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Task-Based Language Learning Toolkit for Tourism
**„TBL 4 TOURISM | Innovative foreign
language teaching methods in VET as
support to tourism sector” Project**
Task 1.1: Field research and state-of-the-art
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Partners



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1. Introduction

The TBL 4 Tourism project partners have successfully completed the first set of activities within Project Result 1 - TBL tasks for tourism. In particular, these activities included the desk research and the field research, based on the previously defined research parameters and criteria.

The aim of Project Result 1 pursued by all project partners has been to define the needs of VET providers and learners and in particular to identify key vocational careers / jobs in the tourism and catering sector that can benefit most from this project. The purpose of the state-of-the-art is to create a base of information that will support the design of a taxonomy of vocation-specific competencies, and the ensuing series of target tasks through which to develop such competences.

This Project result is based on extensive field-work research in each of the project partners' home countries: working through months one and two of the project, the partners completed extensive desk research and conducted a large number of interviews with experts in the field, taking the first important step towards accomplishing the overall goal of Project Result 1 stated in Project Plan, i.e. 'a comprehensive identification of jobs in tourism as well as needs analysis and identification of series of target tasks'.

One area of differentiation is the involvement of a UK-based project partner operating in a context in which English is the predominant first language, and the majority of workers within the tourism and hospitality sector have English as their first language. However, even though these numbers have dwindled due to the impact of Brexit and working visa-related issues, there are still a number of people working within the UK tourism sector whose first language is not English. As such, there have been some useful insights to be gleaned from these desk research and interviews, too,

Considering the depth and scope of the activities and also knowing that the period of the desk research and the expert interviews coincided for the most part with the summer tourist season, the importance of this initial step can hardly be overestimated in the light of the recent developments in the industry and the ensuing state-of-the-art analysis of the key areas. There can be no doubt that the result of this stage of the project will have a strong long-term positive effect on the overall project result.

This Summary Report therefore aims to provide an overview of the key findings obtained through the research conducted by all partner countries.

Starting from the overview of the desk research sources and profile of experts involved in the interviews, the key findings are presented in the order starting from more general ones

(conclusions about the tourism and catering industry), leading to the more specific (types of jobs and tasks within the jobs that could benefit from innovative Eft training).

Finally, the makes recommendations regarding the course of action for the further steps in project development.

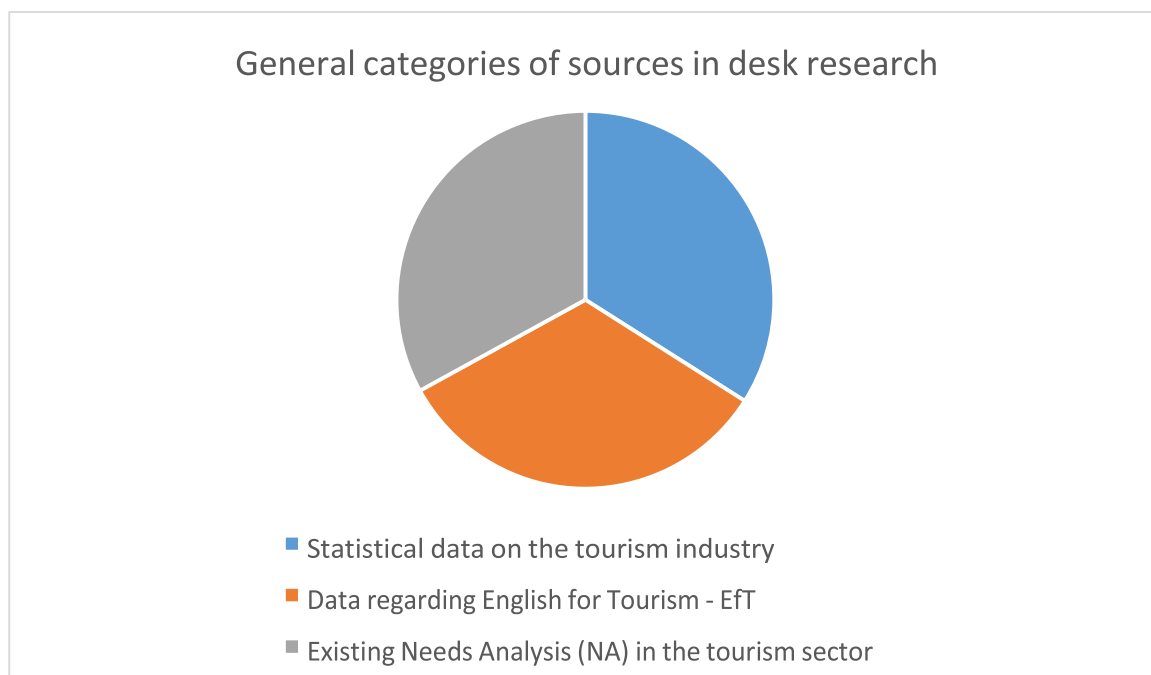
2. Desk research – type of sources and areas covered

2.1 Sources used in the desk research

The partners used a methodical approach in selecting the sources, which can be grouped into three broad categories:

1. Statistical data on the tourism industry
2. Characteristics and issues re. 'English for Tourism' (Eft)
3. Existing NA research in the tourism sector

An overview of the broad categories of the desk research is illustrative of the wide scope of the research conducted by the project partners:



At the same time, it is possible to categorise the sources according to the issuing authority / authors. It can be argued that this kind of a detailed breakdown of the sources reveals the depth of the analysis, spanning the reports, plans and statistics from the highest European and national levels, all the way to articles, publications and papers dealing with relevant aspects of the problem space area.



Apart from the common sources, there were ones used by a single partner, contributing to the reach and depth of the overall analysis.

2.2 Areas covered by desk research

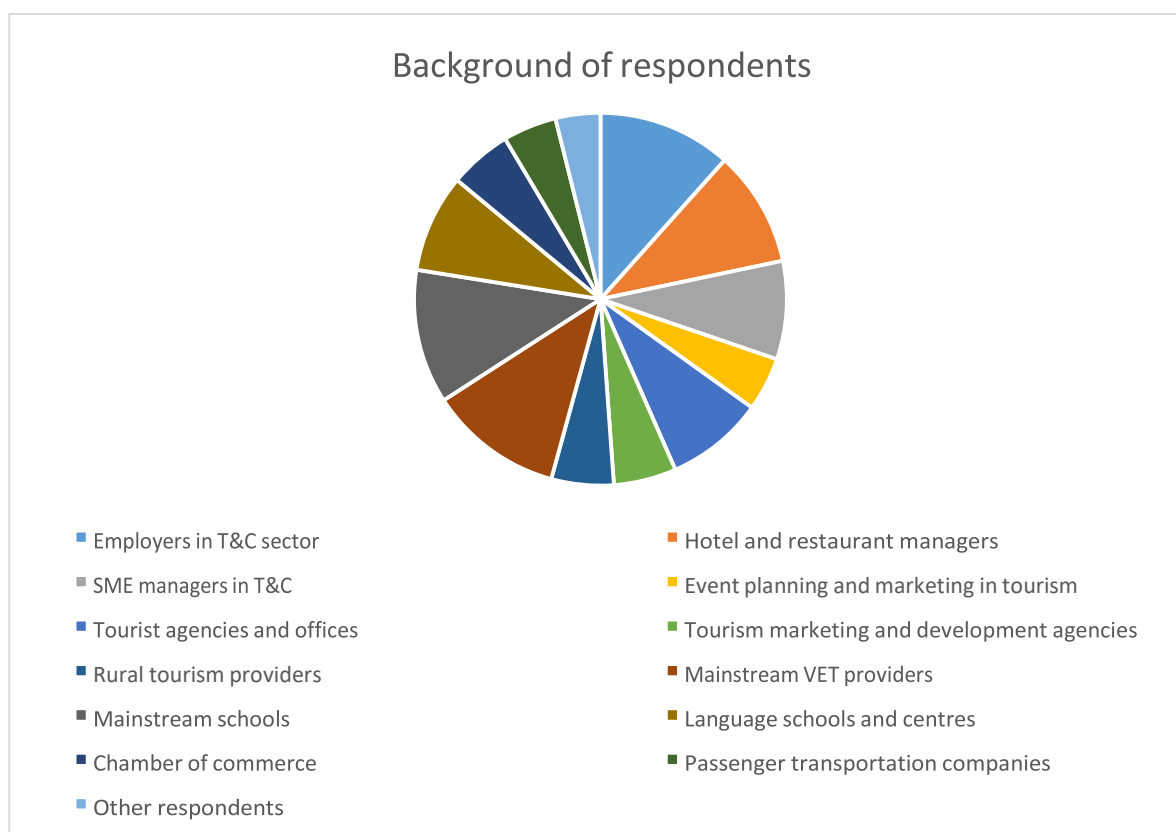
Among other things, the areas covered by the desk research included:

- a) Analysis of the current state in the tourism and catering sector, including strategies for further development and post-Covid strategies
- b) Analysis of jobs in the tourism and catering sector
- c) Analysis of competences of staff in tourism and catering, as well as their competences
- d) Study of mainstream and informal opportunities and training providers for EfT
- e) Study of institutions that can support innovative teaching practices

The extensive range of sources explored by the partners and the overlap of relevant information collected in the process have helped to grasp the current situation and assess the long-term predictions regarding the future developments in the tourism. Within this broad setting, the findings have also helped to define the profile of employees, jobs and tasks in which EfT is used.

3. Expert interviews – profile of respondents and areas covered

The project partners conducted a large number of expert interviews with respondents from diverse backgrounds, greatly contributing to the relevance of collected information. The following chart shows the diversity of backgrounds of the respondents who took part in the expert interviews.



The reports composed by project partners reflect a high level of motivation of the experts to contribute to the project, both at this early stage and later on, in its more advanced stages.

4. Main conclusions about tourism and catering industry revealed through desk research and expert interviews

- Tourism and catering remains a highly important sector in the economies of each of the project countries, but also other countries in Europe.
- The tourism industry is on the increase – the number of tourists in different regions is growing, the infrastructures are continuing to be developed and the number of employees in the sector is on the increase.
- There are national and regional strategies for the development of tourism in place in all of the countries where the research was conducted, typically with a clear connection on wider regional and the pan-European level.
- Post-Covid recovery is not only directed towards returning to the old practices, but also to developing new and innovative products and services.
- Tourism remains a hugely important source of employment, especially for VET staff – in fact it sustains a vast number of jobs in each of the partner countries and regions.
- The sector is very important for employers – for large employers and SMEs / entrepreneurs as well – but also it's very important for other sectors, too. Tourism drives people to a particular place/region, and this leads to their interaction with companies in the retail and leisure sectors, too. As such, tourism is a huge driving force for economic growth.
- For the staff working in tourism there is a very similar set of skills that is the standard requirement, irrespective of the region.
- Needs analysis reveals similar gap in competences for staff working in the tourism and catering sector.
- In many cases, there are indications of opportunities to secure institutional support for innovative EfT teaching and training models.
- There is also a growing shift away from just increasing visitor numbers in the tourism sector to improving the experience of tourists and focusing more on developing stronger ties between tourists and the local community.
- Moreover, and again this is more from a UK perspective, but the focus is not necessarily just on being able to use English as a first language in the tourism sector, but for native English speakers to be more confident in communicating with those from around the world whose first language is not English, and whose English levels might not be very high. This brings into focus the importance of not just linguistic skills, but also interpersonal skills e.g. active listening, clarification of meaning etc which underpin effective international communication.

5. Profile of employees in the tourism industry, types of jobs and tasks that require Eft

An important part of the desk research analysis, supported by feedback from experts in the field centered around the jobs in the tourism and catering sector for which a working knowledge of English was the most important, but also for whom there is the greatest need for the additional training in Eft.

Here the desk research and the expert interviews focused on the relative number of employees in respective occupations, as well as the relative need for adequate competence in Eft.

A comparative overview of the obtained results reveals a significant overlap among the studies conducted by the partners, with the following professions making the ‘top ten’ list:

| | Job/ occupation |
|----|--|
| 1 | Waiter / head waiter |
| 2 | Receptionist |
| 3 | Tour guide / Tourist guide |
| 4 | Concierge |
| 5 | Info- point staff |
| 6 | Entertainment staff |
| 7 | Medical/ treatment staff in Spa and Wellness |
| 8 | Social media manager |
| 9 | Bus driver / Taxi driver |
| 10 | Ticket seller / taxi telephone operator |

The above list also shows the order of professions with the largest estimated need for additional training in English for Tourism (Eft): the partners overwhelmingly conclude that the job of the waiter/ head waiter comes first, followed closely by the receptionist and then the tour guide and other roles. This was evident not just across our European partners where English is the second language spoken, but also in the UK, where a large degree of migrant labour is used for positions such as receptionists and waiters.

6. Level of EfT competences, motivation and accessibility of end users

Despite the fact that two or three of the jobs appear as the most important in terms of need for additional training, in virtually all of the interviews, it was emphasized that ‘the great majority of tourist-related jobs require a working knowledge of English’ (although interviews with UK partners also stressed the importance of either understanding other foreign languages, or being able to better ‘grade’ their English to better communicate with foreign tourists). All of the partners report that even in positions where they felt this knowledge was not so essential, such as in travel agencies for example, it turned out that that even travel agents will need to use English to contact the major tour operators. Similar instances have been provided for other occupations as well.

In line with this, the types of tasks where the working knowledge of English is perceived as essential varies considerably. For a more detailed overview, it is by all means advisable to refer to the respective national reports. Therefore, the following list provides a summary of responses, i.e. the following tasks were identified as the most important within the selected jobs:

- Receiving food and drinks orders, providing information about food and drinks in a restaurant
- Receiving guests and seeing guests off (check-in, check-out) providing information about the hotel facilities
- Responding to (typical) complaints and queries in a restaurant and/or hotel - Answering questions and providing information on different aspects of local tourist offer
- Explaining aspects of local/ national culture, customs and tradition
- Providing information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis, coordination with travel organisers,
- Providing information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping
- Answering telephone queries about local tourist offer, including accommodation, food, local trips
- Participation in tourism fairs and promotional events, B-2-B meetings
- Presenting and selling services and products of local tourism
- Receiving passengers and selling tickets

The above list of functions is mainly based on the role-specific situations and tasks that have emerged as relevant in the expert interviews. On the other side, there are also other nonrole-specific functions that need to be fulfilled in these jobs, as outlined through interviews with managers in these particular industries that oversee waiters/receptionists using English in their day-to-day roles. This includes clarifying meaning and checking understanding, but also demonstrating active listening, and demonstrating politeness through the use of certain functional language, as well as other certain linguistic and interpersonal functions.

The research also showed that there are a number of factors that impact on the perceived difficulty of the task. As an illustration, the SLB report concludes that for the receptionists, cognitive factors that were considered key here, include:

- Number of elements involved (e.g. dealing with a single overbooking versus a multiple case)
- Familiarity (e.g. an everyday complaint versus a more unusual case such as an accident)
- Proximity/steps (e.g. directing clients to a nearby location versus directing clients to a distant one, with multiple steps involved such as different forms of transport).

Similar analysis will definitely be useful as the next step in elaborating the nature of the communicative challenges faced by the end users of the TBL 4 Tourism training course.

The motivation for training was assessed as very high, both among the end users (students/trainees) and the target groups of teachers. However, it is not expected that the dissemination of the innovative teaching programme will progress along a straight line, due to a number of obstacles that will have to be overcome.

7. Target group of teachers and institutional support

In this phase of the research, the project partners also defined the relevant stakeholders within the target groups of teachers and the institutions involved in provision of EfT teaching and training.

These associated partners are expected to play an important role in the further development of the project result and subsequent dissemination activities, ultimately aiding to the overall impact of the project.



On the other side, the partners also conclude that there are a number of factors that can have a deterring impact on the implementation of the project result. The following conclusion from the SLB report echoes the shared feeling:

“In general, we have found language training to be slightly isolated from the main vocational training that these institutions offer. In some cases, e.g. Euroaula, the main focus of language classes is on preparing for Cambridge exams rather than directly helping students with the language skills they might need for specific vocational tasks. Our project may ruffle feathers to the extent that we are implying that this is an inadequate approach, because TBLT essentially combines language training with task training.”

At the same time, the same report proposes a solution that is likely to work well in every national or – indeed – local setting:

“So we think the challenge will be to find directors of studies who are open-minded enough to not only permit their teachers to try out our methods, but to adopt them at an institutional level.”

These views are echoed by research conducted by York Associates who have carried out a large array of teacher development programmes with language teachers worldwide. Whilst it makes perfect sense for language teachers to play an active role in the promotion of these project’s outputs, there is a sense of disconnect between those working as language teachers in the private sector with those working in vocational education, and whether both stakeholders have the complete set of skills to implement such a project to a wider audience. The greatest challenge will be in integrating language training into a more holistic approach towards vocational education through the implementation of a task-based learning approach.

8. Conclusion

The desk research and the expert interviews conducted by the project partners in months one and two of the project have yielded valuable state-of-the-art that transcends the local or national scene. At the same time, the findings obtained in the process provide key guidance for the following activities and remain a valuable source of reference for the entire duration of the project and its final results.

The principal aims of the project task have been fulfilled: collectively, the analysis conducted by the partners has pinpointed the job of the waiter as the target profession to focus on in the following steps. Jobs of the receptionist and several other jobs involving direct communication with customers have also been identified as very important.

In addition, a relevant list of tasks performed by employees in these jobs has been outlined, together with difficulties that typically accompany communication in such situations.

In performing the analysis, the partners have paid special attention to the levels of motivation of the prospective learners and the possible hindrances in implementing the TBL4T training course.

Last but not least, a promising base has been created for further collaborative work with associate partners in all of the partner countries, with an aim to maximise the potential and impact of the TBL4T training course.

The next task within the current project phase are the focus groups interviews. It is recommended that this task be performed in two steps:

- a) Step one would be to conduct surveys using a template prepared by SLB as the subject matter experts, focusing on the exact area of problem space definition
- b) Step two will then be the elaboration of the findings through focus group interviews

In this way, the principle of gradual deepening and narrowing of the focus in the Needs Analysis will be consistently applied.

In addition to this, it seems vitally important to continue developing the collaboration with the associate partners in all the partner countries. This will no doubt be done through the work evolving around the focus groups, but also in the more general dissemination activities in the forthcoming period.

It is worth noting that all of the national reports emphasise the importance of institutional support that needs to be secured within the following months of the project.