

THE IMPACT OF PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ON HOSPITALITY EMPLOYMENT: THE CASE OF VAN

Zekeriya Nas, Van Yuzuncu Yil University, Türkiye.

Email: zekeriyanas@yyu.edu.tr

Turgut Ölemez, Van Yuzuncu Yil University, Türkiye.

Abstract. *This research examines the learning difficulties of English as a second language and the reflections of tourism-related companies on this issue. The problems related to English language teaching are often reflected in organizations operating in the tourism sector. This study focuses on investigating these problems in the context of Van. Using a mixed-method approach, a questionnaire was administered to 114 prospective tourism employees who aim to work in the sector in Van. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the human resources departments of companies operating as employers in the sector. The results indicate that students who choose to study in the field of tourism show low interest and motivation in learning the second language. They tend to prioritize acquiring language skills based on professional experience and obligations rather than during their academic studies.*

Received 05 Nov. 2023

Revised 01 Dec. 2023

Accepted 10 Dec. 2023

Keywords: Tourism, Organization, Language, Barrier, Van, Second Language

1. Introduction

In dictionaries, tourism is defined as "travelling for pleasure," and a tourist is described as someone who travels for pleasure. According to other definitions, tourism refers to the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, including the activities undertaken during their stay in these destinations and the facilities created to cater to their needs. In its simplest form, tourism involves traveling to new lands, experiencing the exotic in the unfamiliar, and seeking self-education or the enjoyment of travel. Over the course of a century, from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, tourism has evolved from mere travel to a form of social activity (Otilia, 2013).

In today's society, tourism activities have become essential for many individuals, as they spend a significant amount of time engaging in touristic travel. When people travel to different countries, they not only encounter new cultures but also encounter new languages.

Many definitions of language have been proposed. Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, defined language as the expression of ideas through the combination of speech-sounds into words. Language is often referred to as "alive" by many experts. According to Santos (1990), language is a series of sounds produced by conscious human beings. Wibowo (2001) defines language as a system of meaningful symbols and articulate sounds, generated by a specific tool, that are arbitrary and conventional. It is used as a means of communication by a group of human beings to express their feelings and thoughts.

Speaking another language allows individuals to have multiple paths in their one life. This idea is supported by the frequently used expression "one language one person, two languages two people" in Turkish. For individuals who are engaged in lifelong learning, learning different languages is one of the key requirements for exploring new cultures (Irgashevic, 2022).

Learning is a transformative process that enhances the quality of human life. It involves transitioning from a state of ignorance to knowledge, from incapacity to capability, and from non-understanding to understanding. By clearly understanding the learning objectives, students are motivated to engage in the learning process and strive to achieve the desired competencies (Harahap, 2019).

Despite technological advancements, the importance of language learning remains significant. When engaging in tourism activities, having a shared spoken language in the destinations visited is crucial for enhancing the enjoyment of the experience.

Communication skills play a vital role in the hospitality industry. A clear understanding of performance expectations is essential for ensuring tourist satisfaction. Good oral and written communication skills are highly valued by hospitality professionals across various positions. In particular, proficiency in English communication enhances the educational experience of students, adding value to their overall learning (Cotic & Grzanic, 2011).

In less developed countries with a focus on tourism, such as many Third World countries, it is common for local personnel to have limited proficiency in foreign languages, predominantly English, which serves as the dominant lingua franca in the tourism industry (Cooper, 1982; Lieberson, 1982). While Turkey may not be classified as a Third World country, it is widely acknowledged that English language education has been neglected or given less priority, similar to the situation in such countries.

The language most commonly learned by locals working in the tourism industry is English, primarily due to the significant number of English-speaking international tourists and the economic incentives associated with English language proficiency (Cooper, 1982; Lieberson, 1982). In Turkey, it is widely recognized that communication challenges in foreign language teaching within the tourism sector

are considerable. The hospitality sector continues to face difficulties in recruiting new staff who are capable of carrying out their professional duties in English.

Table 1: *Commonly Used Languages in Turkish Hotel Industry*

Language	The number of Speakers (Million)	Native Speakers (Million)	% according to World Population
English	1000	365	16
Mandarin	1000	935	16
Indian	900	361	15
Spanish	450	387	7
Russian	320	160	5

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition (Native Speakers Numbers)

Language barriers are an important obstacle to transcultural communication. Tourists are well aware of this difficulty, which significantly influences their destination choices, trip preparations, interactions with locals, and overall travel experiences (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). Surprisingly, the problem of language barriers in tourism has received limited attention in both sociological and sociolinguistic literature.

As temporary visitors, tourists typically have limited immersion in the host society and only fleeting interactions with locals. They lack the time and opportunity to learn the host language during their stay, and locals do not expect them to acquire the language beforehand. Unlike with other less temporary strangers, there is no normative expectation for tourists to acquire and use the host language (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). On the other hand, individuals working in the tourism industry, who regularly interact with a stream of temporary visitors, may enhance their second language proficiency through occupational experiences.

1.1. The purpose of study

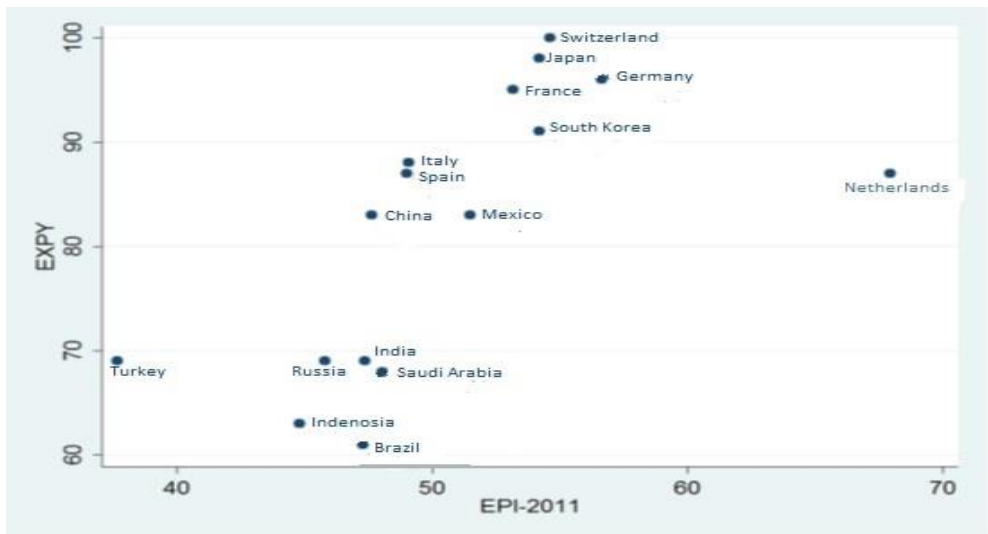
This research aims to examine the impact of English language teaching issues in Turkey on students aspiring to work in the tourism industry. Additionally, it focuses on the challenges faced by companies in recruiting English-speaking personnel within this sector.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the existing language barriers faced by employees and employers in the hospitality sector in Turkey. Through a concise investigation, this research aims to address a specific aspect of the issue that has not been extensively studied in the existing literature. While previous studies have touched upon related topics, there is a gap in research that specifically targets the focal point of our study.

1.2. Research problems

“In Turkey, English language education is a mandatory part of the curriculum for all students, including those who choose a career path in the tourism sector. However, research indicates that individuals in Turkey generally have insufficient English language skills.

Scientist H-index scores and TOEFL scores of countries (2011)



Source: SCImago Journal & Country Rank, ETS

According to the TEPAV report, there are several main problems identified in language education in Turkey:

Emphasis on grammar teaching: Teachers tend to focus heavily on teaching grammar, treating English lessons like other academic subjects such as history or geography.

Test-oriented learning: The education system places a strong emphasis on test-based learning, which leads students to focus on finding the correct answers rather than developing a comprehensive understanding of English as a language.

Lack of skill-based activities: Teachers often fail to engage students in skill-based activities that promote active language use and communication.

Inadequate materials and curriculum: The textbooks and materials used in classes do not cater to the specific needs and proficiency levels of students. Additionally, the curriculum mandates a one-size-fits-all approach, disregarding individual differences among students.

Pressure to complete curriculum content: Teachers reported that they are compelled by inspectors to cover the entire curriculum within the allocated timeframe, regardless of the students' actual learning progress.

As a result of these issues, even high school graduates often find themselves lacking proficiency in English language skills.

1.3. Research Questions

- RQ1.** What are the levels of concern, attitude, and motivation regarding the English language for individuals who aspire to be employed in tourism-related companies?
- RQ2.** Do the levels of concern, attitude, and motivation regarding the English language differ based on the educational backgrounds of individuals who aspire to be employed in tourism-related companies?
- RQ3.** Do the levels of concern, attitude, and motivation regarding the English language differ based on gender for individuals who aspire to be employed in tourism-related companies?
- RQ4.** Is there a significant relationship between gender and educational background regarding the levels of concern, attitude, and motivation regarding the English language for individuals who aspire to be employed in tourism-related companies?

1.4. Hypothesis

In this study, it is aimed to explore the implications of the problems encountered in English language education in our country on the tourism sector. Considering that English is widely used in this industry, the levels of anxiety, motivation, and attitudes towards learning the language are crucial for students aspiring to pursue careers in the sector and for businesses seeking to create employment opportunities in this field.

- H1:** There is a significant difference between the level of anxiety in learning English and attitudes towards learning English.
- H2:** There is a significant difference between the level of anxiety in learning English and motivation towards learning English.
- H3:** There is a significant difference between the level of language learning anxiety and employment expectations for students aspiring to work in accommodation services.
- H4:** There is a significant difference between students' attitudes towards learning English and their motivation in language learning.

- H5:** There is a significant difference between employment expectations of students aspiring to work in the tourism industry and their attitudes towards language learning.
- H6:** There is a significant difference between the level of motivation in English learning for students aspiring to work in the tourism industry and their expectations of being employed.

2. Literature Review

There have been numerous studies conducted on the challenges of language learning as well as employment in various domestic and international sources. However, there are a relatively limited number of studies that specifically examine the intersection of these two areas.

From a profitability standpoint, it is crucial for businesses to hire employees who possess the desired qualifications. In the tourism sector, one of the key qualifications sought after is proficiency in a second language. English, without a doubt, is the language that holds the utmost importance in terms of language skills. Research conducted by Yücel and Arıkan supports this notion, indicating that personnel in the tourism industry who have direct customer interaction acknowledge the significance of foreign language proficiency, as emphasized by businesses (Yücel & Arıkan, 2019).

The study mentioned indicates that the participating tourism personnel recognize the importance of foreign language proficiency in their profession. They expressed intentions to further enhance their language knowledge and skills through measures such as attending language courses or seeking opportunities to study abroad, aiming to advance in their careers. It is worth noting that industry leaders, who are in competition with one another, invest in improving the language abilities of their employees. Moreover, it is acknowledged that foreign language skills used in the tourism field may require approaches different from conventional language teaching methods.

According to Nomnian, et al. (2020), English, as a second language learned and taught for use in tourism, plays a crucial role in fulfilling the needs of tourists and fostering meaningful and enduring experiences between hosts and guests. Furthermore, proficiency in English empowers individuals to have a voice in various fields worldwide, contributing to effective communication in both local and global contexts.

When examining the underlying causes of the language problem in the tourism industry, a shortage of qualified personnel becomes apparent, primarily due to difficulties in language learning. At the heart of this shortage are the challenges associated with language acquisition. In our country, a commonly encountered sentiment regarding this issue is "I understand, but I can't speak." This suggests that individuals may feel proficient in passive language skills but struggle to reach

the desired level in active language use. The main factor contributing to this situation is anxiety, particularly speaking-related anxiety. Anxiety is a complex phenomenon, and while an appropriate level of anxiety can enhance concentration and performance, excessive anxiety can have the opposite effect. In our study, we will specifically focus on speaking-related anxiety.

Foreign language speaking anxiety is considered a distressing experience for students (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Research has identified that perceiving oneself as less competent in speaking skills compared to classmates, lack of self-confidence, desire for perfection in speaking, fear of making mistakes, incorrect pronunciation, inadequate vocabulary, prejudices towards the foreign language, and educators' approach to errors can contribute to foreign language speaking anxiety (Balemir, 2009; Luo, 2014; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012; Melouah, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Suleimenova, 2012; Tüm & Kunt, 2013; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; The research findings of Akşit, Aşık, and Gökçe (2019) in this field reveal that foreign language speaking anxiety is an inevitable reality and can lead to significant problems negatively impacting students' professional lives.

In terms of providing the necessary knowledge and skills for employment in the tourism sector, "Anadolu Vocational High Schools for Hospitality and Tourism," which offer education at the high school level, are of great importance. At the university level, "Tourism and Hotel Management Vocational Schools" as associate degree programs, and at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, higher education institutions that provide education in Tourism Management also play a significant role in producing a qualified workforce for the industry (Alicıgüzel, 2012).

Qualified workforce, which represents the country at some point, is trained in tourism schools. People involved in tourism activities require someone who can speak their language or at least communicate in a common language in a different culture. Therefore, foreign language proficiency is a crucial requirement for employment in the tourism industry (Akgöz & Gürsoy, 2014). The high language skills of tourism personnel, who can be considered as ambassadors of a country, also hold significant importance in terms of representation. Additionally, facilitating tourists' needs in the countries they visit is crucial for word-of-mouth tourism marketing when they return to their home countries. Apart from the report we mentioned regarding our country's language skills, there are also various other studies available.

According to the report published by Education First International Language Schools in 2014, Turkey ranked among the countries with the lowest language proficiency. In the overall ranking of 63 countries, Turkey ranked 47th and ranked last in the European ranking. The same report emphasizes that this situation is attributed to the heavy focus on teaching grammar rules in schools, which results

in people lacking practical language skills. According to the report, only 2% of people in Turkey can successfully use English as a communication language, and they primarily consist of those who need this language in their professional lives (EF EPI, 2014, p. 8). Considering all these findings from the report, it can be inferred that there are people in Turkey who can speak English, likely including those in the tourism industry, but in terms of the overall ranking of the report, their numbers are relatively low, and the demand for English proficiency is not fully met (Hafçı, 2016).

Studies conducted on foreign language self-efficacy abroad have generally focused on achievement. In addition to the studies investigating achievement, the relationship between the use of language learning strategies, self-efficacy, continuous motivation efforts, and the role of gender and teacher self-efficacy have been examined. In many studies, self-efficacy has shown a strong relationship with achievement, indicating that as self-efficacy increases, so does achievement. It has also been found that self-efficacy decreases as anxiety increases, and self-efficacy increases with the use of learning strategies and motivation activities (Hançı Yanar ve Bümen, 2012).

Studies conducted abroad on foreign language self-efficacy have primarily focused on achievement. Alongside research on achievement, there have been investigations into the relationship between the use of language learning strategies, self-efficacy, continuous motivation efforts, and the impact of gender and teacher self-efficacy. Many studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between self-efficacy and achievement, suggesting that as self-efficacy increases, so does achievement. Furthermore, it has been observed that self-efficacy decreases as anxiety levels rise, while the use of learning strategies and engagement in motivation activities contribute to an increase in self-efficacy (Hançı Yanar & Bümen, 2012).

In lately, students' anxiety levels in English language learning increase, their motivation towards learning English will decrease. This is believed to be similar to previous studies conducted in the problem identification part of our education system.

Lastly, it is predicted that the problems encountered in English language learning will closely affect students' motivation in employment matters as well. Students also want to learn English for expectations beyond employment. Our aim is to obtain similar results to the conclusions of the articles we used in our study.

3. Methodology

Our research was conducted on students with potential employment in the tourism sector in Van. In this quantitative method study, the Motivation Scale for English Language Learning, developed by Madiyev, Uğurlu, and Usta (2016), was used. According to the results obtained from scale development, the English language

learning motivation scale consisted of 16 items with three factors, and the total reliability value of the scale was found to be 0.83. The factor loadings for each factor were calculated, and it was found that the items gathered under the heading of personal use had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.85, the items gathered under the heading of attitude had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.77, and the items gathered under the heading of self-confidence had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.78 (Madiyev, Uğurlu, & Usta, 2016).

3.1. Research Strategy

The scale used was examined through the Van Sample, and students aspiring to work in tourism were reached through internet tools. The students to whom the survey was sent understood the content and requirements of the study and willingly filled out the questionnaire.

3.2. Participants

The scale was completed by 114 students. In the conducted check, the data was found complete and that is why all the data was used. Of the participants, 91 (79.8%) were female, and 23 (20.2%) were male (table 2).

Table 2: *Statistics about the Participants*

Frequency	No.	%	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Women	91	66.4	79.8	79.8
Men	23	16.8	20.2	100.0
Total	114	83.2	100.0	

(Participant Numbers: Chart 1)

When the filled surveys are examined in terms of educational status, 60 participants (52.6%) are in high school, 52 (45.6%) are in university, and 2 (1.8%) are at the master's level (table 3).

Table 3: *Statistics about the Education Level of the Participants*

Frequency	No.	%	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
High School	60	43.8	52.6	52.6
Degree	52	38.0	45.6	98.2
Masters Degree	2	1.5	1.8	100.0
Total	114	83.2	100.0	

(Chart 2: Formal Education Levels of Participants)

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

As a data collection tool, the "Motivation Scale for English Language Learning," prepared by Madiyev, Uğurlu, and Usta in 2017 and published in the 'International Journal of Academic Social Science Studies,' was used. Participants were reached

through internet tools, and the survey was prepared using Google Forms and then distributed to the participants.

3.4. Data Analysis Process

The IBM Statistics SPSS 25 program was used to analyze the data.

3.5. Response Rate

A total of 114 people participated in the survey, and all the data were analyzed in a usable manner.

3.6. Reliability

Validity and reliability studies were conducted in the original study of our scale, and they were explained in detail. When the sub-dimensions of the questions were examined according to the Cronbach-alpha coefficient, their reliability was revealed.

Table 4: *Reliability Statistics about the Questionnaire*

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.791	4
"Cronbach-Alpha coefficient for anxiety,"	
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.910	4
"Cronbach-Alpha coefficient for attitude,"	
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0,886	8

"Cronbach-Alpha coefficient for motivation,"

When Chart 3 is examined, a normality test has been conducted for the questions, and due to the significance level being less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), kurtosis and skewness coefficients have been examined. Since these values are between -1.5 and +1.5, it has been determined that the data exhibits a normal distribution (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

Table 5: *Tests of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Learning English is more difficult for me compared to others.	0.155	114	0.000	0.895	114	0.000
Unfortunately, I think I am not good at learning English.	0.175	114	0.000	0.882	114	0.000

I feel insecure when learning English.	0.180	114	0.000	0.889	114	0.000
I'm afraid of being ridiculous while learning English.	0.158	114	0.000	0.872	114	0.000

In this study, one of the challenges encountered was the expectation of anonymity and secure storage of data. It was important for the ethical aspects of our study to provide detailed information and assurance to the participating students and employees regarding the situation. Participants were informed that the obtained data would be used solely for scientific purposes.

4. Research Analysis

In this study, one of the main aspects we were investigating was the impact of attitudes and motivation related to learning English on employment in the tourism sector. We wanted to examine these aspects in terms of the level of formal education and gender. When we applied an ANOVA test to our values to examine the sub-dimensions according to the level of education, the results showed that there was no significant difference in our sub-dimensions based on the level of education. When we examined the relationships between our sub-dimensions, the following values were obtained (table 6).

Table 6: *Statistics of Pearson Correlations*

	Anxiety	Attitude	Motivation	Employment
Anxiety	1.00			
Attitude	0.001	1.00		
Motivation	-0.446**	0.069	1.00	
Employment	0.115	0.315**	0.067	1.00

5. Results and Recommendations

According to the results of our research, as students' positive attitudes towards learning English increase, their expectations of employment also increase. This result, in line with the topics we identified in our research questions, indicates that students with high negative attitudes tend to be hesitant or reluctant to be employed in the tourism sector. This also suggests that one of the key challenges faced by businesses wanting to be competitive in this sector is the reluctance of students with negative attitudes towards employment.

Another research result indicates that as students' anxiety levels in learning English increase, their motivation towards learning English decreases. This aligns with the similarity to previously implemented studies that we highlighted in the problem identification part of our education system. Recommendations regarding what the fundamental problem might be are available in these publications.

In conclusion, it is understood that the problems encountered in learning English also closely affect students' motivations in employment matters. Students want to learn English not only for employment but also for other expectations. The results of our research align with the conclusions of the articles we used in our study.

References

- Akşit Aşık, N., & Gökçe, F. (2019). Yabancı dil konuşma kaygısını etkileyen faktörler: Turizm lisans öğrencileri üzerinde bir araştırma. *Güncel Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3(2), 202-219.
- Cohen, E., & Cooper, R. L. (1986). Language of tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 13, 539-547.
- Hafçı, B. (2016). Türkiye'ye gelen yabancı ziyaretçilerin turizm endüstrisi çalışanlarına yönelik İngilizce dil becerileri beklentisi ve karşılama düzeyi: Kuşadası örneği (Yüksek lisans tezi, Turizm İşletmeciliği Anabilim Dalı). Tez Danışmanı: Çivici, M. E. Ö. Y. (83 sayfa).
- Hançı Yanar, B., & Bümen, N. T. (2012). Developing the English Language Self-Efficacy Scale. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 20(1), 97-110.
- Hararap, H. J. P. (2020). The importance of german language skills in the tourism sector. *Britain International of Linguistics, Arts and Education Sciences Journal*, 2(3), 819.
- Irgashevich, T. S. (2022). Importance of foreign languages in developing hospitality and tourism sector of uzbekistan. *Web of Scientist: International Scientific Research Journal*, 3(9), 48-49.
- Kostic Bobanovic, M., & Grzinic, J. (2011). The importance of English language skills in the tourism sector: A comparative study of students/employees' perceptions in Croatia. *AlmaTourism*, 2(4), 11-31.
- Nomnian, S., Trupp, A., Niyomthong, W., Tangcharoensathaporn, P., & Charoenkongka, A. (2020). Language and community-based tourism: Use, needs, dependency, and limitations. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 13(1), 57-79.
- Otilia, S. M. (2013). English: The language of communication in tourism. *Annals of the "Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu Jiu, Economy Series*, 1, 306.
- TEPAV Proje Ekibi; Efşan Nas Özen (Proje Yöneticisi), İdil Bilgiç Alpaslan, Aysen Çağlı, İdil Özdoğan, Merve Sancak, Ali Osman Dizman, Ali Sökmen. (2014). Türkiye'deki Devlet Okullarında İngilizce Dilinin Öğretimine İlişkin Ulusal İhtiyaç Analizi. *British Council*, 11-12.
- Yücel, E., & Arıkan, A. (2019). Turizm personelinin yabancı dil gereksinimleri: Antalya örneği. *Bingöl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 9(9), 17.