

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON MULTILINGUALISM FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN TOURISM SECTOR.

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### Abstract

Racial diversity is one of the important factors contributing to multilingualism in Malaysia. The uniqueness of each language carries distinctive values that should be embraced by everyone. However, language differences might contribute to language barrier and misunderstanding due to limited knowledge of the cultural background. This is one of the biggest hindrances encountered by tourists while travelling overseas for business or casual purposes. The ability to speak more than two or more languages is considered an advantage to those who work in tourism sector. The act of mastering various languages may help to reduce communication problems. This may lead to more opportunities on career advancement in tourism sector. Hence, the aim of this research is to investigate the perception of Tourism and Hospitality students at Politeknik Merlimau regarding the importance of multilingualism in two different aspects for better job opportunities; recreational tourism and business tourism. The linguistic landscape framework is used in the instrument to justify the rationale of tourism aspects. A survey form was distributed to 100 students of Tourism and Hospitality at Politeknik Merlimau with 84 feedbacks gained from the respondents later. It can be concluded that most of the respondents agree to the importance of multilingualism in tourism sector. However, they need extra force to make it into practice during their studies, especially mastering English Language as the Lingua Franca.

**Keywords:** *Multilingualism, Tourism, Career Advancement.*

## **Introduction**

Tourism industry has been a serious business all around the world for decades. Malaysia became the country with the highest number of foreign tourists in Southeast Asia with the arrival of 26 million tourists from January to November 2023 (KOSMO!, 2023). This trend has resulted to the economic growth of the country itself as RM71.3 bilion was gained from the arrival of tourists on the same year (Times, 2024). The rising number of tourists in Malaysia gives significant impact in job creation and better career advancement in tourism sector. Industries related to hotels, tourism spots, culinary and local cuisines are booming and the popularity of these industries has impacted the choice of tertiary education whereby courses like Tourism and Hospitality is one of the high-demand courses in Malaysia. Hence, multilingualism is practiced in a group of people with a mixture of languages and mother tongues.

### **1. Problem Statement**

Generally, the Malaysian are used to more than one language in their daily lives as the majority of the citizens are the Malays, Chinese and Indians with their respective mother tongues. In addition to language learning and career advancement, they have to master English Language as a global language. The uniqueness of these mother tongues may contribute to language barrier and confusion due to the lack of cultural background information by the tourists. Hence, this research is done to identify the amount of practice in multilingualism among the Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality students at Politeknik Merlimau. This study is focused on the factors that influence multilingualism and the outcome for that practice, either positive or negative.

### **2. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are:

- i. To investigate the factor of multilingualism among Tourism and Hospitality students at Politeknik Merlimau.
- ii. To identify the impact of multilingualism for Tourism and Hospitality students at Politeknik Merlimau.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **4.1 Multilingualism:**

Multilingualism is defined according to two significant Latin words namely "multi" that connotes many, and "lingua" that connotes language. Hence, the exact elaboration of the word "multilingualism" is the power to converse in several languages in order to express oneself but it does not necessarily imply that the speakers in that community are equal or having native-like competency while speaking (Gorter, 2007). The community is considered multilingual as long as they are able to convey and comprehend using more than two languages in a conversation. This ability is an advantage as it may improve the quality of services provided. These services are mostly related to multiple industries, specifically in tourism and hospitality. It opens the door for vast international business ventures in this highly competitive world.

Besides, communication and transparency are crucial to gain customers' trust and expand the business in tourism sector (Žerajić, 2020). The tourists demand clarity and accuracy while communicating as it is part of the effective marketing strategies. Better language skills mean better service qualities (Žerajić, 2020). Hence, some of the vacancies offer lucrative salaries with extra benefits to those who practiced more than just two languages, especially with good English Language command.

#### **4.2 Linguistic landscape framework:**

Previous researchers have proven that the factor of being multilingual is by having spatial patterns of linguistic landscapes. Linguistic landscape is defined as a combination of two or more languages within a linguistic environment of an administrative area which includes road signs, billboards, name of places, shop signs, and signs in government buildings (Abdullah & Wulung, 2021). There are four purposes of the linguistic landscape, including informational, symbolic, mythological, and commercial (Abdullah & Wulung, 2021). Informational is aimed to deliver messages using a dominant language to indicate services provided in that area. Symbolic is aimed to recognize language users and residents. Mythological is aimed to identify the cultural heritage or unique background of the community and commercial is aimed for promotional purposes of tourist areas and products while using the language. These purposes lead to recreational and business tourism that influence the tourists interests to visit certain area for a smooth sailing journey since it helps them to understand the area better. Furthermore, some tourists would love to have more challenging and authentic experiences whereby the mother tongue is used to welcome them in the best way to feel the cultural and heritage values of a distinct area (Žerajić, 2020). Thus, the hospitality worker who can speak both English and foreign language fairly good will be more likely to be hired by the employer. Students of hospitality programme, like

Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality students at Politeknik Merlimau, will benefit a lot for mastering English and foreign languages. This helps students to build their own career professions and increase employability growth in the future.

#### **4. Research Methodology and Instrument**

The research design in this survey is mix method; combining both quantitative and qualitative study. The online survey form was created as the method of quantitative study. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interviews were conducted as the method of qualitative study. The purpose of combining both qualitative and quantitative method is to get better insight of a research problem or issue rather than focusing on one research approach. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms by the help of other English lecturers as the mediator for English 3 classes involved for Session II: 2023/2024. Likert Scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was used for the questionnaire. There were 3 sections included in the questionnaire: Demographic Information (Section 1), The Factor of Multilingualism (Section 2) and The Impact of Multilingualism (Section 3). The instrument used to display the result of mean and standard deviation is SPSS version 27. Besides, the semi-structured interview was done with two students from the same department.

#### **5. Population and Samplings**

This research focused on the Tourism and Hospitality students at Politeknik Merlimau who took Communicative English 3 subject in Session II: 2023/2024. The method used is simple random samplings whereby each individual in the population among Semester 5 students in Tourism and Hospitality department has equal opportunity to be selected as the respondent. A total of 84 samplings have responded to the questionnaire given out of the overall populations which is 100 students. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the number of samplings is adequate since the real number of samplings are more than the minimum of 100(N), which is 80. Hence, all data has been recorded in SPSS version 27.

#### **6. Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted among 18 respondents of the same department which is DHF3A students. The result of Cronbach's Alpha is very important in order to measure the reliability of each item used in the questionnaire. The reliability test included 2 major sections which are Section 2 (6 questions) and Section 3 (13 questions). The result is presented as follows:

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.929	19

*Table 1: The Result of Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics*

Based on Table 1, the result of Cronbach's Alpha showed as 0.929. According to Goforth, 2015, the reliability level of the items is high and consistent. Hence, the instrument can be used for further research data collection. After the pilot test, the online questionnaire was distributed to all targeted samplings and 84 responses were tabulated using SPSS version 27.

## 7. Data Analysis

### 7.1 Demographic Analysis

NO.	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Gender:		
	Male	29	34.5
	Female	55	65.5
2.	Class:		
	DCC 5A-1	17	20.2
	DCC5A-2	14	16.7
	DHF 5A-1	17	20.2
	DHF 5A-2	9	10.7
	DEV 5A	8	9.5
	DUP 5A-1	8	9.5
	DUP5A-2	11	13.1
3.	Race:		
	Malay	77	91.7
	Chinese	1	1.2
	Indian	5	6.0
	Others	1	1.2
4.	Age:		
	19-25 years old	79	94.0
	26-30 years old	5	6.0

*Table 2: Demographic Analysis.*

Table 2 shows the result of demographic analysis for the respondents involved in this research. There are 4 background information gathered; Gender, Class, Race and Age of the respondents. Majority of respondents were female, which is 65.5%, rather

than the male, which is 34.5%. Besides, students majoring in Culinary Arts and Halal Food department (DCC and DHF) have outnumbered the other majors in answering the questionnaire since the percentages shown as 36.9% and 30.9% respectively. The result is influenced by the amount of students' intake each semester and the intake for DCC and DHF students are the highest compared to the Event and Tourism Management (DEV and DUP) in Tourism and Hospitality Department at Politeknik Merlimau. Moreover, Malay students were the dominant respondents, which is 91.7%, followed by Chinese and Indian students (1.2%) and most were aged between 19 and 25 (94%).

## 7.2 Analysis on the Factor of Multilingualism.

NO.	ITEMS	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
1.	Social media.	4.43	0.72
2.	Peers.	4.17	0.74
3.	Learner's motivation.	4.15	0.80
4.	Family.	4.15	0.72
5.	Community.	4.02	0.74
6.	Learner's habit.	3.93	0.80

*Table 3: The Factor of Multilingualism.*

As stated in Table 3, most of the respondents agree that there are several factors contribute to multilingualism. The factors are the influence of social media, family, peers, community, learners' motivation and habits. This can be seen by the high mean score within the range of 3.93 and 4.43 as stated in the table. This result is supported by a previous research related to the attitude of multilingual Malaysian students which informed that the level of motivation and socio-demographic background greatly influence the respondents' attitude towards multilingualism (Kärchner-Ober, 2012). Hence, these factors can be simplified as two affective factors in motivation which are extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation refers to the participation of external forces to make ones feel motivated like the influence of social media, family, peers and community. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation refers to the inner force or self-rewarding feelings like the learners' own motivations and habits, which affect the multilingualism setting as a whole.

## 8.3 Analysis on the Impact of Multilingualism.

NO.	ITEMS	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
1.	Enhance communication skills.	4.33	0.70
2.	Better job opportunities.	4.25	0.83
3.	Good relationships.	4.24	0.86
4.	The best ecotourism destination in the world.	4.19	0.78
5.	Better international work opportunities.	4.15	0.72
6.	Better cognitive abilities in tourism.	4.14	0.81
7.	Portrays civilization.	4.14	0.73
8.	Open-mindedness.	4.13	0.89
9.	Higher salary potential.	4.08	0.87
10.	Promotes nautical tourism.	4.08	0.78
11.	Preserve identity.	4.07	0.92
12.	Huge language barriers.	3.80	1.08
13.	Hinders preservation of mother tongue.	3.40	1.19

*Table 4: The Impact of Multilingualism.*

Based on the distributed questionnaire, there are two major factors of multilingualism which are recreational tourism and business tourism. Recreational tourism can be defined as an activity related to travelling and staying for not more than one consecutive year for enjoyment when one is not working (Ragoonaden, 2016). To some extent, the involvement in sports or cultural event are also considered recreational activities as the activities are done for leisure and informal learning. These elements parallel to two purposes of linguistic landscapes which are symbolic and mythological because the framework emphasizes on relaxation while travelling.

Besides, business tourism is defined as all business-related travel arrangements from different countries that includes conferences, exhibitions, trainings and development seminars. This kind of tourism activity involves income generation that

reflects to the other two purposes of linguistic landscapes which are informational and commercial. It is because the framework emphasizes on advertising tourism areas by using special dominant languages understood by both speakers and listeners which will make the tourist feel welcomed and comfortable to repeat the trip at some other time and promote to others to come and experience the same.

According to Table 4, Item 1, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 13 are clustered in recreational tourism because all items involved with leisure activities most of the time. The mean score of the items are all high within the range of 3.40 to 4.33 based on the Interpretation Score Reading (Moidunny, 2009). The respondents agree that multilingualism helps to inculcate good values as a citizen of Malaysia with different racial ethnicity. The good values highlighted here are open-mindedness with first-class mindsets, building good self-character and improve public relation skills in communication and relationships. This reading is supported by the responses during the semi-structured interviews whereby the respondents agree that three important languages to be mastered are English, Malay and Mandarin Language in Malaysia. Learning different languages make the citizen capable of accepting each other harmoniously and promotes Malaysia as a country with full of social and cultural values. However, there are concerns when most of the respondents believe that multilingualism may create huge language barriers among the citizens and hinders preservation of mother tongue as the mean for this item is the lowest of the low. Hence, mastering English Language should come together with empowering the significant value of mother tongue as it brings uniqueness in culture and racial diversity.

Other than that, item 2, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 on Table 4 are categorized in business tourism because all items are related to job recruitment and career advancement. The mean score of the items are all high within the range of 4.08 to 4.25 based on the Interpretation Score Reading (Moidunny, 2009). The respondents agree that multilingualism promotes Malaysia as one of the best destinations to be visited in which may generate the country's profit and create more job opportunities. The linguistic landscape of dominant languages itself has the power to attract visitors to come and visit Malaysia. Besides, the interviewed respondents accept the importance of being multilingual in tourism sector as mastering English and one more language than the mother tongue makes them feel confident and prepared to be employed in the real tourism sector.

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research answered two of its objectives. The first objective conforms most of the tourism and hospitality students are influenced by their family and surroundings in practicing multilingualism in their daily lives. The second objective also shows that multilingualism gives positive impact to the future and career advancement of the tourism and hospitality students. The positivity can be seen



through the cultural and heritage attractions whereby language is one of the prominent factors. It enhances communication skills and open-mindedness among the citizen that creates comfortable bonding with the tourists. However, multilingualism should be controlled to not just mastering the English Language as the Lingua Franca. The third language like Mandarin language should be practiced to lessen the language barriers. As a result, empowering English Language is a must while mastering the third language to create a balanced and harmony community.

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