Factors Favoring the Level of Knowledge in Writing European Funds for Sports Structures

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the factors favoring the level of knowledge in writing European funds for sports structures. Factors such as gender, age, school, and the level of English are analyzed in correlation with the writing skills abilities: writing knowledge, needs assessment knowledge, purpose and objectives knowledge, Gantt chart knowledge, budget knowledge, finding partners knowledge, finding calls knowledge, dissemination Knowledge. A questionnaire survey was adopted, and the literature was reviewed before collecting data. One hundred nineteen representatives of public and private sports structures participated in this study. The study revealed that the level of English is the main factor favoring the level of knowledge in writing European funds for sports structures. The findings of this study provided valuable implications for curriculum developers and trainers in developing European funds training programs in the field of sport in Romania and beyond.

Key words: English skills, European projects, writing sports projects, teaching in English, European funds writing in English
J.E.L. classification: J24

1. Introduction

The Bologna process influenced the creation of a common European higher education and significantly impacted the internationalization of higher education. Nowadays, in a globalized context, English language users are privileged in terms of access to better jobs and mobility than those using the national language. In addition, English has become the writing language of European projects with direct submission to the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Both the access portals and the application materials are entirely in English.

In this context, this paper analyzes a training program for writing European sports funds (EURO PRO SPORT) delivered in a hybrid format, at the National University of Physical Education and Sport (UNEFS), between October and December 2022.

The course had a technical nature and aimed to introduce participants to *Eurodesign techniques*, providing the necessary tools to understand how European Union funding programs (especially Erasmus+ Sport) work and how it is possible to respond to requests for proposals, both of the EU, as well as of other bodies or organizations. The course focused specifically on design techniques, providing participants with specific skills to draft a project correctly. A very relevant part of the course was developed through practical exercises, essential for learning design tools. The course had two sections: a theoretical section and a practical section in the form of a Euro design laboratory for writing projects.

All the training classes were provided in Romanian. However, the additional documents, application forms, and summary of the projects were asked to be delivered in English to be more related to the actual application process for funds applied directly to Bruxelles.

2. Literature review

There is evidence that English was taught as early as the 16th century, albeit in a limited way, only in places where there was trade with Great Britain. Instead, English was frequently encountered outside the institutional framework of the school (Essen, 1997).

English was the new foreign language used in Spain, Portugal, and Italy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Eastern Europe in the late 1950s, English was reintroduced next to German and French. English gained increasing importance until the late 1980s (Fodor, Peluau, 2001).

Nowadays, English and French are considered to be of particular importance and are widely taught in Romania (Truchot, 2001a., b., c.). Also, English occupies a leading place in the countries of the European Union, thus becoming the first modern language taught.

A Eurydice study from 2001 announced that out of 29 countries studied, nine of them learning English is compulsory. Moreover, in the rest of the countries, due to the large-scale introduction of English teaching and the obligation to learn a foreign language, English has a quasi-compulsory status (Truchot, 2002).

The Bologna process embraced by several European countries led to a common European space of higher education and implicitly to the internationalization of higher education. This is corroborated by Erasmus+ mobilities through European projects prioritizing the English language. Also, English language users and those who have benefited from Erasmus mobilities will be considered more adapted to the context of globalization. Regarding the research field, most journals have resorted to English to address an international audience.

The use of the English language both between universities and at the level of European institutions was a gradual process. For example, European institutions have used English in areas such as economics, technology, and science. Nowadays, the European Union's programs are managed mainly in English, from calls available to application submission and implementation. The programs concentrated on the central and eastern European countries are also based on the use of the English language (Ionescu, Stănescu, 2021).

Starting in 1980, there has been an expansion of the fields in which English is used, a process also supported by the effects of the internationalization of the economy and globalization. Thus, the English language began to be used in the main areas falling within the competence of the EU; the teaching of English spread, and thus the young diplomats were formed at American and British universities or other English language faculties in Europe (Wright, 2000).

According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2021), speaking English gives people access to a broader range of information, a more diverse network, and job opportunities than ever before. English-speaking workplaces can attract more diverse talent and draw on ideas and information from a larger pool (Ionescu, Stanescu, Aivaz, 2022, a.).

They are also more likely to collaborate internationally with partners and within their organizations. Romania ranks 15 as a high proficiency country in this EF English Proficiency Index, the countries with better scores being the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Singapore, Norway, Belgium, Portugal, etc. In Romania, 31% of the population speaks English, while in Denmark, 71% speak English.

A globalized planet needs a way to communicate, and English is firmly established in that role. Speaking English allows people to engage internationally in the broadest possible sense: meeting colleagues, understanding humanity's everyday challenges, and collaborating on solutions (Carter, 2020).

Suppose the adoption of English is rooted in history; the need for a lingua franca springs from globalization. The more our economies, technologies, and populations have intertwined, the more we need a way to communicate across borders. Consequently, English usage has spread unevenly but persistently over the past decades.

As part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding, the European Union (EU) has designated language learning as an essential priority and funds numerous programs and projects in this area, including the Erasmus+ Programme, the Creative Europe Programme, the European Day of Languages, the European Language Label and Juvenes Translators.

Various articles of the Treaty of the European Union refer to the importance of all EU's languages, to the linguistic rights of EU citizens, and to the aim of "developing the European dimension in education, mainly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States, while fully respecting cultural and linguistic diversity" (Article 165(1) TFEU).

3. Research methodology

As a research method, we used cross-tabulations. In the first step, we determined whether the association between the variables was statistically significant. Then we examined the differences between expected and observed counts to determine which variable levels may impact the association most (Aivaz, Teodorescu, 2022).

The central hypothesis is that a high level of English determines a) a high writing knowledge; b) a qualitative needs assessment analysis; c) purpose and objective knowledge; d) a qualitative Gantt chart for the project; e) a qualitative structure of the budget for the project; f) a good process in finding the right partners for the project; g) the choice of an appropriate call for the submission of the project; h) the level of dissemination of the project results. To confirm this hypothesis, the variables used in the analysis were: Writing knowledge; Needs assessment knowledge; Purpose and objectives knowledge; Gantt chart knowledge; Budget knowledge; Finding partners knowledge; Finding calls knowledge; Dissemination Knowledge.

4. Findings

About 119 participants registered for this course, 57 females and 62 males, with different age limits – about 26% up to 35 years and 74% over 35 years old, the majority of participants had university degrees/master's degrees. They had different levels of English: 26.1% advanced, 23.5% beginner, and 50.4% intermediate.

The participants entered this training with the following abilities: 86.6% said that on a scale from 1-5, the writing knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 73.9% said that on a scale from 1-5, the needs assessment knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 75.6% said that on a scale from 1-5, the purpose and objectives knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 75.6% said that on a scale from 1-5, the Gantt chart knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 72.3% said that on a scale from 1-5, the budget knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 80.7% said that on a scale from 1-5, the finding European partner' knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 80.7% said that on a scale from 1-5, the finding calls knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor); 68.1% said that on a scale from 1-5, the dissemination knowledge was up to 3 (inferior, poor, medium poor).

4.1. The correlation between Writing knowledge and Level of English

As shown in Table 1, when analyzing the correlation between the variables of writing knowledge and the level of English, we can see that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables, in the sense that the knowledge of the English language determines the differentiation of the participants in terms of Writing Knowledge – in table 2 the Pearson Chi-Square is 0.05.

Out of the total 119 participants, 76.5% have an intermediate and advanced level of English, and 23.5% are beginners. Out of the ones that declared an excellent level of writing knowledge in European funds, 85.7% have an intermediate and advanced level of English. When writing a European project directly for the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the application forms and budget must be filled in English, so an intermediate/advanced level of English is needed.

Table no. 1. Crosstab between writing knowledge and level of English

			Level_English			Total
			Advanced (C1&C2)	Beginner (A1&A2)	Intermediate (B1&B2)	
Writing_Knowledge	1	Count	11	13	35	59
		% within Writing_Knowledge	18.6%	22.0%	59.3%	100.0%
	2	Count	8	9	12	29
		% within Writing_Knowledge	27.6%	31.0%	41.4%	100.0%
	3	Count	5	2	8	15
		% within Writing_Knowledge	33.3%	13.3%	53.3%	100.0%
	4	Count	7	2	5	14
		% within Writing_Knowledge	50.0%	14.3%	35.7%	100.0%
	5	Count	0	2	0	2
		% within Writing_Knowledge	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	31	28	60	119
		% within Writing_Knowledge	26.1%	23.5%	50.4%	100.0%

Source: Authors' calculation

Table no. 2. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.101[a]	8	.050
Likelihood Ratio	14.035	8	.081
N of Valid Cases	119		

a. 7 cells (46.7%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .47.

Source: Authors' calculation

4.2. The correlation between Needs Assessment Knowledge and Level of English

As shown in Table 3, regarding the need assessment knowledge and the level of English, out of the total number of 119 participants, 76.5% have an intermediate and advanced level of English, and 23.5% are beginners. Out of the ones that declared an excellent level of writing knowledge in the field of European funds, 86.4% have an intermediate and advanced level of English, and out of the ones that declared an excellent level of writing knowledge in the field of European funds, 77.7% have an intermediate and advanced level of English. The P-value from table 4 is less than the significance level, so we can deduce that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables.

When preparing a project, the need assessment is an essential part of the application form.

A need is a discrepancy or difference (gap) between what exists or the current state of affairs for the group or situation in question and what should be or is desired. A need reflects a particular problem that requires intervention and needs to be solved. A needs assessment attempts to identify these gaps, analyze their causes, and set priorities for future proceedings. Needs assessments require sufficient data, usually gathered from European statistics that are generally provided in English.

Table no. 3. Crosstab between Needs Assessment Knowledge and Level of English

			Level_English			
			Advanced (C1&C2)	Beginner (A1&A2)	Intermediate (B1&B2)	Total
Needs Assesment_Knowledge	1	Count	8	7	20	35
		% within Needs Assesment_Knowledge	22.9%	20.0%	57.1%	100.0%
	2	Count	4	14	11	29
		% within Needs Assesment_Knowledge	13.8%	48.3%	37.9%	100.0%
	3	Count	5	2	17	24
		% within Needs Assesment_Knowledge	20.8%	8.3%	70.8%	100.0W
	4	Count	11	3	8	22
		% within Needs Assesment_Knowledge	50.0%	13.6%	36.4%	100.0%
	5	Count	3	2	4	9
		% within Needs Assesment_Knowledge	33.3%	22.2%	44.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	31	28	60	119
		% within Needs Assesment_Knowledge	26.1%	23.5%	50.4%	100.0%

Source: Authors' calculation

Table no. 4. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.218[a]	8	.005
Likelihood Ratio	20.667	8	.008
N of Valid Cases	119		

a. 3 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.12.

Source: Authors' calculation

When analyzing the correlation between the variables' *purpose and objectives knowledge and the level of English*, the p-value is larger than the significance level, so *there is not enough evidence to conclude that these variables are associated.*

Developing the purpose and objectives of a project is a more technical ability that does not involve a good level of foreign languages in general and English in particular. The purpose and objectives of the project refer to the project itself, so the writer of the project can develop these project sections in their native language and then translate them into English with the help of the internet applications available nowadays.

4.3. The correlation between Gantt chart knowledge/Budget and the Level of English

The Gantt chart was developed in the early 1900s by Henry Gantt, and it shows the start and end periods and the duration of activities. It is not a network graph because it does not show the interdependence or the links between activities. This chart is usually provided by the funders inside the application package/annexes, but to fill it in, one needs to have intermediate/advanced knowledge of English.

The funders inside the application package/annexes also provide the budget. However, to understand these very technical accountability terms, one must have advanced English knowledge, especially for projects with budgets larger than 60.000 euros.

As shown in table 5 and table 6 below, the p-value is less than the significance level, so we can conclude that there is a statistically significant association between the variables.

Table no. 5. Crosstabbetween Gantt_chart_knowledge and level of English

			Advanced (C1&C2)	Beginner (A1&A2)	Intermediate (B1&B2)	Total
			Level_English			
Gantt_chart_ knowledge	1	Count	5	8	20	33
		% within Gantt_chart_knowledge	15.2%	24.2%	60.6%	100.0%
	2	Count	3	9	17	29
		% within Gantt_chart_knowledge	10.3%	31.0%	58.6%	100.0%
	3	Count	7	6	15	28
		% within Gantt_chart_knowledge	25.0%	21.4%	53.6%	100.0%
	4	Count	12	2	5	19
		% within Gantt_chart_knowledge	63.2%	10.5%	26.3%	100.0%
	5	Count	4	3	3	10
		% within Gantt_chart_knowledge	40.0%	30.0%	30.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	31	28	60	119
		% within Gantt_chart_knowledge	26.1%	23.5%	50.4%	100.0%

Source: Authors' calculation

Table no. 6. Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.487[a]	8	.006
Likelihood Ratio	20.412	8	.009
N of Valid Cases	119		

a. 4 cells (26.7%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.35.

Source: Authors' calculation

4.4. The correlation between Finding partners' Knowledge and the Level of English

In table 7, we have the Crosstab between finding external partner knowledge and level of English. When talking about *finding external partner knowledge*, as the p-value from Table 8 is less than the significance level, we can infer a significant association between these two variables.

A necessary condition to apply for funding from the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is to have at least one external partner. Thus, the international component is an eligibility criterion.

All the processes of finding a partner, communicating with their representatives, and writing the application form usually involve a common language - English, so there is no doubt that also these variables are connected.

Table no. 7. Crosstab between finding external partner knowledge and level of English

			Level_English			
			Advanced (C1&C2)	Beginner (A1&A2)	Intermediate (B1&B2)	Total
Finding partners_Knowledge	1	Count	6	11	24	41
		% within Finding partners_Knowledge	14.6%	26.8%	58.5%	100.0%
	2	Count	5	8	18	31
		% within Finding partners_Knowledge	16.1%	25.8%	58.1%	100.0%
	3	Count	6	4	14	24
		% within Finding partners_Knowledge	25.0%	16.7%	58.3%	100.0%
	4	Count	10	4	3	17
		% within Finding partners_Knowledge	58.8%	23.5%	17.6%	100.0%
	5	Count	4	1	1	6
		% within Finding partners_Knowledge	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	31	28	60	119
		% within Finding partners_Knowledge	26.1%	23.5%	50.4%	100.0%

Source: Authors' calculation

Table no. 8. Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.070[a]	8	.007
Likelihood Ratio	20.332	8	.009
N of Valid Cases	119		

a. 5 cells (33.3%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.41.

Source: Authors' calculation

4.5. The correlation between Finding a call Knowledge and the Level of English

When discussing finding a call, as the p-value from table 9 is larger than the significance level (0.298), there is not enough evidence to conclude that the variables are associated. The principal calls are also available on national websites and also on the websites of the European Union, translated into the national languages.

Table no. 9 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.544[a]	8	.298
Likelihood Ratio	10.823	8	.212
N of Valid Cases	119		

a. 5 cells (33.3%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .71.

Source: Authors' calculation

4.6. The correlation between the Dissemination Knowledge and the Level_English

The p-value from table 10 is less than the significance level, so we can conclude that there is a statistically significant association between the variables. The level of English determines a good knowledge of the dissemination methods and access to different local/regional/European networks where project results can be promoted.

Table no. 10 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.682[a]	8	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	38.252	8	<.001
N of Valid Cases	119		

a. 3 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.53.

Source: Authors' calculation

5. Conclusions

This paper examines the factors influencing the knowledge of writing sports projects funded with European funds. The observed high degree of association between the majority of factors that determine an excellent European project (a high writing knowledge, a qualitative needs assessment analysis, a qualitative Gantt chart for the project, a qualitative structure of the budget for the project, an exemplary process in finding the right partners for the project, a good level of dissemination of the project results) and the level of English emphasizes the importance of a more closely integrated training system in the field of European funds. Facilitated access to European funds knowledge is to be combined with measures for best practice in writing applications in English, simulation of tasks in English, and ways of finding and communicating with external partners to increase the level of English and the quality of the applications.

Thus, from the point of view of efficiency and effectiveness, it would be recommended that the teaching of European funds courses in general, and in the field of sport in particular, be carried out in English, using from the start an international program that would allow participants to use the English language: creating partnerships with one or more universities in Europe, making assignments and project drafts in English, creating the proper contexts for communicating in English with external partners. This means exposing learners to English through experiences (such as immersion) close to the natural context and focusing on the meaning of what is being communicated rather than its form.

To achieve this objective, however, the universities, training providers, and the state should apply a systematic and unified methodology to help identify those individuals that demonstrate potential in terms of European funds writing in English in order to increase the number of sports organizations that apply for funding and that are capable of bringing about sustainable growth in the sports sector (Ionescu, Stanescu, Aivaz, 2022, b.).

New research is needed to see to what extent training programs in European funds are more effective if they have a diverse curriculum with teaching in both native language and English.

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