

# **EVALUATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF TOURIST GUIDE CANDIDATES SHARES ABOUT FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

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**Abstract:** When the structure and function processes of the tourism sector are examined, it can be seen the tourism actors who spend the most time with tourists are the tour guides. Therefore, the education and personal development of tourist guides should be well-qualified. This study examines the effects of social media on foreign language education which is an important field for tourist guide candidates. The study was designed according to the quantitative method and descriptive survey model. Within the scope of the study, 322 questionnaires sent to the tourist guide candidates and the data were evaluated in accordance with the analysis. It concludes tourist guide candidates spend a significant amount of time every day on social media. They declare the posts about foreign language learning on social media affect their perceptions. Based on the results of this study suggestions are made to tourist guide candidates.

**JEL classification:** I23, Z30

**Key words:** Tourist Guides, Foreign Language Learning, Social Media, Perceptions, Candidate.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

It is known that the tourism sector has a variety of influences on many other sectors. It can be also stated that its biggest effect is its economic benefit to them. With its foreign exchange earnings, tourism activities, especially at international levels, positively affect almost all tourism destinations (Bahar and Kozak, 2018). For this reason, actors within the sector are expected to work in harmony with each other in order to contribute to the economy of the sector itself and then its nation. When examining structure and function processes of tourism, it can be observed that those who mostly spend time with tourists are tourist guides; therefore, tourist guides, who have an extremely significant position in the sector (Geva and Goldmand, 1991: 178; Değirmencioğlu, 2001: 190; El-Sharkawy, 2007: 78), are supposed to be well-qualified and to have adequate personal development process. This is not only because they are expected to have knowledge about ancient places, museums they introduce to tourists;

but also because they need to have language proficiency in both native and foreign languages, strong communication skills and to be a fine service provider (Shidende et al., 2019; Ap and Wong, 2001). So, it is necessary for them to acquire a many-sided education and it is recommended that they ought to develop their skills in terms of many perspectives, one of which is foreign language abilities (Değirmencioğlu, 2001; El- Sharkawy, 2007; Yenipınar ve Zorkirişçi, 2013; Lovrentjev, 2015; Eker ve Zengin, 2016). Tourist guide candidates should have proficiency in at least a foreign language. They can't acquire the working license in Turkey without proving it); therefore, they attend foreign language courses in related departments of higher education institutions in addition to their fundamental courses.

### **FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN TOURIST GUIDING PROGRAMS**

By nature of the profession, candidates need to have proficiency in at least one foreign language. For this reason, students in most universities have German, Russian, Japanese, Italian courses as second foreign language apart from English, the most widespread language across the world. Students in tourist guiding programs which accept students not regarding their language scores have difficulties in foreign language courses in these programs and most of these students cannot acquire the working license as they can't prove their language proficiency. Eker and Zengin (2016: 15) have focused on the subject and worked on curriculum of tourist guide education. In the conclusion part of the study, they have suggested that "Tourist guiding programs can accept students only regarding their language scores." "Preparation class in tourist guiding programs can be compulsory. "International exchanging programs can be supported more in tourist guiding programs". "Some occupational courses can be given in English

Türker et al. (2012) focuses on evaluation of the tourist guiding education system from the perspective of professional tourist guides and conducted a focus group study. One of the participants in the study has a very interesting recommendation, which can be very useful: "Internship requirement as assistant guiding can be beneficial for students in tourist guiding programs. It is necessary to determine with whom they work, in which language they serve during tours, how many tours they experience and to document them. Besides, they need to make presentations in foreign languages during educational training tours." In this way, they can have the opportunity to practice foreign language in internship and educational training tours.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

Since the 1990s, technological viewpoints of individuals and nations have considerably changed with the development of computers and the internet and they are still changing constantly with every moment. Especially younger individuals constitute virtual social areas at social media platforms by turning action of socializing on the internet into an addiction. At these platforms with almost no limit, it can be possible to contact other individuals, to share photography, audio, video, and to comment on the shared ones. Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) describe social network sites as "applications enabling their users to constitute profiles with personal information, invite friends to visit these profiles and to send quick messages to each other"

Demir and Kumcağız (2019) have concluded in their study on social media addiction of 374 university students as follows:

**Table. 1 Daily Usage Duration of Social Media by University Students**

Daily Usage duration	Number of Students	Percentage
Less than 2 hours	107	28,61%
2-3 hours	167	44,65%
4-5 hours	75	20,05%
6 hours and more	25	6,68%

*Source: Demir, Y., & Kumcağız, H. (2019: 29)*

According to Table 1, only 28.61% of 374 students use social media “less than 2 hours”. 44.65% and %20.05 of those use it “2-3 hours” and “4-5 hours” per day, respectively. Finally, 6.68% of those utilize it “6 hours and more” per day. These figures are an indicator demonstrating how frequently and intensively university students utilize it. It is possible to test this result with findings from studies conducted through a variety of samples.

From this point of view, when assuming that individuals learning foreign languages are younger ones and considering the above-mentioned figures, usage of social media could be regarded as a great handicap and waste of time unless social media is utilized to learn languages. However, it is possible to turn social media opportunities into an efficient tool for learning foreign languages. Reinhardt (2019: 31) has studied the role of social media in learning and teaching foreign languages and the study concludes that social media needs to be utilized in goal-oriented and multidirectional ways by learners and teachers as its usage is increasing day by day.

Akhiar (2019) has studied on students’ perceptions and Attitudes Towards the Use of Instagram in English Language. According to results of the study, students have positive perceptions and attitudes about use of Instagram in order to improve their “writing” abilities, one of the four language competences. The author states in the study’s conclusion that it is necessary to use social media platforms such as Instagram to create learning environments which enhance student motivation in learning languages.

Montoneri (2015) analysed benefits of social media in classrooms. In the study conducted in Taiwan, effects of online education on Facebook of students in a university were measured.

While in the fall semester of the academic year of 2013-2014, education was completed in an usual way, same students actively utilized Facebook groups in the spring semester. It was concluded in the study that scores and motivations of students were higher in the latter semester.

Shams (2014) intended to measure effects of Facebook usage in English classes in Bangladesh. According to the results of the study, Facebook usage increases student motivations and especially those who have lower English proficiency are more positively affected by this process.

Social media platforms can be turned into educational platforms for foreign language education. Especially when tourist guide candidates have goals to attend YDS and tests of TUREB rather than TOEFL and IELTS, they don’t need to prepare for one of the four language competences, writing. For this reason, they can increase exposure

time to contents in foreign languages by following social media accounts which share their posts in foreign languages. In this way, they are able to improve their vocabulary, reading and translation abilities. In particular, it is recommended to follow official accounts of countries whose official language is the one students try to learn. For example, if candidates would like to learn English, they could follow official accounts of countries such as the United Kingdom, America, Canada, Australia or if they would like to learn German, they can follow those of countries like Germany, Austria and Switzerland, so they can minimize risk of exposure to wrongly-structured contents.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

Objectives of the study are states as follows:

1. To present perceptions towards shares of tourist guide candidates related to foreign language education on social media.
2. To provide tourist guide candidates with suggestions about the subject.
3. To eliminate the gap in the related literature.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

As the study aims to present perceptions towards shares of tourist guide candidates related to foreign language education on social media, a descriptive survey model has been utilized. It is the model enabling a situation which was present in the past or still at present (Büyükoztürk et al., 2017). In the study, questionnaire technique was used. It is composed of two parts, one of which has 5 questions in order to determine demographic characteristics of participants. The questions in the latter part are based on the study entitled “Evaluating social media addiction of university students in terms of different variables” by Demir and Kumcağız (2019). In order to draw the attention of guide candidates, a brief text including aim and scope of the study has been added to the questionnaire.

Population of the study is constituted by tourist guide candidates in the first quarter of 2020. those who attended the educational training tour by TUREB on the dates of 9-16 February, 2020, the final year undergraduate students and non-thesis master students in tourist guiding programs of Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University and Eskisehir Osmangazi University constitute the sample of the study. Data collection was carried out between 1st April and 15th May, 2020 in Canakkale and Eskisehir. In the study, 322 of these questionnaires have been regarded as adequate to analyze. Acceptable sample sizes for certain populations by Sekaran (1992: 253) have been analyzed and it has been understood that the above-mentioned sample is adequate ( $N = 2000$  for  $S = 322$ ).

In the study, analyses have been conducted through SPSS. Firstly, it has been determined whether data are distributed normally or not. Hair et al. (1995) state that there are three phases to be considered for normality test, which are form convenience, skewness and kurtosis values and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In this regard, it can be stated that data are formally convenient, and values of skewness and kurtosis are between +1.5 and - 1.5. In the third and last phase, values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test are higher than 0.05 and therefore it can be said that data are normally distributed. Following the normality phase, it has been determined to utilize parametric tests, which are frequency test, T-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Scheffe test.

#### 4. ANALYSES

Demographic characteristics of participants have been determined through frequency analysis and demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table no 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender (N. 322)</b>					
<b>Female</b>	120	37,3	<b>Male</b>	202	62,7
<b>Age (N. 322)</b>					
<b>18-20</b>	92	28,6	<b>27-29</b>	26	8,1
<b>21-23</b>	66	20,5	<b>30 and more</b>	80	24,8
<b>24-26</b>	58	18,0			
<b>Marital Status (N. 322)</b>					
<b>Married</b>	62	19,3	<b>Single</b>	260	80,7
<b>Education Status (N. 322)</b>					
<b>Associate</b>	28	8,7	<b>Undergraduate</b>	220	68,3
<b>Graduate</b>	74	23,0			
<b>Income (N.322)</b>					
<b>999 TL or less</b>	95	29,5	<b>3000-3999 TL</b>	22	6,8
<b>1000-1999 TL</b>	77	23,9	<b>4000-4999 TL</b>	24	7,5
<b>2000-2999 TL</b>	40	12,4	<b>5000 TL and more</b>	64	19,9

*Source: Authors' contribution*

About 37% of tourist guide candidates in the study are female whereas 63% of those are male. When taken age distribution of them into consideration, it can be observed that 28.6% of those are between 18-20, 20.5% of those are between 21-23, 18% of those are between 24-26, 8.1% of them are between 27-29 and the rest (24.8%) are 30 and more. Only 19% of the participants are married while 81% of them are single. Approximately 9% of them acquire education at associate level; 68% of them at undergraduate level and 23% of those study at graduate level. When considering incomes of the participants, 29.5% of them receive 999 TL or less, nearly 24% of them have income at the amount between 1000-1999 TL, approximately 12% of those receive 2000-2999 TL and nearly 32% of them have income at the amount of 3000 TL or more.

Internet usage aim and social network preferences of participants have been determined through frequency analysis and are demonstrated in Table 3.

**Table 3. Internet Usage Aim and Social Network Preferences of Participants**

	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
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How often do you go online? (N. 322)					
Everyday	314	97,5	3-4 days a week	4	1,2
Once a month	4	1,2			
What is your primary aim on the internet? (N. 322)					
Social Media	216	67,1	Communication (Mail, skype etc.)	26	8,1
Watching and Sharing Videos	26	8,1	Research	42	13,0
Other (News, Downloading etc.)	12	3,7			
Which social network takes your more time if you are a member of more than one social network? (N. 322)					
Facebook	26	8,1	Youtube	94	29,2
Instagram	168	52,2	Twitter	32	9,9
Others (Whatsapp vb.)	2	,6			
How often do you use social networks? (N. 322)					
Every day	310	96,3	3-4 days a week	8	2,5
Once a month	4	1,2			
How many hours per day do you spend on social networks? (N.322)					
Less than a hour	98	30,4	between three hours and 5 hours	46	14,3
between a hour and three hours	158	49,1	5 hours and more	20	6,2
What is your primary aim on social networks? (N.322)					
Spending time	150	46,6	Chatting online	20	6,2
Expressing my ideas	8	2,5	Others (Get informed, games, news)	144	44,7

*Source: Authors' contribution*

According to Table 3, most of the participants go online every day with their primary aim: social networks. The participants utilize Instagram (52.2%) and Youtube (29.2%) more than others, they visit these networks almost everyday (96.3) and they spend up to three hours on these networks. Besides, participants use social networks mostly to spend time (46.6%) and for other aims such as get informed, games and news (44.7%).

**Table 4. Participants' Perceptions About the Shares of Foreign Language Education on Social Media According to the Gender Variable**

Messages and Shares as to foreign language education affect my opinions						
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gender	Male	18 8,9%	36 17,8%	52 25,7%	56 27,7%	40 19,8%
	Female	0 0,0%	12 10,0%	48 40,0%	54 45,0%	6 5,0%
Total		18 5,6%	48 14,9%	100 31,1%	110 34,2%	46 14,3%

*Source: Authors' contribution*

When examining table 4, it is observed that 47.5% of the participants state messages and shares as to foreign language education affect their opinions whereas 26.7 of those state they don't influence their opinions. Only %10 of female participants express that messages and shares as to foreign language education doesn't affect their opinions while %50 of those say messages and shares as to foreign language education affect their opinions.

In table 5, there are participants' paying attention cases of messages and shares about foreign languages on social networks in accordance with their educational levels.

**Table 5. Participants' Paying Attention Cases of Messages and Shares about Foreign Languages on Social Networks in Accordance with Their Educational Levels.**

Paying attention to messages and shares about foreign languages on social network						
		Strongly disregard	Disregard	Neither Disregard Nor Regard	Regard	Strongly Regard
Educational Status	Associate	4 25,0%	0 0,0%	2 2,5%	12 8,2%	10 20,0%
	Undergraduate	8 50,0%	22 73,3%	66 82,5%	100 68,5%	24 48,0%
	Graduate	4 25,0%	8 26,7%	12 15,0%	34 23,3%	16 32,0%
Total		16 100,0%	30 100,0%	80 100,0%	146 100,0%	50 100,0%
		322 5,0%	322 9,3%	322 24,8%	322 45,3%	322 15,5%

*Source: Authors' contribution*

According to table 5, only 14.3% of participants who acquire education at associate, undergraduate and graduate levels disregard messages and shares about foreign languages on social networks whereas 60.8 % of those regard messages and shares about foreign languages on social networks

In table 6, there are writing comment cases of participants to contents about foreign language on social media in accordance with their gender.

**Tablo 6. Writing comment cases of participants to contents about foreign language on social media in accordance with their gender.**

<b>Writing Comment Cases of Participants to Contents about Foreign Language on Social Media</b>			
	<b>Gender</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
<b>Yes</b>	108 74,0%	38 26,0%	146 100,0%
<b>No</b>	94 53,4%	82 46,6%	176 100,0%
<b>Total</b>	202 62,7%	120 37,3%	322 100,0%

*Source: Authors' contribution*

When analyzing table 6, it is seen that most (74%) of male participants write comments to contents about foreign languages on social media whereas only 26% of female ones prefer to write comments to them.

In Table 7, there are foreign language preferences in which participants plan to acquire a working license in accordance with their gender. They were told to select more than one language.

**Table 7. Foreign languages in which candidates plan to acquire a working license according to the gender variable**

<b>Foreign languages in which candidates plan to acquire a working license according to the gender variable</b>									
		<b>English</b>	<b>Russian</b>	<b>German</b>	<b>Arabian</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Other</b>
	<b>Male</b>	188 63,5%	34 60,7%	52 51,0%	16 53,3%	2 33,3%	32 88,9%	12 66,7%	32 84,2%
	<b>Female</b>	108 36,5%	22 39,3%	50 49,0%	14 46,7%	4 66,7%	4 11,1%	6 33,3%	6 15,8%
<b>Total</b>		296 100,0%	56 100,0%	102 100,0%	30 100,0%	6 100,0%	36 100,0%	18 100,0%	38 100,0%



*Source: Authors' contribution*

According to table 7, female participants (n=108) and most of male participants (n=188) plan to acquire the working license in English. In the second place, there is the German language in which female (n=50) and male (52) participants plan to receive a working license. Following English and German, there are participants who plan to acquire the working license in Russian (n=56), Spanish (n=36) and Arabian (n=30) languages.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Tourism activities in the international arena positively affect all tourism destinations. Considering the general structure of the tourism sector, it can be seen that the tourism actors who spend the most time with tourists are the tour guides. For this reason, the education and personal development of tourist guides should be well-qualified. Having knowledge about the historical places that the tourist guides will tell, as well as having language proficiency in terms of both native and foreign languages will enable them to establish a strong dialog with the tourists. The educational opportunities required to achieve this development are increasing and diversifying day by day. In this context, the study aimed to present perceptions towards shares of tourist guide candidates related to foreign language education on social media.

According to the results of this paper, the majority of the tourist guide candidates are using the internet every day to enter Social Media. This result may be considered normal due to the age of information and communication. Participants mostly use Instagram and Youtube social media platforms and they enter these networks almost every day and spend a maximum of three hours. Three hours is an important interval in a one-day time frame. Using this time period for both fun and learning will contribute to the development of tour guide candidates. According to the results of this study, the participants not only spend leisure time on social networks but also they use it for other purposes such as information, learning, game, and news.

Mostly female tourist guide candidates mentioned that messages and shares on the social media platforms about foreign language education affect their opinions. The same result occurs depending on the level of education. Depending on the level of education they received at the university, the majority of the participants consider messages and shares about foreign languages on social media platforms as important.

Mostly male tourist guide candidates write comments to contents about foreign languages on social media whereas a very small proportion of female ones prefer to write comments. According to these results, which are in parallel with Akhiar (2019), students have positive perceptions and opinions about using social media in terms of improving their "writing" skills, which is one of the four skills of the language.

Based on these results, language training platforms on social media can be created for tourist guide candidates in order to ensure that the tourist guides reach a sufficient and effective foreign language level. The candidates can easily ask questions and find answers on these platforms. In this direction, assistance can be given to Higher Education Institutions and tourist guide candidates in which platforms they can be included. In addition to these, further suggestions can be as follows:

- Number and credit of foreign language courses should be increased.

- Foreign language courses should be given by non-Turkish instructors if conditions are suitable.
  - By dividing foreign language courses into 5 days a week, frequency of exposure should be increased.
  - In classes, there should be a balance between activities of grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, writing and reading.
  - Courses should be held with less students in order to improve the quality.
  - Courses should be more interactive and be more fun with technological applications such as Kahoot, Voscreen, Playphrase.me etc.
  - International internship possibilities should be increased by making agreements with international tourism companies.
  - By making cooperation agreements with international universities which have tourist guide programs, international training programs should be organized.
- For interactive language learning, foreign language education platforms (such as Minticity) should be utilized.

This study has some limitations. The research was conducted only in some destinations in Turkey. The internationality of the sample can broaden the perspective. The study was also conducted in a cross-sectional time interval and by collecting data from tourist guide candidates for once. Longitudinal and multiple data collection may be recommended for future studies.

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