

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS OF  
UNDERGRADUATES IN THE TOURISM STREAM: ACHIEVING FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY FOR THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY  
INDUSTRY**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Proficiency in more than one language is essential for communicating and interacting with others in contemporary global society. It is also a crucial asset for employability in the tourism and hospitality industry. Foreign languages serve to communicate with other people, countries, and cultures. Most tourism services are based on human (employee) performance; services are produced and consumed simultaneously in a face-to-face exchange (service encounters) situation, and employees and customers are physically and psychologically close enough to influence each other (Kuslivan & Kuslivan, 2000). Therefore, proper communication between the host and the guest is necessary for successful tourism operations. Most of the undergraduates learning foreign languages are continuing their careers as language professionals, mainly in tourism or other tourism-related industries. The ability to satisfy the guests is influenced by the foreign language that the guests speak. Further, the importance of learning foreign languages and proficiency highly impacted tourism undergraduates' future career opportunities compared to the current job requirements due to the highly dynamic labour market. The researcher identified the need to investigate tourism undergraduates' foreign language proficiency and the role of motivation and attitudes in foreign language proficiency.

Furthermore, the previous studies have mainly investigated foreign language proficiency concerning English as a foreign language for medical students, school-level student's undergraduate younger learners and English learners' achievement. It highlighted the research gap for this study and addressed it by researching tourism undergraduates' foreign language proficiency rationally. Therefore, this study mainly examines the undergraduates' attitudes and motivation toward achieving foreign language proficiency in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Bachman (1990) has defined Language Proficiency as; "The realization of the importance of context beyond the sentence to the effective use of the language." Motivation and attitude play a significant role in learning a language. Instrumental motivations emphasize the pragmatic features of learning a second language without a strong desire to communicate with people who speak the second language (Samad et al., 2012a). An instrumental motivation indicates utilitarian motivations for learning, whereas an integrative motivation refers to a desire to be a member of the target language group (González-Becerra, 2019). According to Cooper and Fisherman (1977), personal motivation is closely related to activities resulting in personal gratification. Students would prefer instrumental motivation over integrative motivation in

learning languages. However, some findings revealed that integrative motivation obtained the most incredible score compared to instrumental motivation and personal motivation, indicating that students are more motivated to study foreign languages

Attitudes help in decision-making and simplification by dividing the world into recognizable and manipulable categories: things I like, dislike, or do not care about. A negative attitude and lack of motivation can lead to obstacles in learning a language. Thus, having a positive attitude toward learning a language is an excellent start to learning a language (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to examine the role of motivation and attitude in achieving the foreign language proficiency of Tourism undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The study's findings will be significant for the language teachers who are teaching foreign languages at universities for the tourism students to understand students' attitudes and motivation regarding language proficiency and apply effective strategies and techniques in foreign language teaching.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the study's objective, the conceptual framework was developed based on the literature review. Accordingly, instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, personal motivation, and attitude are the independent variables. The dependent variable is foreign language proficiency.

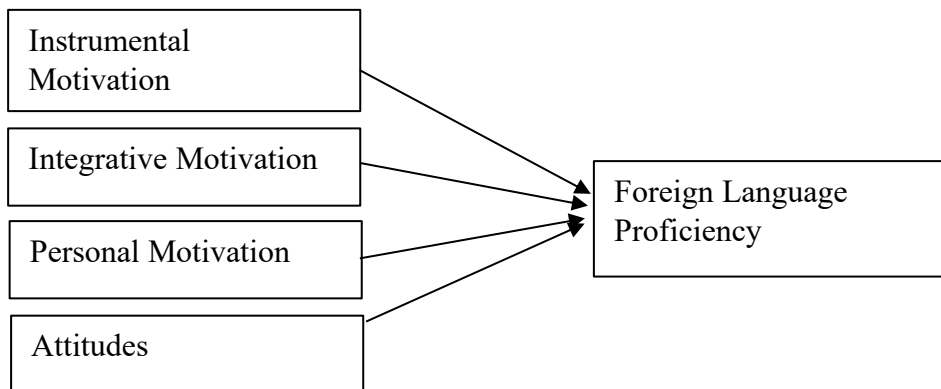


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Accordingly, this study examines the role of motivation and attitude in achieving the foreign language proficiency of tourism undergraduates by analyzing the relationship between attitudes, instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, personal motivation, and foreign language proficiency.

The population of the study is about 300 tourism undergraduates from four state universities in Sri Lanka, namely the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Uva-wellassa University of Sri Lanka, and the University of Kelaniya. The convenient sample technique was adopted for this study. The sample covered 153 participants consisting of 55, 40, 25, and 33 respondents, respectively, from the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka,

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka, and the University of Kelaniya. The questionnaire was prepared based on the literature review and distributed online. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation. Correlation analysis was employed to analyze the relationship between the variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the demographic profile of the participants, there were 60 male undergraduates and 93 female undergraduates. Most respondents are Sinhalese (86.9%), and the rest are Tamils (13.1%). 86.9% of participants revealed that Sinhala is their mother tongue, and 13.1% stated that Tamil is their mother tongue.

Most respondents (40.5%) learn the German Language, and 18.3% of respondents learn Mandarin. 13.7% of the respondents learn French, 13.7% of the respondents learn Japanese, 7.8% learn Russian, 4.6% learn Korean, and 1.3% of the respondents learn Spanish. Most respondents (11.1%) learn a foreign language because it is an academic requirement. 4.6% of participants stated that their prime motive for learning a foreign language is to complete a tourism degree, and the job market is the prime motive for 4.6% of participants. Career development, job market, learning cultures, and personal interest are the other main motives for learning a foreign language. The descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the responses related to undergraduates' motivation and attitudes. Table 1 depicts the results of the descriptive analysis.

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis

|                         | N   | Mini. | Maxi. | Mean   | SD    |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Instrumental Motivation | 153 | 1.00  | 5.00  | 4.5180 | .4553 |
| Integrative Motivation  | 153 | 1.00  | 5.00  | 4.4488 | .4734 |
| Personal Motivation     | 153 | 2.00  | 5.00  | 4.0539 | .3626 |
| Attitude                | 153 | 2.00  | 5.00  | 4.0327 | .3623 |
| FL Proficiency          |     |       |       | 3.9837 | .3959 |
| Listening               | 153 | 2.0   | 5.0   | 3.980  | .4512 |
| Speaking                | 153 | 2.0   | 5.0   | 3.941  | .4898 |
| Reading                 | 153 | 2.0   | 5.0   | 4.013  | .4290 |
| Writing                 | 153 | 2.0   | 5.0   | 4.000  | .4136 |

According to the descriptive analysis (Table 1), all the variables are almost around value 4. It shows that most of the responses to the questions thoroughly agreed with the answers in the Likert scale, which shows that the students are motivated and have positive attitudes toward learning foreign languages. Additionally, positive responses were mainly gathered by comparing between variables. The highest standard deviation is integrative motivation (0.4734), indicating that integrative motivation much more deviates than others. The least standard deviation is presented by attitude (0.3623). The highest mean score is indicated by reading skills compared to other writing, speaking, and listening skills. When analyzing the four primary skills of foreign language proficiency, the mean score for reading proficiency is 4.01, the mean score for writing proficiency is 4.00, the mean value for listening proficiency is 3.94, and the mean value for speaking proficiency is 3.91.

The correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The result of the correlation analysis is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis

|                   |                        | Instrumental<br>Motivation | Integrative<br>Motivation | Personal<br>Motivation | Attitude | FL<br>Proficiency |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| FL<br>Proficiency | Pearson<br>Correlation | .184*                      | .326**                    | .424**                 | .711**   | 1                 |
|                   | Sig. (2-<br>tailed)    | .023                       | .000                      | .000                   | .000     |                   |
|                   | N                      | 153                        | 153                       | 153                    | 153      | 153               |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As the results of correlation analysis (Table 2), the correlation coefficient between all independent variables, instrumental Motivation, integrative motivation, personal motivation and attitude, and Foreign Language Proficiency (dependent variable), indicate a significant positive relationship between them. The coefficient of correlation between Instrumental Motivation and Foreign Language Proficiency is 0.184, and the P-value is 0.023, indicating a positive relationship between Instrumental Motivation and Foreign Language Proficiency. Therefore, it can be interpreted that when instrumental motivation increases, foreign language proficiency also increases slightly. The coefficient of correlation between Integrative Motivation and Foreign Language Proficiency is 0.326, and the P-value is 0.000, indicating a significant moderate positive relationship between Integrative Motivation and Foreign Language Proficiency. The coefficient of correlation between Personal Motivation and Foreign Language Proficiency is 0.424, and the P-value is 0.000, indicating a significant moderate positive relationship between Personal Motivation and Foreign Language Proficiency. The coefficient of correlation between Attitude and Foreign Language Proficiency is 0.711, and the P-value is 0.000, indicating a significant strong positive relationship between Attitude and Foreign Language Proficiency. Therefore, it can be interpreted that when attitude increases, the foreign language proficiency of tourism undergraduates is also increasing, proving that attitude is positively correlated to foreign language proficiency.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study mainly focused on the Tourism undergraduates' motivation and attitudes towards achieving foreign language proficiency. According to the results of the descriptive analysis, it was found that the tourism undergraduates are motivated and have positive attitudes toward achieving foreign language proficiency.

Further, the study revealed a significant positive correlation between attitude and foreign language proficiency. This indicates that a positive attitude leads undergraduates to achieve foreign language proficiency. Further, personal motivation also showed a moderately high significant correlation with foreign language proficiency. There is a significant positive relationship between Instrumental Motivation, Integrative motivation, and Foreign Language Proficiency. It can be interpreted as motivated undergraduates with positive attitudes toward

learning, which will lead them to achieve foreign language proficiency. These findings are consistent with past studies that found that motivated students with positive attitudes toward English language learning enjoy being in the classroom and believe that the language they are learning will be useful to them in their lives and will perform better than those who are less motivated. When analyzing the four primary foreign language proficiency skills, the current study revealed that reading skills showed the highest mean score than other writing, speaking, and listening skills. Especially, speaking skills have the least score, secondly writing, and thirdly listening. Accordingly, Tourism undergraduates are mostly experiencing difficulties with listening and speaking skills based on the current research findings.

Based on the study's findings, it is suggested that educators motivate undergraduates to achieve foreign language proficiency by making them aware of the career opportunities in the tourism field and inculcating positive attitudes toward foreign language learning. Additionally, foreign language teachers should focus on applying efficient strategies for developing the speaking and listening skills of the tourism undergraduates as they perceive less proficiency in these two components, which are more critical for the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, foreign language proficiency, motivations, tourism and hospitality industry

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