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LEARNING THE SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT RIT

SENIOR PROJECT
PROF. R. CHARRY
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THE SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION
IN TOURISM EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the sentence: “How many languages you know, that is how much you are worth” can be heard often. According to numerous articles, knowledge of more than just one second foreign language has a huge role in business tourism. It makes people more well-rounded and more successful in their careers. The main purpose of this research paper, was to discover if there is a high interest among students to study a second foreign language for more than just two years. The questionnaire was given to all seniors and juniors at RIT, including the alumni who graduated within the last three years. The results showed that students have a huge interest in extending their foreign language classes across the four year duration of the undergraduate program. The main reason why they chose to study a foreign language, that is not English, was due to pure interest, disregarding the fact whether or not the teacher was good or if it was an easy “A”.

A small gap, regarding studying a foreign language, was present between current students and alumni. The gap includes reasons why it would be beneficial for current students to have more than just two years of foreign language classes in order to have a more successful career.

KEY WORDS: foreign language education, foreign language skills, hospitality education, competence

INTRODUCTION

Knowing a second foreign language, other than English, could have a beneficial effect on one's personal life, for example, with making new friends and with communication in general. However, most importantly, it has a huge influence on one's business life, especially in the Tourism industry. Most College Education Systems support, encourage, and develop multilingualism. Due to this, younger generations have the perception that they have a greater knowledge in a larger variety of foreign languages than previous generations.

The two most important questions are, how much interest in studying a second foreign language should a student have and how much the real knowledge do they really soak up and essentially apply after college? "Learning another language gives the student the ability to step inside the mind and context of that other culture. Without the ability to communicate and understand a culture on its own terms, true access to that culture is barred." (Yoganja Sushanthi Menike, 2015.)

When it comes to learning, as well as participating in a second foreign language course within college, research that was made in one school in Sri Lanka showed that participation is 100% the most important part if one wants to gain the correct knowledge and skills. Additionally, female students are generally more interested in studying a second foreign language than male students. Usually, male students attend the first class with the wrong attitude: "I can not or it is very difficult". It has been proven that a short period of intense learning is much less effective than a longer period of learning.

Christine Uber Grosse noted that people mostly think that English is the most important language in today's business world, especially Americans, but she agreed that her ability of knowing other foreign languages not only English helped her to start her business career (Christine Uber Groose, 2004.).

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN HOSPITALITY

The key part of the hospitality industry is knowing foreign languages. “It is evident that in the field of tourism and hospitality, beside the communicative language ability it is extremely important to develop intercultural competence” (Kathy Monks 2010, Journal of European Industrial Training)

Nowadays, English is the most popular language all over the world but with a higher number of international guests, other foreign languages are beginning to have a big role in tourism. Dave Ozageer, director of Pearl Beach Resort, pointed out that his employees participate in Chinese language courses before communicating with guests from China. He described that with knowing Chinese, his guests will have better communication with employees and in that way, will generate a better visit experience amongst guests (Bezern, 2015).

Knowing more than one foreign language is a great advantage for every individual, but the level of knowledge of a language, as well as the intercultural competences are gained by adopting a foreign language through integrated themes related to customs and culture. Communication between guests and employees should be clear, as Davied noted: “The main thing is to be able to hold a conversation and understand customer’s needs.” (Davied Leslie, 2006. Tourism Management p.27).

The fact is, that although English is dominate world language, there is a growing appreciation for the knowledge of more foreign languages. Euro barometer 2010 survey shows that most Europeans (up to 81%) agree that all languages spoken within the EU should be treated equally. Moreover, it was found that 54% of Europeans can speak at least one additional language, 25% of Europeans can speak at least two additional languages, while 10% know three or more foreign languages. (Kostic, Grizinic, 2011.)

EDUCATION OF A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE USA

In America, the knowledge of another foreign language and culture, aside from English, has become as crucial as math and other essential courses. It is considered that the knowledge of another language in the USA is much needed in order to, overcome all economic challenges and to push oneself to the top of the global economy.

A study showed that students who had a second foreign language instruction ninety minutes a week, had better results in other courses, such as, math, compared to those students who did not take another foreign language (Armstrong, 1997.). In addition, early learning of a second foreign language helps ones to remember the English vocabulary and it helps in reading skills. (Masciantonio, 1977.) Another advantage of learning additional foreign languages is better listening, better memory, and other skills that differ them from people who only know their mother tongue (Ratte, 1968). One of the most important things in learning a foreign language, is to understand how the language works and how to use it when there is a problem, therefore, it is better for a child to start learning a foreign language from an early age (Cummins, 1981).

The results of the SAT- Scholastic Aptitude Test have shown some very interesting facts, such as, students who have studied a foreign language for four or more years, have a better understanding in math and have better results during verbal tests. Students, who have had at least four years of extra foreign instructions, have achieved over 100% better results within other courses than other students who had only two years of foreign language instructions.

Other research has shown that students who participated in three hundred hours of foreign language courses, during the duration of two academic years, can not achieve the knowledge that students should have after high school and even worse, after elementary school. It is fairly difficult to gain any knowledge from lectures that have a duration of a forty-five to sixty minutes and take place only once per week. (Committee for Economic Development 2006).

One of the changes that should be taken into consideration, are teaching techniques, for example, how to actually awake interest in students in order to learn another foreign language. Unfortunately, in some parts of the United States, the opportunities to learn another language are very low.

EDUCATION OF THE SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN EUROPE

Due to the fact that the English language is generally the most used language for communication both in Croatia and in the rest of Europe and the world, it is important to further emphasize the need to adopt linguistic and intercultural knowledge of the English language.

For example, according to research results conducted by the Greek Tourism Organization, 98.5% of hotels in Croatia, stated that they first look for knowledge of the English language, 56.7% stated that after English, they look for knowledge of German, followed by French with 28.4%. In renowned hotels, a large number of people speak three different foreign languages (Amiradis, 2011). Nonetheless, hotel directors have indicated that they have great difficulty in finding the right workforce with knowledge of more than one foreign language (Amiradis, 2011), which further points out the necessity of learning foreign languages for a successful career in tourism.

It has become clear that despite the dominance of English as a world language, knowledge of another language or a few of them, has become more and more important, not just in the tourism field, but within the entire economy.

However, given that the Croatian economy depends largely on tourism, a strong knowledge of other foreign languages is highly welcomed and recommended. In accordance to the above-mentioned data, most guests come from European countries, as a result, it is important to encourage language learning during all levels of education, such as, Italian and Spanish, but also to significantly enhance learning of the German language (Colic, Tomic, 2013).

When it comes to education of foreign languages in Croatia, English is introduced in kindergartens and in elementary schools. There is also offered the opportunity to choose whether they want to learn another language rather than English. On the other hand, when it comes to the importance of other foreign languages in the work place, research made by director of web page posao.hr in one Croatian company shows that the main problem is the lack of opportunities to study a foreign language. For example, there was a survey taken by employees of a company regarding their interest about knowledge of a second foreign language. Research results show that ninety-seven percent of respondents speak a foreign language, even though fifty percent have never attended a foreign language school. English is the most represented and it is spoken by 54% of respondents, followed by German with 20%, and Italian with 9%. A total of 32% of respondents were refused a job interview because of lack of knowledge of a foreign language, and 5% lost their jobs due to this. Only 12% of respondents said that the companies in which they work for, have training opportunities for foreign languages, while 90% are interested specifically for this form of language learning (Sasa Jurkovic, 2012).

METHOD

The main goal of this research paper, was to find out the interest level of extending the learning of second foreign languages across all four years, among students currently enrolled at RIT Croatia. The results were then compared with the opinions of Alumni students that participated in second foreign language classes during two years of their studies at RIT.

The instrument that was used for this research paper was a questionnaire. There were two types of questionnaires, one for students at RIT (juniors and seniors) and another one for alumni (students who graduated from the International Hospitality and Service management program at RIT within the last three years. This questionnaire was given to fifty students at RIT and sent to one hundred alumni. Only twenty-four alumni responded. We used a questionnaire employed by Brian-

na Johnson (2008.) The questionnaire was modified for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire for current RIT students was divided into three parts and almost every question had answers from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The first part of the questionnaire asked for basic information about current enrolled year at college, gender, and the language which they chose to study. The second part consisted of questions regarding the reasons for studying exactly that language. The third part was consisted of questions about their opinions for their future career and their interests in extending the learning of a second foreign language across the entire duration of their undergraduate program.

The same questions were asked in the questionnaire for alumni. The only difference was that they had to state the opinion about their level of knowledge of a second foreign language in their current careers and if they could have, would they rather have studied a second foreign language during the entire duration of their undergraduate program.

The response rate from RIT students were, fifty participants: male (20) and female (30), juniors (15) and seniors (35).

The response rate from RIT alumni were twenty-four participants: male (8) and female (16). Eight participants graduated in 2015, two in 2016, and fourteen in 2017.

RESULTS

As it was stated earlier, there were two types of questionnaires; one for current students and one for alumni. Questions in both questionnaires were almost the same. There were in total of eight questions plus two questions about year and gender. The hypothesis of this research paper was that current students want to study a second foreign language for more than two years, while the hypothesis for alumni, was that if they had a chance to have four instead of just two years of studying a second foreign language, they would say yes.

Questions analysis: (the answer could be: 1-strongly disagree till 5-strongly agree)

The first part of results are about current students:

Twenty-one of them chose Italian for their second foreign language, twenty-two of them took Spanish and seven of them took German. In the second part of the question, students could agree or disagree with various statements about reasons why they decided to choose that specific language:

Italian students mostly agreed that they chose Italian because they really wanted to study that language ($m=4.33$) and the second half of participants answered that they chose that language in order to fulfill the second foreign language requirement at RIT ($m=3.8$).

Spanish students had fairly similar responses as Italian students, one half agreed that they really wanted to study that language ($m=4.4$) and the second stated that they chose Spanish just to fulfill the requirement at RIT ($m=4.0$).

German students also agreed that they chose this language because they wanted to learn it ($m=4.2$), while other participants were mostly neutral.

When it comes to much more important questions like: "Skills in my second foreign language other than English are important for my future career?" - ($m=4.3$), forty- three of them agreed or strongly agreed, while seven of them were neutral. The next question was: "Good skill in English is enough for my future career?" ($m= 2.9$), in this question twenty-four participants, strongly disagreed or just disagreed and they did not think that English was enough, while nine of them were neutral about this fact. Others thought that it is enough and in some ways, that is surprisingly a huge number. The next question was: "The second foreign language at RIT is equally important as other courses". The average of this question was ($m=3.96$), which means that seven of them disagreed with this fact, nine of them were neutral and thirty-five of them agreed that it was as important as other courses. This shows that the majority of students think that foreign language courses are equally important to other courses.

The last question was the most important question for the entire research. The question was: "I think it would be beneficial for my future career if I had more hours of second foreign language

instruction at RIT (all 4 years)". The results were ($m=4.3$), no one disagreed or strongly disagreed, eleven participants were neutral, while thirty-nine students thought it would be really beneficial for them to have more hours of second foreign languages.

The second part of results are about alumni:

The first question for alumni was why they chose to study the foreign language that they studied.

They mostly answered that they chose to study that language, because they really wanted to study exactly that second foreign language (twenty-one of them agree) while the second biggest percentage was because they heard the teacher was good (nineteen of them agree).

When it comes to much more important questions like: "Skills in my second foreign language other than English are important for my current career?", three participants disagreed, six of them were neutral, four of them agreed, and six of them strongly agreed with that fact that knowledge of another language, besides English, is important for their current career. The next question for them was: "Good skills in English are enough for my current career?", four participants disagreed, three of them disagreed, three of them were neutral, eight of them agreed, and six of them strongly agreed.

The question after this one was: "The second foreign language at RIT is equally important as other courses". The results for this question were: one disagreed, five were neutral and eighteen strongly agreed. These numbers show that alumni also feel that it is important to study other second foreign language equally as it is important to study other courses at RIT.

The last question was: "Do you think it would be beneficial for your current career if you had had more hours of second foreign language instruction at RIT ? (all 4 years)", twenty-one participants agreed with this fact, while only three of them were neutral.

DISCUSSION

RIT has recognized the importance of learning foreign languages other than English and how much it means to students for their future career. Using all these results, it can be noticed that students know that they will need the knowledge of multiple languages for their future careers, but also a large number of them choose to learn specific languages in order to complete the college requirement or to get an easy “A”.

Mostly all questions were answered with positive agreement regarding studying a second foreign language at RIT. A large portion of the participants believe that knowledge of the second foreign language other than English will have some impact on their future career. The biggest gap was present between these two questions: English skills are enough for a future career and the second one, skills in my second foreign language other than English are important for the future career? It can be seen the average answer, amongst current student, for the first question is 3.0 which means that half of them think that is it enough to know only English but on the other hand the average for the second question is 4.3 which means that they all agreed that it is important to know another language, including English, for their future career.

For the same question, seventeen out of twenty-four alumni agreed that English is enough for their current careers but also twenty-one out of twenty-four agree that knowledge of other languages is important for their current careers.

When it comes to agreement about canceling this course from the education program almost everyone (students and alumni) disagreed with this idea.

As Christine Uber Grosse pointed out, that people mostly think that English is the most important language in today’s business world. However, they are also aware of the fact that one day, if they want to become very successful, they will need knowledge of other languages as well.

The results of this research could be beneficial for RIT and to other colleges. If they choose to extend the learning of second foreign language this will help to better results not only in that course but as Armstrong (2017.) Stated, the more hours put towards learning a second foreign language, will help students have better results in math and within their English vocabulary.

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APENDIX

1)QUESTIONNAIRE:

THE SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE (not English) INSTRUCTION IN TOURISM EDUCATION

Dear Students,

Please take a moment to complete this short questionnaire and share your opinion about learning the second foreign language (not English) at RIT. This questionnaire and your results will help me for my senior project.

Thank you,

Andrea Petrovic

Year: JUNIOR SENIOR

Your gender: FEMALE MALE OTHER

1) Which second foreign language did you choose to study at RIT? (2 years)

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Somewhat Agree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

2) I took this class because... (rate all that apply):

In order to fulfill my foreign language requirement at my university

1 2 3 4 5

I wanted to learn that language

1 2 3 4 5

I heard it was easy to get an A

1 2 3 4 5

I heard the teacher was good

1 2 3 4 5

For fun

1 2 3 4 5

Other reasons: _____

3) I wanted to study the second foreign language because...(rate all that apply):

I was interested in that language so I could communicate with a friend/family member who speaks that language

1 2 3 4 5

I wanted to go to in that country for travel or study abroad

1 2 3 4 5

That language is an important language to know in our current society

1 2 3 4 5

I wanted to be able to make friends and converse with speakers of that language

1 2 3 4 5

I like being able to communicate in a foreign language

1 2 3 4 5

It will help me to get a job and be better equipped for my future career

1 2 3 4 5

Culture of that language interested me

1 2 3 4 5

It makes me a more well-rounded person

1 2 3 4 5

3) Skills in my second foreign language other than English are important for my future career?

1 2 3 4 5

4) Good skill in English is ENOUGH for my future career?

1 2 3 4 5

5) The second foreign language at RIT is equally important as other courses.

1 2 3 4 5

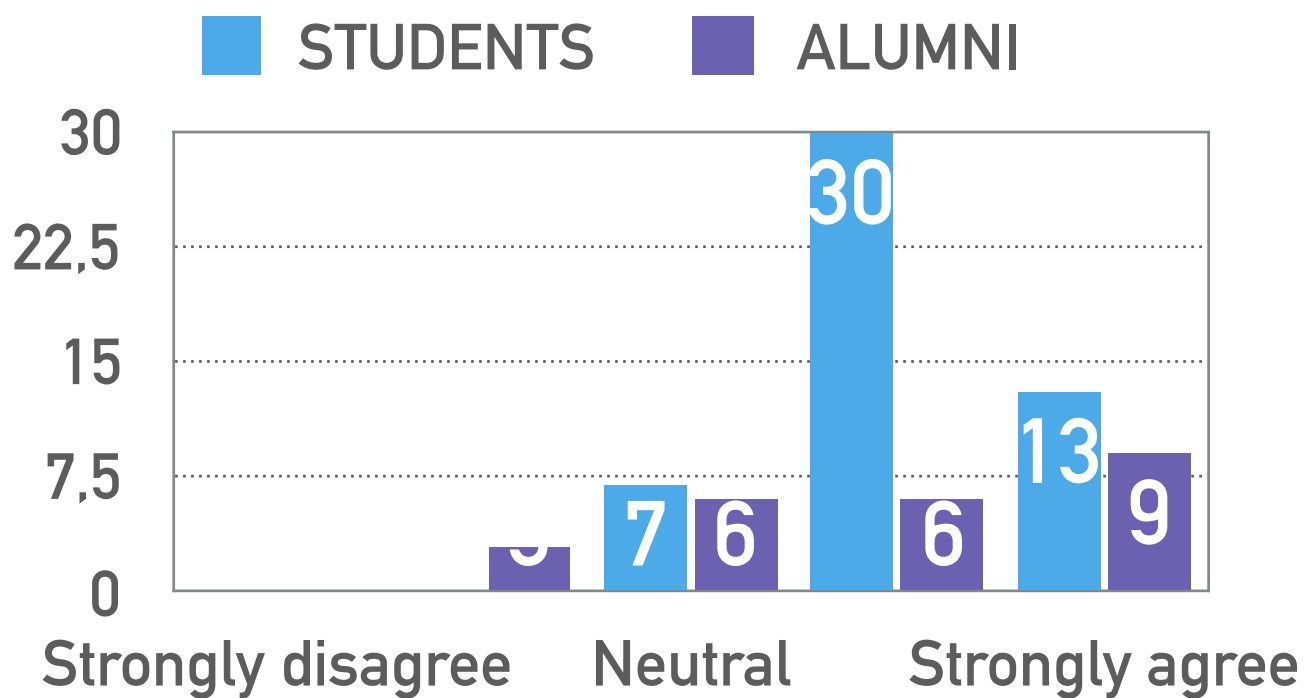
6) It would be better to cancel this course from the educational program.

1 2 3 4 5

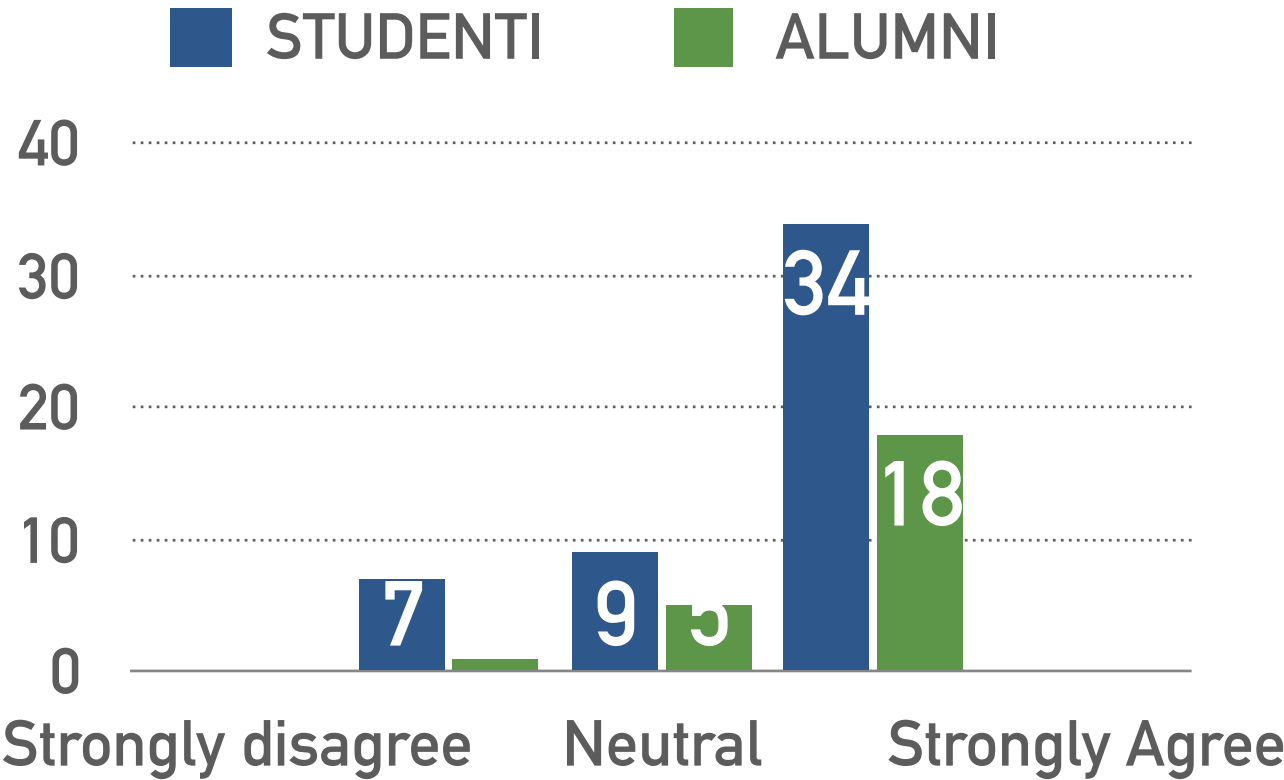
7) I think it would be beneficial for my future career if I had more hours of second foreign language instruction. (4 years)

1 2 3 4 5

GRAPH 1



GRAPH 2



GRAPH 3

