



RevistaDigital **>>PALABRA**

Revista Palabra
ISSN 2145- 7980
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Ecuador

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Foreign languages knowledge as factor for Human Resource
Development in Tourism industry of Manabi, Ecuador
Revista Palabra, vol 7, abril de 2018, p. 56 - 69
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana
Montería, Colombia

Disponible en: <http://revistas.upb.edu.co/index.php/Palabra/>



Foreign languages knowledge as factor for Human Resource Development in Tourism industry of Manabi, Ecuador

Conocimiento de idiomas extranjeros como factor para el desarrollo del talento humano en la Industria Turística de Manabí, Ecuador

» Abstract

This article focuses on foreign language competence of travel advisers as a relevant element for the human resources development (HRD) on tourist industry in Manabi, Ecuador. It describes a framework based on the travel agencies operations, effective communication and andragogy. This study comprising in the examination of French and English language knowledge in 25 travel advisers located in Manta. It is also determined the relationship among their attitudes for foreign language practice and the factors sex, age and work position. The results allow to determine that travel advisers do not consider French language as priority competence but, 10% of participants had reached level B2 in English meanwhile 90% of participants had reached A1. This condition becomes in a barrier to human resource development in tourism field. It does exist significant relationship between 'work position' and the 'attitude for foreign language practice' which should be considered to motivate the language acquisition.

Key Words: Tourist industry, English language, human resources, economic and social development, work attitudes.

» Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la competencia en idiomas extranjeros de los asesores de viajes como un elemento relevante para el desarrollo de recursos humanos (DRH) en la industria turística en Manabí, Ecuador. Describe un marco basado en las operaciones de las agencias de viajes, comunicación efectiva y andragogía. Este estudio comprende el examen del conocimiento del idioma francés e inglés en 25 agencias de viajes ubicadas en Manta. También se determina la relación entre sus actitudes para la práctica de la lengua extranjera y los factores sexo, edad y posición laboral. Los resultados permiten determinar que las agencias de viajes no consideran el idioma francés como una competencia prioritaria, pero el 10% de los participantes habían alcanzado el nivel B2 en inglés, mientras que el 90% de los participantes habían alcanzado A1. Esta condición se convierte en

una barrera para el desarrollo de recursos humanos en el campo del turismo. Existe una relación significativa entre la “posición de trabajo” y la “actitud para la práctica de la lengua extranjera” que debe considerarse para motivar la adquisición del lenguaje.

Palabras clave: Industria turística, lengua inglesa, recursos humanos, desarrollo económico y social, actitud laboral.

» Introduction

Tourism industry is characterized by a world wide higher growth (WTO, 1998) thus, this activity that includes “people traveling to and staying in other places different to their usual environment, for less than one year for leisure, business, and for other purposes” (WTO, 2010, p.1) requires of “employees with well-honed vocational skills. Therefore, the tourism industry relies heavily on vocational training programmes to develop its human resources” (Becherel, 2008, page. 75).

But, Tourism is also an economic phenomenon capable to support a country development process which, also can generate employment through organizations that are or not directly associated with Tourism industry (Niezgoda, 2004; Baker, 2013; Temirblatova, M., and Borza, M., 2015). Having such objective in a local economy developing plan, the touristic service quality also means taking a professional approach, expecting to do things well at all times and satisfying the legitimate expectations of consumers in coherence with the principles of the World Code of Ethics for Tourism.

In terms of history, biodiversity and culture Ecuador is a country well known around the world, but, its tourism industry has not reached a high development until the year 2000 because, the economic crisis that limited the support to tourism initiatives, and lacking of local infrastructure and transportation system failures. This important sector was included in the new ecuadorian Productive Matrix since 2013; followed by an aggressive foreign languages media campaign in order to forecast this destination around the world, expecting to increment the number of visitors to this country. Some of those global promotion campaigns were: “Ecuador - The country of the 4 worlds”, “All you need is Ecuador”, and “Visit Manabi first”.

According to www.tourism-review.com, Ecuador has increased in the number of tourists since 2011 generating revenue of \$1.2 billion. Actions held in favor of tourism in Ecuador are “eradication of visa restrictions [...], advertising campaigns have opted to make use of words to raise tourist awareness [...]. Luxury all inclusive tours and hotels have become increasingly popular while tour companies are paying keen attention to their customers’ satisfaction”

According to Turner (2015) in the publication WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2015. Travel & Tourism to GDP in Ecuador was US\$ 1,959.9mn (1.9% of total GDP) in 2014. It is expect its rise by 3.8% pa, from 2015-2025, to US\$ 2,829.2mn (1.9% of total GDP) in 2025. Also, the Travel & Tourism directly supported in jobs in Ecuador for 2014 was 127,500 jobs (1.7% of total employment), including jobs indirectly visitor exports generated US\$ 1,424.5 mn (5.1% of total exports) in 2014. This is forecast to grow by 4.2% pa,

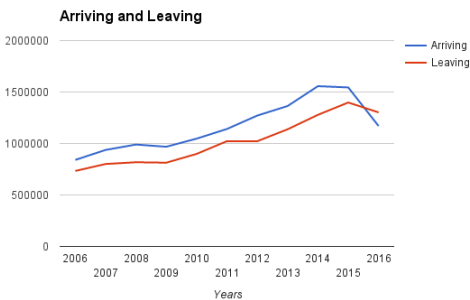
from 2015-2025, to US\$2,022.0mn in 2025 (5.4% of total).

Table No 1. Visitors in Ecuador during 2015

Countries	% Visitors
Colombia	24.1
USA	16.7
Peru	11.3
Venezuela	7.7
Spain	4.3
Argentina	3.8
Chile	2.8
Cuba	2.7
Germany	2.1
Canada	2.1
Others	22.4
Total	100

Source: Ministry of Economy, Ecuador (2016).

Graphic No.1. International Tourist Visitors flow in Ecuador 2006-2016



Travel & Tourism investment in 2014 in Ecuador was US\$ 1,018.1mn, or 3.6% of total investment. It should rise by 4.0% pa over the next ten years to US\$1,556.7mn in 2025 (3.8% of total).

The chain of touristic services includes hotels, restaurants, transportation and amuse-

ment services but, the ‘travel agencies’ acts as a bridge between services suppliers and potential customers getting a relevant role in the economical system. Also, this work applies the quantitative method of research and the Strategic Problem Formulation (SPF) theory which suggests that the organizations face multiple complex situations permanently; and these organization require of solutions in order to advance in their growth (Nickerson, Silverman, & Zenger, 2007; Baer, Dirks, & Nickerson, 2013).

Table No 2. Position of Tourism in the National Incomes, 2015

Products and services	Incomes million US dollars
Bananas	2793
Shrimps	2000
Seafruits	1624
Tourism	1251
Flowers	1014
Metals	646

Source: Ministry of Economy, Ecuador (2016)

This researching work answer the following questions:

What is the travel agencies human resources current foreign language knowledge?, What are the relationships among the attitudes of travel agencies staff for the foreign language learning and the factors of sex, age and work position?.

» Theoretical Framework

Tourism and Human Resources Planning (HRP)

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), defined the term 'Tourism' as the group of "activities that people made during their travels and stays in other places that are not their usual environment, for a consecutive period less than one year, for leisure, business and other purposes" (Sancho, 1998, p. 11). Also, Figuerola (1999) cited by Guijarro (2009) in concern of the term 'Tourism' said: "This is an act that involves spending, which requires the expenditure of revenue, in change of a demanded service" (p. 17). The World Tourism Organization defined to the term 'Travel agency or agent' as that licensed business or professional, who is in charge of pursuing and organizing tourist services and/or mediation (WTO, 1998).

According to Ballesteros (2012) the first travel agency in the world appeared in 1758, it was named as 'Cox & Kings'. In those times, Mr. Thomas Cook was one of the first entrepreneurs who planned, sold and prepared tours to religious destination in England.

Another formal definition of the term 'Travel Agency' is given by Bašan, Dlačić and Trezner (2013). They referred to travel agencies as "economic entities whose primary and profitable line of business is: to organize tourist trips and to provide travel intermediary services" (p.50). In fact, a travel agency in addition to the "intermediation, organization and realization of travel projects, it

arranges and sales touristic products [...] it also has the capability to solve problems of accommodation, and professional tourist guiding" (Ballesteros, 2012, p. 7) and high qualified personnel is required in order to do this work.

Human resource planning helps to determine the skills will be needed for those new initiatives (Samar Kamel Saad, 2013). In order to meet capable and skilled employees and achievement of competitive advantage in the run of the touristic business organization focus on human resources planning systems (Armstrong, 2012; Mathis & Jackson, 2012).

Furthermore, many tourism and hospitality organizations are able to provide high quality services; so, human resource planning permits more reliable control over staffing costs, capabilities, able ability, and it regulates the numbers of employees that the organization requires (Price, 2011) being a very useful tool in current administrative procedures.

Efficient and effective communication in touristic operations

The usage of foreign languages is essential in some productive sectors in Latin America and Caribbean countries as Tourism and International business thus, the most common languages spoken in this region are Castilian and Portuguese but, also French or Criollo in Haiti, Guarani in Paraguay, Nederland in Anthelia. Even in the region, other languages are spoken for a communities, such is the case of Ecuador where, it is possible to find Kichwa, Chachi, Epera, Awa, among others.

However, for international business and especially for touristic purposes, professionals should speak Chinese, German, French, and specially English language.

During the touristic operations is possible to meet people from other cultures, making of the efficient communication an extremely necessary act, in order to reach the exchange of information among the visitors, local people and touristic services suppliers, whom normally do use another different language. This kind of intercommunication message uses high-frequency vocabulary and appropriate grammatical structures in order to reach the estate of comprehension, which requires cooperation in every participant of this kind of intercultural exchange (Maftoon and Shakibafar, 2011). Also, sensible topics of a specific abroad culture should be managed with respect and carefully by local people, in order to get an appropriated communication level with the visitors (Fred, 2003). Nonetheless, people do use of several channels to replace their oral expression limitations in foreign languages as writing, drawings, body signals and so on. But, the tourism industry expects to offer services according to international standards, and do enroll in their staff, people that have a certain level of language commands to reach more efficiently to their customers and potential clients. However, tourism industry requires of bilingual staff, it means people with the ability to speak, read, write, and listen fluently and with the less accent possible in both languages (Grosjean 1982), visitors are expected when they arrive in the guest room or lobby to be treated cordially and in their own language because “relationships are made through processes of exchange of

information and affection” (Martin, Piñuel, Grace, and Arias, 1982, p. 64).

Thus, bilingualism and multilingualism, which are basically “the ability to sustain growth in low-frequency, abstract vocabulary, and complex structures” at the moment to use another language (Maftoon and Shakibafar, 2011, p. 83). However, Kaufmann (1996) insisted on the importance of developing the ability of reception and hospitality in every travel adviser, because it is the beginning of having a good standard of communication and quality service attention. It is the affective communication that give a plus in quality to the touristic operations.

Andragogy and Training of Adult people.

In most of the cases, current professionals in tourism acquire a foreign language once they are adults; in such condition, ‘Andragogy’ or Adults training can be a very helpful process for foreign languages acquisition in which games are used in order to promote language production (Carrera and Villafuerte, 2015). In other hand, Knowles (1970) defined ‘Andragogy’ as the art and science of helping adults to learn something new. In the year 1977, Felix presented the definition of the term ‘Andragogy’ as the science and art of educating to adults but, Bernard (1985) quoted by Lopez (1996) introduced ‘Andragogy’ as “a science which deals with historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological and organizational aspects of the adult education” (p. 94). During the years 70s, Knowles referred ‘Andragogy’ as the art that allows adults to achieve the process of learning technology. Also, Paulo Freire

(1975) about 'Andragogy' affirmed that "education for adults must be an analytical exercise instead of, a docile cognitive deposits reception act, and it should promote the critical reflexion in adults". Finally, According to Rosana Caraballo (2007) 'Andragogy' is "a method of studying that mixes styles of learning, procedures, techniques, situations and strategies of teaching and learning, in order to achieve significant learning in adult learners" (p. 211). Additionally, Krashen (1987) quoted by Intriago and Villafuerte (2016), language acquisition process is "a subconscious process, where people are not usually aware of. It is the fact that they are using the language for communication" (Krashen, 1987, p. 10).

Furthermore, to have problems in communication on the usage of a foreign language, it is "the starting point for the acquisition and integration of new language knowledge" (Aguilar, 2011, p. 171) but, it is necessary to consider that "the communicative approach is fundamental when it comes to teach a foreign language in school of adults since, they give the importance to the personal previous experiences" (Bosio, 2011, Pp. 41-42).

» Methodology and instruments

This quantitative work is centred on the travel advisers of Manta city, Ecuador. The expectation is to generate constructionist reflections in order to support the human resources development in the context of tourism industry in Ecuador.

This article also applies the Strategic Problem Formulation (SPF) theory expecting to find solutions to the complex problems of travel agencies in concern to their human resources (Nickerson, Silverman, & Zenger, 2007). The SPF theory characterizes business problems in order to face a lot of different variables that could be unobservable, high degree of connectivity among the factors of the problem and variables, and the dynamic resulted from a change of the pattern of interactions over time (Baer, Dirks, & Nickerson, 2013).

Two techniques for the collection of information were applied in this study:

- a. A placement test was designed by the researcher in order to determine the level of English and French language acquired by the 25 participants at the end of 2015. The placement test comprised both structured and open-ended questions and the results were analysed using MERC (2002) rubric. This instrument evaluate the four communication skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening and aboards themes around tourism industry, and daily life activities in the travel agency.
- b. Likert questionnaire about attitudes for the foreign language practice. This instrument was designed by the researcher in order to determine the relationships between their attitudes for foreign language practice and age, sex and work position. This likert questionnaire was evaluated by Cronbach index= 0.837 and fine-tuned by 3 experts. This questionnaire

consists of 30 items and also provide information on travel advisers: Position, instruction level, national or international languages studies, usage of foreign language in front office desk.

The analysis applied in this study are:

- a. **Documentary analysis:** A literature review was executed in order to obtain information to answer the first question about the tourist potentialities of Manta and Manabi.
- b. **Quantitative data analysis:** These instruments were applied in the ecosystem of work (travel agencies) during participants lunch time. A previous date was arranged in order to avoid interruptions during the process of instruments application. The process took 50 minutes (35 minutes evaluation and 15 minutes interview). The data was processed using SPSS. 23. The statistical relationships among the travel advisers' attitudes for foreign language learning and the factors sex, age and position were established applying ANOVA.

Sample

This study took as sample 25 travel advisers from different travel agencies located in Manta city. The group is integrated by 10 women and 15 men in the range of age 20 - 50 years old. The condition requested to participants is to have a current work in a travel agency in positions at front desk, ha-

ving the opportunity to be in direct contact with clients.

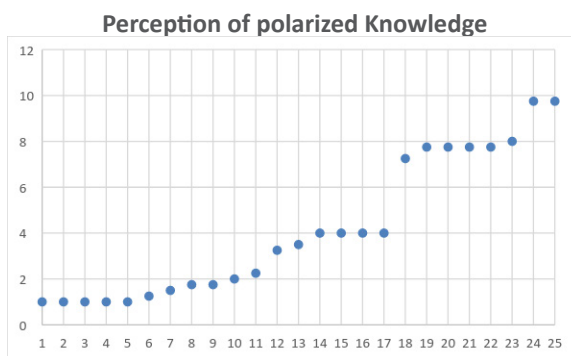
» Findings and discussion

Foreign language knowledge in Travel Agencies' Human Resources of Manta.

In answer to the question: What is the travel agencies human resources current foreign language knowledge? See in the Matrix No. 3, the results obtained in the French and English evaluation applied to 25 travel advisers are exposed.

Central measures obtained about English knowledge of travel advisers are: statistical mode is 1, the Median is 3.5; the Standard deviation is 3,119. For French knowledge of travel advisers are: statistical mode is 1, the Median is 1,5; the Standard deviation is 0, 55.

Graphic No.2. Comparison between participants' English knowledge results



Source: Evaluation of the knowledge of English applied to travel advisers

Matrix No. 3. Foreign Languages Knowledge Levels of participants from Manta.

Travel advisers			FRENCH					ENGLISH				
No.	Sex	Age	Listening	Writing	Speak	Read	Average	Listening	Writing	Speak	Read	Average
1	f	40	3	2	2	2	2,25	1	1	1	1	1
2	f	56	2	1	1	1	1,25	1	1	2	1	1,25
3	f	34	2	3	2	3	2,5	1	2	1	2	1,5
4	f	35	4	2	1	2	2,25	2	2	2	2	2
5	f	20	2	1	1	1	1,25	4	4	3	3	3,5
6	f	27	2	3	2	3	2,5	4	8	3	2	4
7	f	27	1	1	1	1	1	8	8	7	6	7,25
8	f	25	1	1	2	1	1,25	8	8	8	7	7,75
9	f	35	2	1	1	2	1,5	10	10	10	10	9
10	f	35	1	1	1	1	1	8	8	8	8	8
11	m	34	1	1	2	1	1,25	1	1	1	1	1
12	m	34	2	1	1	2	1,5	1	1	1	1	1
13	m	35	3	2	2	2	2,25	1	1	1	1	1
14	m	30	1	1	2	1	1,25	1	1	1	1	1
15	m	42	2	1	1	2	1,5	2	2	2	1	1,75
16	m	42	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1,75
17	m	40	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	2,25
18	m	28	2	2	1	1	1,5	4	3	3	3	3,25
19	m	28	2	2	1	1	1,5	5	7	7	5	4
20	m	25	1	1	2	1	1,25	7	5	5	7	4
21	m	28	2	1	1	2	1,5	5	7	7	5	4
22	m	42	1	1	1	1	1	8	8	8	7	7,75
23	m	28	2	2	1	2	1,75	6	6	9	10	7,75
24	m	42	1	1	1	1	1	8	8	8	7	7,75
25	m	52	1	2	2	2	1,75	10	10	10	10	10

Source: Evaluation of knowledge of English applied to Manta travel advisers

In the graphic No 2, it is represented the popularity in the participants` English languages knowledge (travel advisers); it means that most of them (90% of participants) know very little English language but, the minority (10% of participants) has the command of English.

B. Relationships among the travel advisers attitudes for foreign language practice

In answer to the question: What are the relationships among the attitudes of travel agencies staff for the foreign language learning and the factors of sex, age and position?

Matrix No.4. Chi-square of Pearson applied to attitudes for foreign language practice

Items	Sex	Age	Work position
2.1. I think social networks should be used for foreign language practice in the university context.	.76	.00	.01
2.2. When I have to prepare English Exams I prefer to use pc programs.	.99	.16	.04
2.3. I enjoy practicing English in small groups.	.76	.00	.01
2.4. I would practice English using videos on Youtube.	.79	.15	.01
2.5. The social network I would use for English Practice is Whatsapp.	.80	.02	.27
2.6. I like to practice English using google+.	.54	.00	.01
2.7. I prefer to use Facebook for my English practice.	.33	.25	.12
2.11. I enjoy practicing phonics by online programs.	.91	.00	.00
2.12. I am sure I can improve my oral expression in English if I practice using videoconference with foreigners.	.75	.22	.02
2.13. I like to read blogs in English because, people expresses their ideas using a in common style.	.06	.17	.02

In the case of the factor 'sex' of the travel advisers, all the attitudes evaluated report a "Pearson Chi-square" index $\chi^2 = .05$ in compliance with the hypothesis on the independent variables.

In the case of factor 'age' of the travel advisers are reported relevant relationships with the following attitudes for foreign language practice 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.11.

In the case of factor 'work position' of travel advisers is reported relevant relationship with the following attitudes for foreign language practice 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.11, 2.12 and 2.13 that present a "Pearson Chi-square" $\chi^2 < .05$ therefore there is a significant relationship.

The results of the ANOVA for the multi factors 'sex, age and work position' in relation to the attitudes for the idiomatic practice, indicates

Matrix No.5. ANOVA for multi factors: sex, age and work position on the attitudes for foreign language practice

Ítems	Media square	F	Sig.
2.2. When I have to prepare English Exams I prefer to use pc programs.	8123.0	4320.0	.04
2.4. I would practice English using videos on Youtube.	7368.0	5178.0	.03
2.15. I like computer corrects my mistakes in English.	8482.0	12574.0	.00
2.16. I feel I can improve my listening in English when I practice with videos.	3165.0	6280.0	.02
2.19. I can watch and listen videos in English about current topics of my personal interest by internet	8438.0	5191.0	.03
2.20. In order to people understand well my writing messages, I must check it before.	18321.0	17183.0	.00

that in most of the attitudinal items the null hypothesis is rejected, since the degree of significance exceeds the value ANOVA $\geq .05$ expected. Except for items 2.2, 2.4, 2.15, 2.16, 2.19 and 2.20 in which it is observed, the fulfillment of the null hypothesis reporting a significant relation in these items

Travel agencies as part of tourism business are concerned with the following levels of human resources strategy: corporate strategy, business unit strategy, and functional strategy (Becherel and Vellas, 1999; Bratton and Gold, 1999). Having as purpose the survival and success of the travel agency is necessary to direct resources on the second language staff acquisition programs because, “the success of a destination depends on its competitiveness, and one of the key elements of competitiveness is the quality and efficiency of its human resources [...] The way people are treated is a competitive factor that will encourage the flow of tourists to the destination” (page, 78). Most of the participants in international counter have a greater knowledge of English Language. The administrators and business owners also have a outstanding English knowledge. Most of them had studied English abroad. In other hands, the national counter staff have very limited knowledge of English and they have no time or resources to attend to foreign languages courses in the location. Also, travel advisers must use globalized reservation systems that are totally set in English language: SABRE and AMADEUS. Regulations on international air traffic, ticket regulations, touristic packages, car rentals service, etc., usually appear in English language; therefore, a travel agent must facilitate the understanding of travel information to the

clients using foreign languages. Nearly every travel advisers in Manta contract technical and professional trained in local universities. There is a relatively low proportion of employees who studied at technical training centres and professional training in abroad countries.

» Conclusions

It is already clear at this stage that, there is a need for greater communication, collaboration, and coordination between the training institutions, the tourism industry, and the public sector in order to improve the human resources development in Manta-Manabi touristic industry. It is needed the ensuring of cooperative management between the public and private sectors in order to ensure that the content of programmes be pertinent and applicable to current trends. Also, foreign language teaching must be always included in every the training processes.

The results indicate that travel advisers (participants) in Manta do use foreign languages in their common working activities but, especially English language in most of their communication routines about air traffic and ticketing service. French is also used in tour guiding. However, study French language is not a current priority goal.

English language knowledge is polarized in Manta's travel advisers. A few advisers have a high knowledge of English (international tourism position) meanwhile, other advisers (the most of the national travel advisers) have a low level of English knowledge. Who work in tourism should have at least a

second language command to give a service according to the international standards.

The results show relevant relationships between the factors 'age and work position' with travel advisers attitudes for foreign language practice. This condition should be considered in order to create new strategies for human resources development under the condition that 'foreign language knowledge' in tourism industry is a 'plus or invests and not an expense'.

Experience shows that for a human resources development strategic plan successful application, all players in the tourism industry must be involved in its elaboration and implementation. A clear role should be defined for such a board. Duties would include: To eliminate barriers to appropriate human resources development; to consider the concerns of each stakeholder and build consensus; and to develop and maintain effective tourism education that considers foreign language acquisition.

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