingue. *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, vol.48; 2.
3. Rajagopalan, K. (2009). Exposing young children to English as a foreign language: the emerging role of world English. *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, vol.48; 2, 185-196.
4. Brewster, A. L., Bender, R. A., Chen, Y., Dube, C., Eghbal-Ahmadi, M., & Baram, T. (2002). Developmental febrile seizures modulate hippocampal gene expression of hyperpolarization-activated channels in an isoform and cell-specific manner. *Journal Neurosciense*, 22, 4591–4599.
5. McKay, S. (2006) *Researching second language in classrooms*. The Reading Matrix. Vol. 8, No. 1. Cidade: Editora.
6. Comissão Europeia (2004). *Muitas línguas, uma só família: as línguas na União Europeia*. Bruxelas: Direcção-Geral Imprensa e Comunicação.
7. Comissão Europeia (2004). *Promover a aprendizagem das línguas e a diversidade linguística: plano de acção 2004-2006*. Luxemburgo: Serviço das Publicações Oficiais das Comunidades Europeias. Disponível em http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/lang-action/2004-06_pt.pdf
8. Strecht-Ribeiro, O. (1998). Línguas estrangeiras para os mais novos: articular o sistema, melhorar as práticas. *Revista Educação & Comunicação*, 7, 210-219.
9. Lantolf, J. (2000). *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*. Oxford University Press.
10. Matthews, P., Klaver, E., Lannert, J., Conluain, G. & Ventura, A. (2009). Políticas de valorização do primeiro ciclo do ensino básico em Portugal: (Avaliação Internacional). Lisboa: GEPE.
11. Maalouf, A. (2008). *European Commission: A Rewarding Challenge: How Language Diversity Could Strengthen Europe*. Disponível em http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc1646_en.pdf. xxx
12. Nawar Al-Saadi, (2021). Importance of English Language in the development of tourism management. *Researchgate*, vol.4 (1): p.33-45.
13. Quivy, R., & Campenhoudt, L. V. (2005). *Manual De Investigação em Ciências Sociais*. Lisboa: Gradiva Editora.
14. Stake, R. (2005). *Investigación con estudio de casos*. Madrid: Morata. Sage Publications.

15. Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case Study Research – Design and Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
p. 94.