

The real need for foreign language proficiency during co-op

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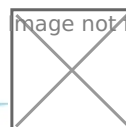


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The real need for foreign language proficiency during co-op

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SENIOR PROJECT 2020

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ABSTRACT

This research study was focused on the real need for usage of foreign languages other than English in co-op. The survey was distributed electronically to the RIT students from Dubrovnik and Zagreb campuses. Survey measures if students of RIT Croatia use foreign languages in their co-op, and if employers look for a variety of languages or only English as mandatory. After collecting survey responses, results were positive, from students' perspective, regarding the usage of English and other foreign languages, and also for the employers, who asked for the usage of those foreign languages. The variety of foreign languages gives students many opportunities to expand their knowledge and to be more successful in future business. This research project is important for the future of RIT Croatia campuses because it will give them insight into the relevance of foreign languages learned there and the usage of those languages in the real-world during co-op and in the future. Learning foreign languages is crucial if students want to communicate with others and create business and personal relationships.

KEYWORDS: *Cooperation, RIT Students, Foreign Languages, Communication*

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Many students have been listening about the importance of foreign languages for their future careers for years. From elementary school till college, teachers and professors often emphasize that languages and good communication will open many career opportunities, particularly in hospitality, and in our rapidly globalizing world. However, what actually happens when those students reach the workplace? Do they really need and use those language skills? Perhaps there is a gap between the usage of foreign languages in a career and things which are being learned in schools. The purpose of this project is really important for the future of RIT campuses because it will give them insight into the relevance of foreign languages learned there and the usage of those languages in the real-world during co-op and in the future. Learning foreign languages is crucial if people want to communicate with others and create business and personal relationships.

1. Multilingualism in the modern world

Languages were important years ago when it came to education, and today, those who know one or more foreign languages, are those who have more opportunities and advantages in the business world. English is a default language and it is mandatory in most elementary and high schools. In today's world, it becomes mandatory to know at least two languages because everything is growing fast rapidly and people need to adapt by opening as many opportunities as they can so they would be in front of the competition, for example in job hunting. That is highly possible if an individual knows more than two languages. Today, more than ever, schools are implementing the importance of having to acquire more than one foreign language regarding their students' business and private life as well. Globalization is also one of the reasons why schools are persistent in learning foreign languages and applying them later on during co-ops. Also, there is a strong connection with multilingualism and the European Union because they also pursue schools to provide their students

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with a knowledge of many languages (Božinović and Sindik, 2013). Based on a research, students who learn other foreign languages from the young age, have more positive attitudes toward academic subjects (Navarro-Villarroel, 2011). According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it was declared that the citizens of the European Union should know at least three languages, one, which is their mother tongue, and some other two, in a way that all of these languages or multilingualism in general, could become a symbol of the European Union (2001). Students have stated that their attitudes are divided into two groups of identification. The first one is mother tongue which is emotional for them, and the second one is language for communication, which refers to English usually (Todor, 2016). In the research, which was done by Cenoz (2003), it was said that multilingual individuals are better at learning new languages than bilinguals and monolinguals. Also, bilinguals are better than monolinguals when it comes to learning a new language. It is very simple, if an individual has learned two foreign languages since he was a child, he will have an advantage in communication and in expressing himself over another individual who knows only his mother tongue. Language learning strategies have high importance when it comes to the development of the student. It is important for the students to be aware of what they know and to become innovative and unique in creating a new strategy. They should create their strategy by being spontaneous and without the help of others (Božinović and Sindik, 2013). The multilingual acquisition can happen on different occasions, throughout tips and instructions in institutions or outside the institutions naturally. Also, those changes can occur in any phase of life, from childhood to adulthood (Cenoz and Genesee, 1998). “The learner’s linguistic awareness is a key variable in the acquisition processes and his/her language performance and is often related to educational background” (Božinović and Sindik, 2013). This

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quote basically sums up everything that has been said until now because education is connected with a language performance and the students must be aware of their language knowledge.

2. The need for foreign languages in a career in general and in hospitality

When learning new languages, it is important to learn some specific aspects of those cultures because it will help in creating a trustful relationship, both in hospitality and in a career in general, it will help in increasing certain values and it will help to learn a certain language in a much better and deeper way. Learning new languages and values from other cultures is a great basis for creating powerful relationships in the business world and improving communication on different levels because there is a huge cultural diversity and the best possible option is to learn new aspects and to adapt. Intercultural competence is important in creating a good, relaxing working atmosphere, and therefore, there should be an intercultural training and intercultural exchange of ideas included in it because it will bring international values and cooperation within the company and employees.

“In the process of learning a new language, it is important to be aware of its cultural aspect(s), because the knowledge of other cultures helps a learner to learn a certain language and to assess cultural values of that language.” (Ellis, 2005; Williams and Burden, 1999, in Luka, 2007, p. 4)

To be efficient in the field of hospitality and tourism industry, it is crucial to develop multilingual competence. When learning about languages, it is important to mention second language acquisition. The first language, or so-called mother tongue, is the first language that a child acquires from a young age and it has its own symbol (L1). On the other hand, the term L2 stands for second language acquisition which individuals learn throughout the life according to their preferences, for example, if the certain language is required for a certain job position, if they are moving to another country or if they are just exposed to it during their primary or secondary education, etc. (Lennartsson, 2008). Since there is a relationship between L1 and L2, researchers

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think there should be an effect of cross-linguistic transfer in language learning. It would give students more motivation and it would result in doing more researches about languages by students (Javadi-Safa, 2018). According to the research provided to U.S. University Students, the results showed that students were motivated to learn new foreign languages because it would help them in the future business opportunities (Norris, 2011). Furthermore, if an individual has a good basis in the knowledge of his mother tongue, the acquisition of the second language is supposed to be easier and better. There is also a higher possibility of getting a better quality of grammatical and syntactical knowledge regarding the quality of his native language basis.

3. Student attitudes towards foreign languages in general

In today's world, individuals should be encouraged to learn more than two languages so they could be well prepared for the future. According to Horwitz (1988), students should express their thoughts about languages to their professors, and then professors will be aware of students' satisfaction regarding certain language. Students should start learning foreign languages at a young age and that would create an opportunity to be a fluent speaker or writer one day. One of the studies done, has shown that students with negative attitudes regarding success had positive learning of English which indicated that there were some other components involved, such as self-efficacy (Martinović and Poljaković, 2010). From a young age, children adopt new languages and language values by watching cartoons or films on TV. Primary school students mostly start learning a foreign language according to their parents' wishes or simply by following their peers. As they grow up, they become aware of the importance of foreign language acquisition for different reasons. Some of them want to live or study abroad and some of them start learning foreign languages because they want to find a better job and create more opportunities for future employment. There are two levels which are important to determine in order to identify students'

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attitudes. The first one is the individual level which refers to student's academic achievement and satisfaction in learning, and the second one is the larger level, which refers to the instructional program (Saracaloglu Seda and Evin, 2000). Research done by Venesa Radić (2019) shows that while defining attitudes, it is highly important to be optimistic and positive, especially in the beginning, because it will impact the outcome and it will show better results. It was mentioned that every person is different and that every person has its own attitude which can be impacted by different perspectives and experiences. By being positive and optimistic, a person creates a more successful way of learning and being innovative. It is highly important to have a strong basis for a mother tongue because learning new languages will depend on that. Students get many opportunities while educating, to learn new languages properly and they should take as many opportunities as they can because it will only bring them prosperity in the future. The research questions for this project are if students of RIT Croatia use foreign languages in their co-op and if employers look for a variety of languages or only English as mandatory. Students should be aware of the importance of learning foreign languages because those languages give students more opportunities, and other people in general, as well.

METHOD

The main goal of this primary research paper was to find out the real need for foreign language proficiency during co-op. The survey, in Google Forms, was used as a research instrument for the data collection. The survey should have been distributed in two ways, first, at RIT Dubrovnik campus, given to students to fill it in classes, and the second way should have been sending it electronically to RIT Zagreb campus. Due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, there were a few changes made and students from both campuses received the survey electronically. The target population were students from RIT Dubrovnik and Zagreb campuses who did and will do future

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co-ops which will include the usage of foreign languages. This population was selected according to their learning knowledge in foreign languages and their experience during co-ops. As already mentioned, the survey was distributed in the same way for both campuses. Participants were students from freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior level of education who received an online version of the survey, through an e-mail, and were kindly requested to answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible. The survey was conducted electronically and there were 82 responses collected. The survey consisted of two parts. The first part had 4 questions and the second part had 5 questions. All questions were related to the students' recent co-op experiences and their usage of foreign languages in a particular job. The survey questions were not taken from the already existing surveys, in fact, the questions were created originally. The survey was created for the purpose of this research study. The measurements were based on the Likert Scale model with two main levels: level of frequency and level of agreement scale.

RESULTS

This survey was conducted in order to find out the real need for usage of foreign languages other than English in co-op. A survey was distributed electronically to the RIT students from Dubrovnik and Zagreb campuses. The purpose of this research is to find out if there is a real need for foreign language proficiency during co-op because it will give an insight into the relevance of foreign languages learned and the usage of those languages in the real-world during co-op and in the future. The response rate was 82 participants from all college levels. The survey consisted of 9 questions which were divided into two parts. The first part had 4 questions and the second part had 5 questions. All questions were related to the students' recent co-op experiences and their usage of foreign languages in a particular job. The measurements were based on the Likert Scale model with two main levels: level of frequency and level of agreement scale. Regarding the usage of

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English while communicating with customers during co-op, most of the participants, precisely 50%, answered that they were using English almost always. 15.9% of participants answered that they are using it usually during co-op. Then, 8.5% of participants answered that they were using it frequently, sometimes and occasionally. Lastly, only 2.4% of them said they were using it rarely, and 6.1% of them said they were never using it (figure 1). From this question, it is evident that English is the most commonly used foreign language during co-op. When it comes to the usage of foreign languages, other than English during co-op, the highest percentage was 18.3% where participants said that they used other languages occasionally during co-op. Below that was 17.1% where participants answered that they used other languages sometimes and almost always. The same result was for the usage of other languages never and rarely, where the percentage was 13.4%. The lowest percentage was 4.9%, where participants said they used them usually during co-op (figure 2). From this question, it is evident that the usage of foreign languages, other than English during co-op, was pretty low, much lower than it would have been expected. In regard to the third question, answers were divided. 17.3% of participants answered that they were never asked from their employer to use foreign languages. 8.6% of them were rarely asked and the lowest percentage of participants, 6.2%, were occasionally asked. 11.1% of them were sometimes asked and 16% of them were frequently asked. Lastly, 13.6% of participants said that they were usually asked and 27.2% were almost always asked, which is the highest percentage (figure 3). The question in relation to other languages had mixed answers, and some of them were Croatian which had a percentage of 7.1% of participants, then German, which was the highest percentage of 17.1%, Italian 8.6%, Spanish 12.9%, etc. (figure 4). On the Likert Scale of Agreement, 23.2% of participants answered that they strongly disagreed with the sentence. With the same percentage, 23.2%, the same number of participants answered that they agreed with the sentence. 18.3% of

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participants disagreed and 13.4% neither agreed nor disagreed. 22% of them said that they strongly agreed (figure 5). The highest percentage was 28% of participants where they answered that they strongly disagreed with the sentence. 15.9% of them said that they disagreed and 12.2% strongly agreed. 22% of them agreed and neither agreed nor disagreed with the sentence (figure 6). 20.7% of participants answered that they strongly disagreed with the sentence that using foreign languages other than English was important to them during work. 13.4% of them disagreed with the sentence and 25.6% of them neither agreed nor disagreed. 23.2% of them agreed and 17.1% of participants strongly agreed (figure 7). The next two questions were about job title and sector in which participants have worked. As to the job title, there were 66 responses. Some of them were receptionist, waiter, web developer, HR intern, student, concierge, sales representative, finance assistant, marketing assistant, hostess, pharmaceutical technician, bellboy, etc. With regard to the sector, there were 81 responses. The question was divided into 7 possible answers and the percentages were: retail sales – 6.2%, hotel – 32.1%, private accommodation – 7.4%, restaurant/café – 9.9%, transportation – 1.2%, tour guide – 1.2% and other – 42%.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to determine the real need for language proficiency during co-op. As already mentioned, there should be high awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages because they will give students, and other people as well, more opportunities. Learning foreign languages is crucial if students want to communicate with others and create business and personal relationships. After analyzing the results of the survey, students often use English during their co-ops. Their usage of other languages other than English is average, mostly they use them occasionally. When it comes to employers, they also ask their employees, in this case, students, to use foreign languages occasionally, which should be more regularly. Regarding the usage of

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languages other than English, they mostly use German, Italian, and Spanish in accordance with English. In the second part of the survey, skills in a foreign language other than English were not that important while getting hired or were not a required condition for employment, and students neither agreed nor disagreed with this sentence. It was similar to the sentence whether the supervisor emphasized the importance of using the foreign languages other than English on the job during employment. Since the answers were divided, the conclusion was that students did not agree nor disagree. Lastly, the usage of foreign languages other than English was important for most of the students. Students who learn foreign languages quickly, are not those who are easily adapted to learning new languages, but those who have variety of positive characteristics, such as optimism, high motivation and will, who have plans and are oriented toward future success. Professors should apply these characteristics in teaching their courses and in that way will motivate students even more to engage themselves in learning (Vahedi, 2011). Regarding the job title and sector, the highest percentage of students worked in a hotel and in other segments which were not titled in the survey. Most frequent job titles were at a front desk, waiter/waitress, and assistant. While analyzing the respondents' results, the researcher concluded that the responses from the participants did not achieve the expected results because they were not positive and encouraging enough. The findings of this research paper can be useful for the future of RIT campuses because it will give them insight into the relevance of foreign languages learned there and the usage of those languages in the real-world during co-op and in the future. While respondents' answers were average, that does not mean that other students have the same experiences during recent co-ops. Since the participants were only RIT Croatia students, results cannot be valid for all hospitality students from other colleges. A survey was distributed electronically through e-mail and maybe questions could have been better explained in-person to students while completing the survey.

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There would be more responses as well if the survey was given in-person to students at the Dubrovnik campus and electronically to students at the Zagreb campus. For the near future, it would be really interesting to research how students react if supervisors do not care about the usage of foreign languages and if students suggest some changes and improvements.

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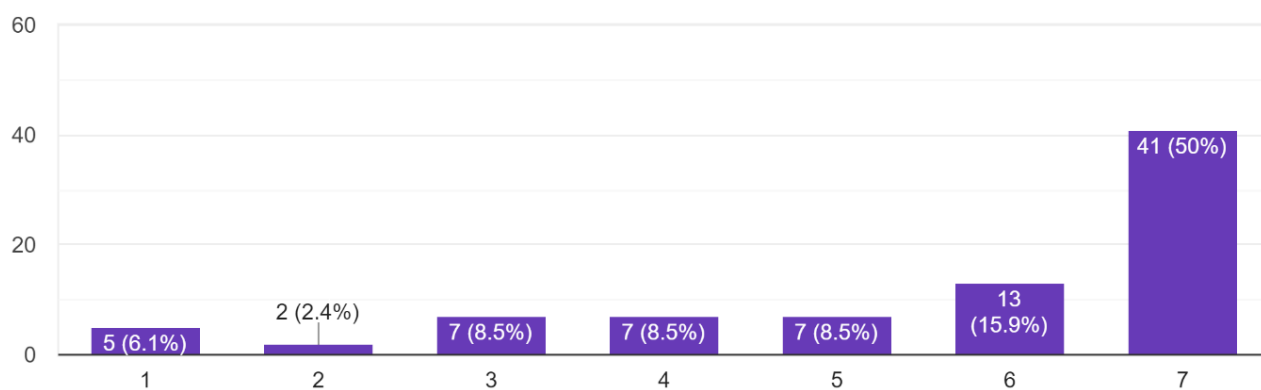
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APPENDIX A

Figure 1

1. How often did you use English to communicate with customers or co-workers in your Co-op?

82 responses

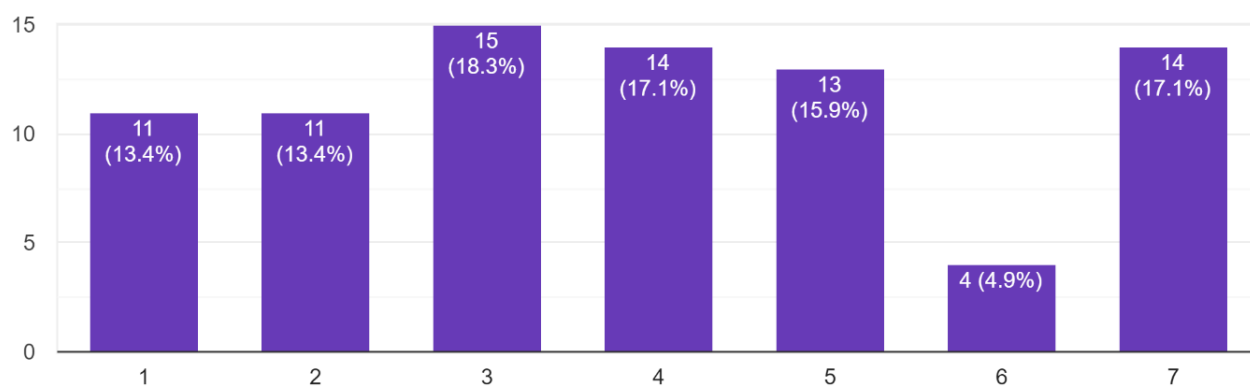


APPENDIX A

Figure 2

2. How often did you use other languages than English in your Co-op?

82 responses

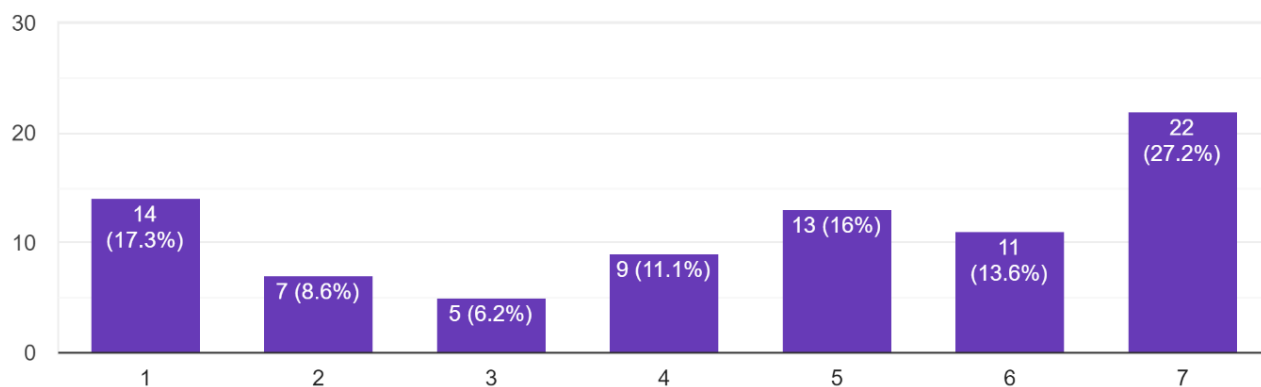


APPENDIX A

Figure 3

3. How often did your employer ask from you to use foreign languages?

81 responses

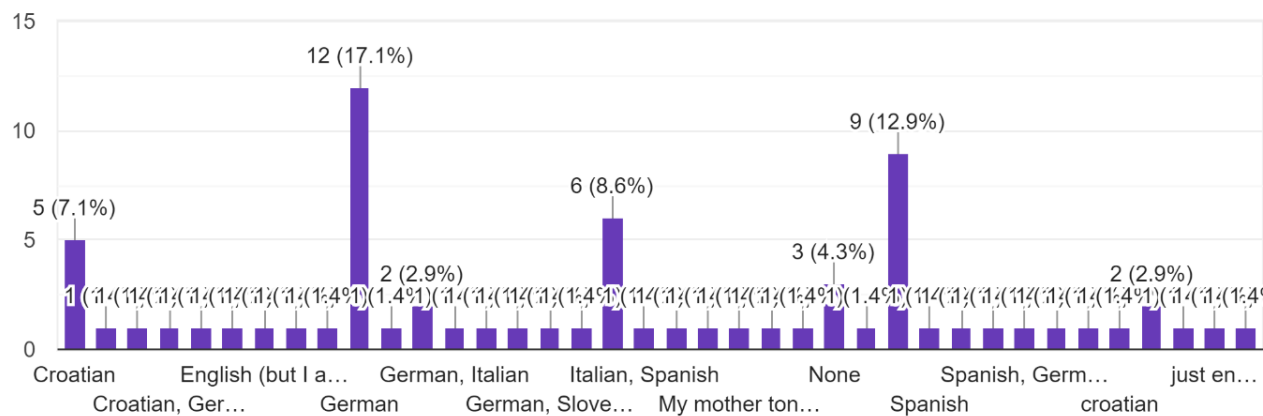


APPENDIX A

Figure 4

4. Which other languages did you use in your Co-op?

70 responses

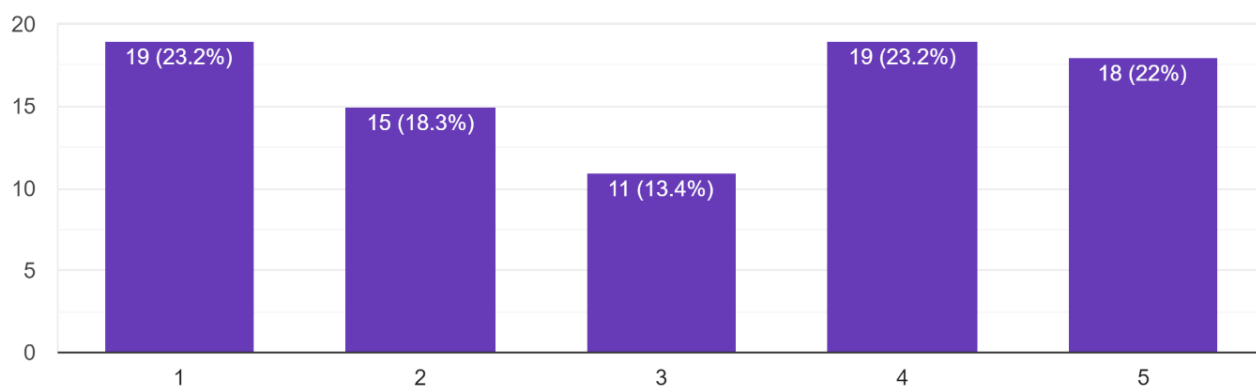


APPENDIX A

Figure 5

My skill in a foreign language(s) other than English was an important factor in my getting hired or a required condition of my employment.

82 responses

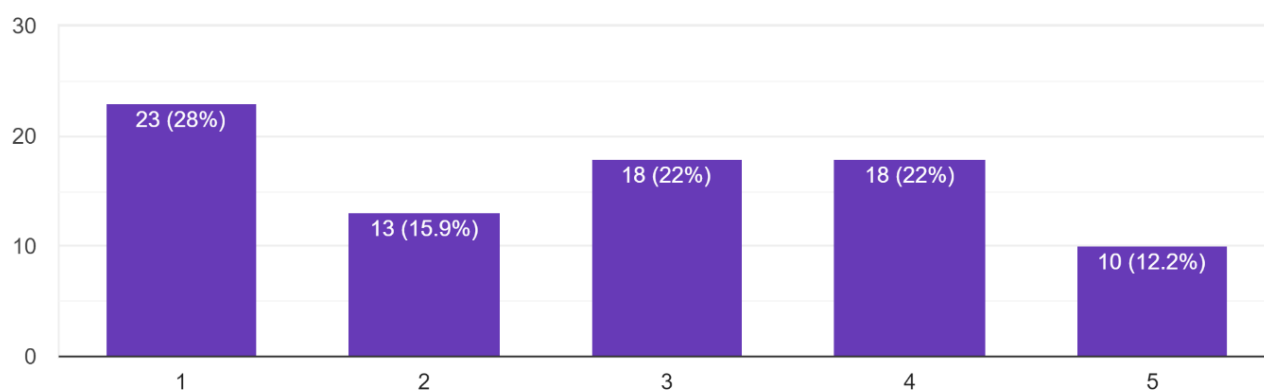


APPENDIX A

Figure 6

My supervisor emphasized the importance of using foreign languages other than English on the job during my employment.

82 responses

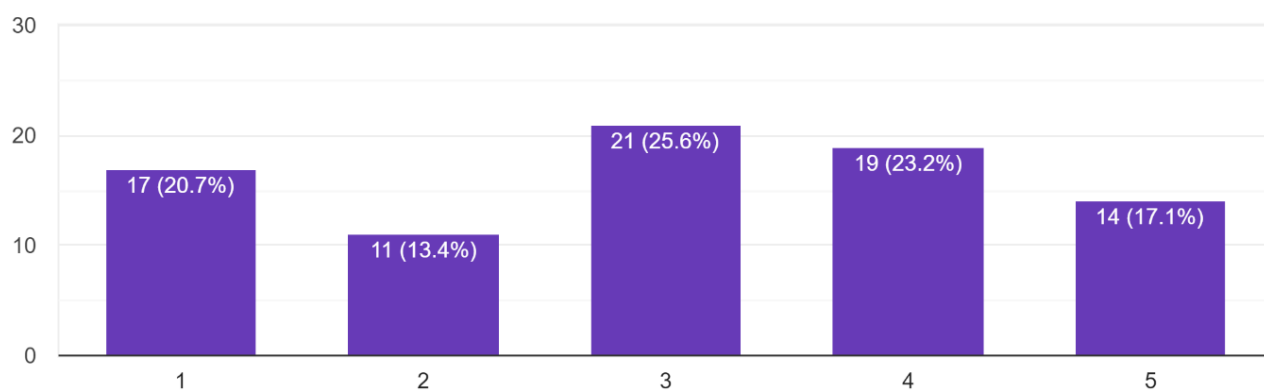


APPENDIX A

Figure 7

Using foreign languages other than English was important to me during my work.

82 responses



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APPENDIX B

Please take a moment to remember and think about your most recent co-op experience, and your use of foreign languages on that job.

1. How often did you use English to communicate with customers or co-workers in your Co-op?

Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Almost always
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2. How often did you use other languages than English in your Co-op?

Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Almost always
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3. How often did your employer ask from you to use foreign languages?

Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Almost always
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4. Which other languages did you use in your Co-op? _____

Agree or disagree on a 5-point scale with the following statements.

My skill in a foreign language(s) other than English was an important factor in my getting hired or a required condition of my employment.

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Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
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Using foreign languages other than English was important to me during my work.

Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
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Job title: _____

Sector:

- ☐ Retail sales
- ☐ Hotel
- ☐ Private accommodation
- ☐ Restaurant/café
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Tour guide
- ☐ Other