

TBL 4 Tourism

Project Result 1

Task 1.3 Questionnaire & Focus Groups

In this report we set out the results of the final stage of Needs Analysis for PR1 of the TBL 4 Tourism project.

The objective was to select a group of 10 target tasks relevant to waiters and other front of house restaurant staff who need to work in English. To that end, in agreement with project partners, SLB designed a closed option questionnaire to be completed by relevant experts, and followed this up with a focus group meeting using a procedure designed by the Blackbird school.

Overall we feel the process was a useful one, with the caveat that we could only count on a minimal number of participants in the focus group. This was due to the short timeframe we had to organise and conduct the groups, and the likely participants' limited availability. However, given the expert credentials of participants, and the reasonably high number of respondents to the survey (who were selected for their expert knowledge), we feel we can have reasonable confidence in the results.

The Survey

The survey was designed by SLB according to the list of 22 potential target tasks drawn up by Blackbird. A consistent 5-point Likert scale was used to collect comparable data, drawing on methods described in the relevant literature on Needs Analysis in TBLT, for example Long, 2005, 2015; Malicka et al., 2019; Serafini et al., 2015; Watanabe, 2006.

The full results are downloadable [here](#).

Sample size

Questionnaires were sent out to relevant staff in a total of:

- 4 restaurants
- 1 hotel chain
- 4 professional training centres specialising in hospitality (public and private)
- 1 university
- Individual experts in education.

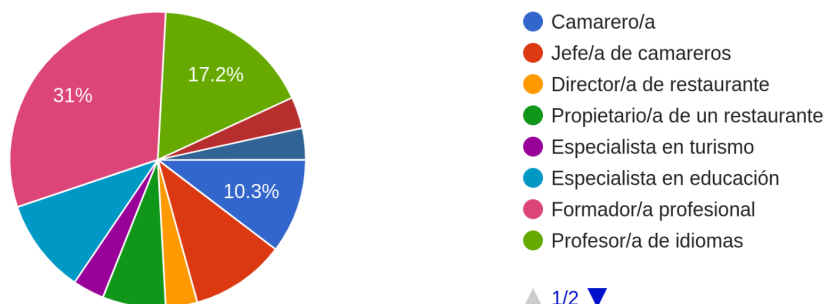
Key contacts in the institution were asked to distribute the link to respondents who fit the criteria established by Blackbird in their Focus Group template. It is therefore difficult to estimate the precise number of people the questionnaire reached.

We can assume that most respondents were based in Catalonia and the majority of those in Barcelona, which lends the data a particularly local validity.

Relevant work experience

¿Cuál es tu principal función laboral?

29 responses



In total, the questionnaire was completed by 29 respondents, but 2 missed the cut-off date for inclusion as data analysis was already in progress. The 27 we will consider include 9 professional trainers, who all work in professional training institutions (8 public, 1 private), and 5 language teachers (4 who work in public professional training institutions and 1 who works in a university teaching centre).

The remainder are as follows:

- 3 education specialists
- 3 head waiters
- 3 waiters
- 1 tourism specialist
- 1 restaurant director
- 1 professional training professor
- 1 hotel director.

16 respondents work in a restaurant and provided further details on the restaurant's price point and cuisine type. In total, nine shared that their restaurant was "average price" and 5 shared that theirs was "high price." Two respondents said that their restaurants were both "average price" and "high price."

Years of experience

Respondents were asked to specify how many years of experience they had in their main role, rounded to the nearest year.

The least-experienced respondent had up to 1 year of experience, while the most experienced had about 30 years. Three respondents had 17 years and another 3 had 5 years. Two respondents each listed that they had 3, 10, 16 and 22 years of experience, respectively. The remainder were evenly spread out between 1 and 30 years.

Other relevant work experience

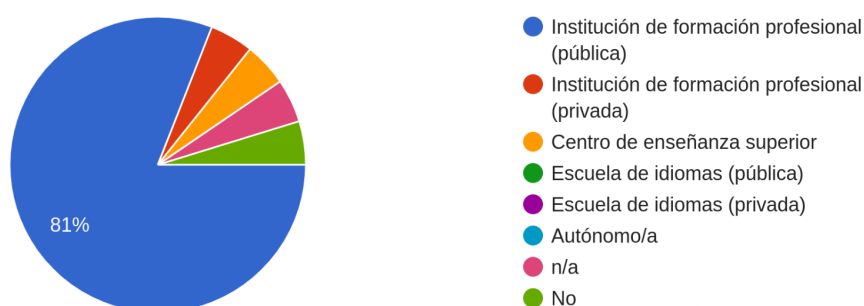
Twenty-four respondents provided details about other relevant work experience; 3 left it blank. Nine respondents did not have other relevant work experience, bringing the total to 12.

Fifteen respondents answered yes, but 6 declined to provide further details. Those 6 may not have known they could give more detail because the question did not explicitly ask them to provide it. Future versions of the questionnaire could easily fix this.

Training or teaching context

Si trabajas como profesor o formador profesional, ¿en qué contexto trabajas?

21 responses



Nineteen respondents specified a training or teaching context: 17 work in public institutions, 1 works in a private one and 1 in a university teaching centre.

Task frequency

15 tasks were identified as “most frequent” (several times a day) by most respondents, which included tasks across the difficulty spectrum like *Communicate with clients to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction* (high difficulty), *Inform customers about the day’s specials* (medium difficulty) and *Schedule dining reservations* (low difficulty).

The complete list of the 15 most frequent tasks, ordered from least to most difficult, is as follows:

1. Greet and escort customers to their tables
2. Assist clients with seating arrangements
3. Schedule dining reservations
4. Present menu and provide detailed information when asked
5. Take accurate food and drinks orders
6. Communicate order details to the Kitchen Staff
7. Serve food and drink orders
8. Inform customers about the day’s specials
9. Offer menu recommendations upon request
10. Up-sell additional products when appropriate
11. Communicate with clients to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction
12. Provide basic information about the restaurant/ establishment

13. Provide customers with general information or assistance
14. Process customer bills or payments, deliver checks and collect bill payments
15. Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs or traditions

Many of the same respondents marked the same tasks as most frequent, lending a degree of consensus to the results.

Task difficulty

Respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of a task for new waiting staff to perform in English. Though no one rated a task as “most difficult,” two respondents gave examples of such tasks in the additional tasks section. They were “Interpret machine instructions,” “Intervene in case of an emergency” and “[Have a conversation about] Anglo-saxon gastronomic culture.”

Eleven tasks were left blank by 5 respondents each. Since they were instructed to leave questions blank if they could not answer for that specific task, they could have been unfamiliar with the task or could not credibly speak to that task’s difficulty in English.

Task teachability

Twelve respondents filled out this section, including two head waiters who did not identify as a professional teacher or trainer. Most rated tasks as a 3 out of 5 in teachability, that’s to say, as neither easy nor difficult to teach.

Fifteen respondents left it blank, indicating they had no experience in training staff in language skills. This could indicate that they were neither a language teacher nor a vocational trainer (since these were the roles who were invited to complete this section), but it could also signify that they train staff in their mother tongue.

Additional tasks

Several additional tasks were suggested by respondents, although some of these were similar to ones already listed. Time was spent during the focus group to establish the importance of these tasks and whether they should be included in our list, incorporated into a wider ‘Target Task Type’ (see below) or excluded.

List of target task types

According to the survey results, the list of 22 tasks were sorted first by frequency, then by difficulty, and finally by ‘teachability’; tasks which were frequent but not difficult were excluded from the list. The rationale for doing this lies in prioritising those tasks which our target group most often need to do, and which present a level of challenge—either at the practical or the classroom level—which merits inclusion in a course that will be designed to meet the needs of both students and trainers.

The excluded tasks (rated as frequent but not difficult) were:

- Greet and escort customers to their tables
- Assist clients with seating arrangements

It is supposed such tasks could still be dealt with as part of any extended simulation of a service situation.

Additional tasks suggested by survey respondents were discussed during the focus group and incorporated or discarded according to the experts' views on their relevance to our objectives.

The tasks were then grouped together into more general **target task types** (TTTs) to generate a list of 10 with the best possible coverage of all the specific target tasks (TTs) regarded as frequent and to some degree challenging. Target task types are generated whenever specific target tasks may not be important to all students on a course. For example, in some cases waiters will not be expected to give detailed information about wine. We can therefore group the TT of 'Talking about wine, production processes and the feelings it evokes' - an additional TT suggested by a questionnaire respondent - into the wider TTT1 as shown below. For more information, see Long (2015), pp. 223-5.

The list was adjusted and finalised according to contributions in the focus group (see the following section), and is as follows:

1. Talk about food & drinks on offer
 - a. (TT4) Present menu and provide detailed information when asked (e.g. about allergies)
 - b. (TT11) Offer food & drink menu recommendations upon request
 - c. (TT12) Upsell additional products when appropriate
 - d. ~~(additional) Offer wine menu recommendations upon request (Talk about wine, production processes and the feelings it evokes)~~
2. Take accurate food and drink orders
3. Deal with billing and payments
4. Provide information about the restaurant/establishment
5. Serve food and drink orders
6. Communicate with clients to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction
7. Provide customers with general information or assistance relating to activities outside the restaurant
 - a. (TT15) Provide customers with general information or assistance
 - b. (TT19) Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer
 - c. (TT21) Provide information about locations, public transport routes, taxis
 - d. (TT22) Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping

8. Schedule dining reservations
9. Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs or traditions
10. Provide a written translation of the menu

Further information from the focus group

The focus group was held on 4/10/22 online, with the procedure adapted from guidelines by Blackbird. It took one hour and there were three participants, in addition to Neil McMillan, who took on the double role of guiding the discussion and taking notes. The group was recorded so that additional notes could be taken later, and the relevant permissions were obtained. Participants were fully informed thanks to the translation of the relevant information provided in the Focus Group template.

The participants were:

1. The director of a central Barcelona hotel, part of a wider international chain with hotels across peninsular Spain and the Balears
2. An English teacher at the main public vocational training centre in Barcelona with a specialism in hospitality and a training restaurant
3. A freelance English teacher with experience teaching waiting staff

In the end, although this falls significantly short of the 10 participants recommended by Blackbird, we felt there was a very good level of expertise and insight on offer. It will be instructive to compare this to contributions of focus group participants across the partner countries.

To supplement the data, we were able to draw on additional interviews with participant 1, and with the head of languages at the school of participant 2. Data we collected during the previous task (expert interviews) was also of great use as our participants included restaurateurs.

We summarise in table form the data gathered below, as per our list of target task types. At times we refer to complexity - we are here referring to cognitive rather than linguistic complexity, a factor which we feel should be paid close attention to in the syllabus and task design stage. See Malicka et al., 2019 for a clear explanation of this in the context of needs-based task design.

TTT	Comments
1. Talk about food & drinks on offer	There are several aspects to this which could be dealt with to a greater or lesser extent depending on the teaching context. Some tasks are largely one-way (presenting the menu) while others involve interaction (responding to questions about allergens, for example).

	<p>Complexity could vary widely according to, for example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of items • the waiter's familiarity with the dishes or wines, especially in the English version of the menu • the complexity or familiarity of a client's dietary needs. <p>This provides a lot of options when it comes to designing multiple pedagogic tasks in the next phase.</p> <p>It was commented that there's a big difference between describing food and drinks, and selling them. The latter is a skill which it would be desirable to incorporate in pedagogic task design, e.g. to include models of effective persuasion strategies.</p>
2. Take accurate food and drink orders	<p>For this task as for other oral/aural tasks, it was recommended that any course include the comprehension of diverse accents, as this is an aspect that can add complexity.</p>
3. Deal with billing and payments	<p>This was regarded as reasonably straightforward, but can be made more complex by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having large groups to deal with • people wanting to split the bill • dealing with multiple payment types • resolving problems with payments
4. Provide information about the restaurant/establishment	<p>This may include directing customers to specific facilities such as toilets, or, if the restaurant is in a hotel, to other hotel facilities. It could therefore be broken down into more specific target tasks.</p> <p>It was commented that this task could also include the waiters being engaged in 'small talk' about themselves and/or their work in the establishment.</p> <p>Complexifying factors may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarity • distance of the facility • number of steps to get there • narrating in the past (more complex than present reference, cognitively)
5. Serve food and drink orders	<p>This was regarded as generally less complex and involving minimal interaction, but again, it could be made more challenging by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased number of guests • multiple dishes/courses • order mixups

<p>6. Communicate with clients to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction</p>	<p>This task was rated as one of the most difficult. It may include, in smaller establishments, dealing with online complaints - these would normally be dealt with by a separate team in larger operations.</p> <p>It was commented that the type of complaint may sometimes vary along national lines. British clients are more likely to complain about the heat of dishes, while French diners may focus more on food quality. Other complaints can concern the length of time it takes for food to be served, or the lack of attention from staff.</p> <p>This is a potentially highly complex task, with a number of variables at play, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarity/predictability of complaint • multiple aspects to the complaint • decision on who can resolve it (referring to local and/or statutory procedures) • decision on how to resolve it • negotiation of the solution with the client
<p>7. Provide customers with general information or assistance relating to activities outside the restaurant</p>	<p>It was felt that this was similar to TTT4 and similar comments were made, but it was felt it should be regarded as a separate task type. Rather than referring to the immediate environment, this task could include information about tourist activities, transport, or shopping. A course should develop a variety of pedagogic tasks deriving from these which are relevant to the students' local working context.</p> <p>In terms of pedagogic task sequencing, we felt this task should be sequenced after TTT4 in course design. This is because basic directions can be introduced in TTT4, and built on in this task as it is likely more challenging. This is because it involves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more distant (and possibly unfamiliar) locations • multiple transport options/costs • multiple steps
<p>8. Schedule dining reservations</p>	<p>As this could be done by phone, internet or in person, this is one of the tasks that may involve a wider range of technological tools. It was also remarked that problems decoding accents are heightened over the phone, so more accent work should be incorporated into task design.</p>

<p>9. Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs or traditions</p>	<p>This was regarded as a separate target task from TTT7 due to the specific cultural knowledge required, and the less ‘instrumental’ nature of the interaction. It was commented that staff in larger restaurants and hotels, if not originally from the local area, are often trained in Catalan cultural traditions in order to be able to explain such aspects as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal decor/objects, e.g. relating to Christmas celebrations • Seasonal dishes, e.g. relating to the time of year or festival (e.g. mushrooms in Autumn, the ‘coca de Sant Joan’ - a traditional cake for St John’s day in June) <p>It is therefore logical and helpful for staff to receive additional or complementary training on doing this in the target language, and desirable that this is highly adapted to the local area.</p> <p>It was also commented that this cultural aspect is sorely lacking in published materials designed for our target group, which in any case are not made for a specific locality.</p>
<p>10. Provide a written translation of the menu</p>	<p>We are pleased that the use of task types allowed this task to be included, despite the fact that it scored lower for frequency, and is probably not applicable to waiting staff in medium-to-large restaurants. However, interviewees in the prior stage of this project who are connected to small restaurants highlighted that staff are often required to either collaborate on such translations, or do them individually. It was regarded as a key and potentially challenging task because of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of items • Unfamiliarity with new items • The level of description needed <p>Some will use machine translation, but there is still a need for this to be done in a principled way, with accurate proofreading. For pedagogical reasons, it is also of interest to have a written task in any potential course, as it will add variety to the productive skills taught. It should combine very logically with TT1, allowing written and spoken forms to be linked.</p>

Concluding remarks

The following additional comments are of relevance to the remaining phases of this project. They were gleaned from the focus group, our additional interviews and email exchanges, and our own reflections on the results.

1. There is a particular need for materials and general teaching ideas for students in the 'grado medio' category of professional training. These students are typically 16-17 years' old and arrive with an approximate English level of A1-A2. The current published materials used by language teachers are beyond this level, making course design and lesson planning a real headache for teachers.
2. The aforementioned materials are heavily focused on acquiring vocabulary and structures, and far less on language in use.
3. Vocational training and language training are often separated in an unhelpful way. An ideal version of a course derived from this NA would be developed and delivered by vocational trainers and language teachers working in collaboration. However, particularly at a public level, such changes can be regarded as radical and much work would need to be done at a higher level to implement them.

We would like to close with a recommendation. The time allowed for this stage of needs analysis did not allow for the detailed observation of the target tasks, alongside analysis of their typical discourse. We strongly recommend that at the beginning of the next stage, this crucial step be taken, at least for those TTs for which sample materials will be developed. The results of such analysis will greatly inform pedagogic task design.

References

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