

Foreign Languages for Economic Development. An Overview of the Romanian Labour Market*

Roxana-Maria GÂZ

Department of European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai
Str. M. Kogalniceanu, nr. 1
400084, Cluj-Napoca
Romania
Tel: +40-264-405322
Fax: +40-264-591906
roxanagz@yahoo.fr
roxana.gaz@ubbcluj.ro

Roxana-Maria Gâz is a Ph.D. candidate in Philology at the Faculty of European Studies within Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her field of research covers the language policies of the European Union, and, particularly, the actions that have been taken and implemented in the European higher education institutions for the promotion of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, according to the recommendations of the European Union.

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Foreign Languages for Economic Development. An Overview of the Romanian Labour Market

Apart from the recommendations made by the European Union institutions regarding the learning of at least two languages other than mother tongue, it has become increasingly important as well the learning of foreign languages for the economic development. This article sums up some of the main recommendations referring to languages and their importance in business, then it presents an overview of the Romanian labour market so that, in the end, it presents the preliminary results of a survey carried out in a Romanian university to see how foreign languages are taught, whether students are aware of their importance or not, which languages are being included in the academic curriculum and how wide the offer of the university is.

Keywords: foreign languages; economic development; Romanian labour market, survey, quantitative research

1. Introduction

Linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism are among the main values of Europe. Nowadays, multilingualism is a bridge among cultures, but, as we are well aware, it has not always been like this. Languages, together with other cultural instruments, were used as battlefields. Some languages dominated, others were discriminated or even excluded. It is still the case in certain countries, where linguistic, cultural or religious differences cause riots, rebellions that lead to the death of many people.

As Robert Phillipson stresses in his book, languages are considered to be “the medium through which communication takes place in politics, commerce, defence, academia, the media, technology, the internet, and most aspects of life”, therefore they are definitely “central to our increasingly international world, to globalisation and to the accelerating process of European unification” (Phillipson 2003: 5).

In 2008, the Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue made some proposals regarding the use of languages in the European Union, which were gathered under the title *A rewarding challenge. How the multiplicity of languages could strengthen Europe*. They said that: “Every language is the product of a unique historical experience, each is the carrier of a memory, a literary heritage, a specific skill, and is the legitimate basis of cultural identity. Languages are not interchangeable, none is dispensable, none is superfluous. To preserve all the languages of our heritage, including the ancestral European languages such as Latin and

Ancient Greek; to encourage, even for languages which are very much minority languages, their development in the rest of the continent is inseparable from the very idea of a Europe of peace, culture, universality and prosperity”.

In the same year, the Business Forum for Multilingualism, established by the European Commission, issued a document on the importance of foreign languages and how companies work better with languages¹. The specialists came to the conclusion that “Europe needs to turn its linguistic diversity into a real competitive advantage”, and this can only happen if formal and informal language learning is promoted, language strategies are implemented even in companies, local and central national authorities involve in the promotion of foreign language learning².

We are living in a globalized world, in which “states and societies are becoming «increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interactions»”. Therefore, the flow of people, trade and capital placed language and communication at the centre of the interactive global cultural economy. As such, Colin Baker underlined the fact that usually bilinguals and multilinguals have an advantage in the recruitment process compared to monolinguals: “In tourism, marketing, retailing, airlines, public relations, banking, information and communications technology, accountancy, business consultancy, secretarial work, hotels, law and teaching, for example, bilingual and multilingual employees often have the competitive edge when applying for a post or for promotion.” (Rasool 2007: 417-418)

The importance of language and communication skills has been further analyzed by Naz Rasool who categorized these skills as follows: multilingualism; information processing skills; knowledge of different subject registers; subject knowledge; inter-cultural communication skills, awareness and knowledge; data handling; decision making skills; problem solving skills; research skills; analytical competence; interpreting meanings; oracy skills (speaking and listening). The author pointed out that all these skills are the basis of a “*language-based economy*”, taking into account that for a society to participate in today’s global cultural economy it is highly important to improve its linguistic capability together with its productive capacity. In her view, there is a positive correlation between the two of them. Building a country’s linguistic capability will boost its productive capacity. This cannot be done without teaching and learning resources, educational infrastructures, physical structures, transport systems and administrative tools, that have major implications in the educational system (Rasool 2007: 127-128).

At European level, statistics show that some 10 million Europeans work in other member states. Specialists agreed that “a society of polyglots – whether foreign or home-

¹ Education and Culture DG, *LANGUAGES MEAN BUSINESS. Companies work better with languages*. Recommendations from the Business Forum for Multilingualism established by the European Commission, Belgium, 2008.

² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

grown or a mix of the two – improves opportunities for business and leisure. By creating a more inclusive environment, they attract and facilitate more investment and tourists”³.

It has been said that “language skills equal business skills”⁴ and that multilingualism is becoming more and more relevant not only for multinational companies but also for small and medium enterprises. As such, in 2006, the National Centre for Languages (CiLT) and the International Communication Specialists initiated a study entitled: *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, because, as stated in the European Commission’s document, drafted in 2005, “language skills will be important in achieving European policy goals, particularly against a background of increasing global competition”⁵. The purpose of this study was to analyse the importance of languages and of language skills in the European economic environment, especially in what small and medium enterprises are concerned.

The study shows that there is a direct connection between languages and successful exporting: “four elements of language management were found to be associated with successful export performance: having a language strategy, appointing native speakers, recruiting staff with language skills and using translators and interpreters”⁶. This investment in languages has proven to be very efficient as, the study further mentions, companies, and especially SMEs, investing in the language management have registered an increase of almost 45% in export sales, as compared to companies that did not consider these elements as being important⁷.

As to which language is mostly used on the European market, the results are not surprising at all, in the sense that English is mostly used in international business relations (51%), followed by German (13%), French (9%), Russian (8%), Spanish (4%) and other languages (15%)⁸.

But let us see the situation on the Romanian labour market.

2. Overview of the Romanian labour market

Our economy started its development after the revolution of 1989, after the collapse of the communist regime, and was characterised by instability and an increase in the number of unemployed persons.

³ <http://www.eu4journalists.eu/index.php/dossiers/english/C93/408/>, 3rd October 2009.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ European Commission, *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*, 2005.

⁶ *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, December 2006, p. 7.

⁷ *Idem*.

⁸ *ELAN*, p. 19.

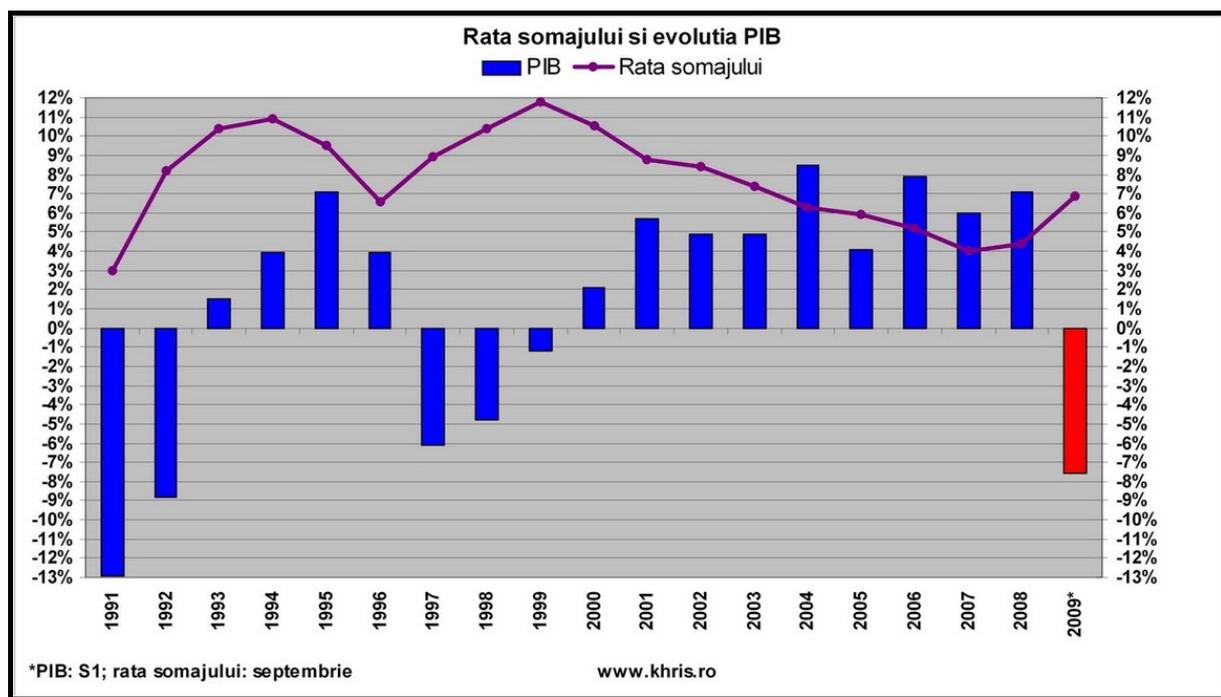


Figure 1. The Unemployment Rate and the GDP 1991-2009.

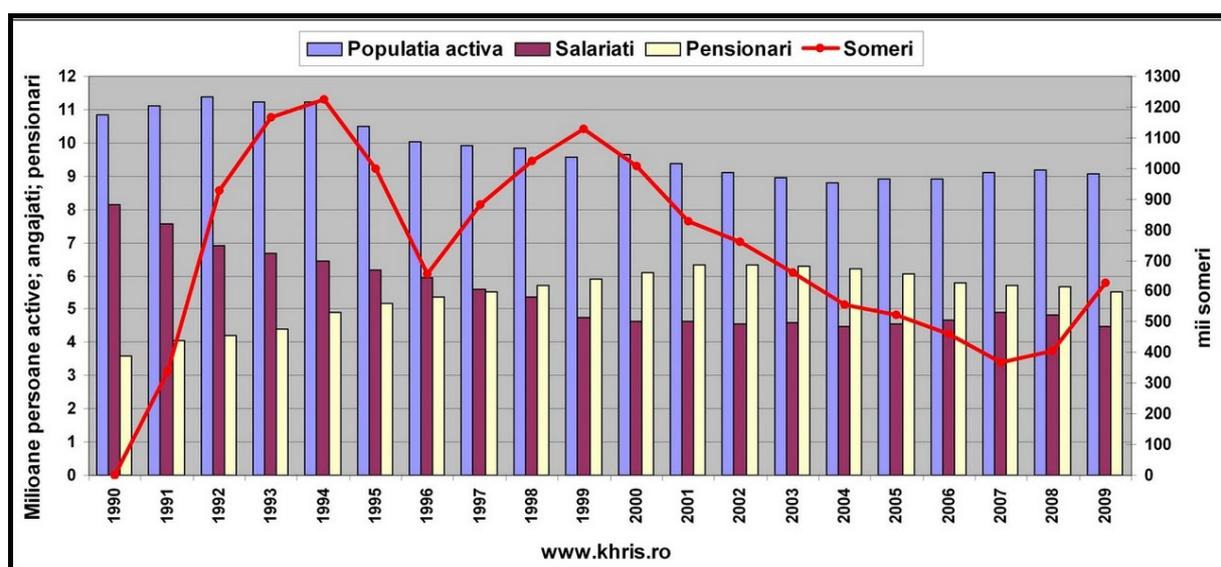


Figure 2. Active, Employed, Retired and Unemployed population

The period 2000-2008 was characterised by an economic strengthening which can be seen in the improvement of the business environment and the positive attitude of the foreign partners which resulted in direct foreign investments.

The Romanian National Bank (BNR) published, in 2010, the data regarding the direct foreign investments in 2003 until 2009. The results show an obvious increase in the direct investments made by foreign companies in out country, from 1,946 million euro in 2003 to 3,488 million euro at the end of 2009.

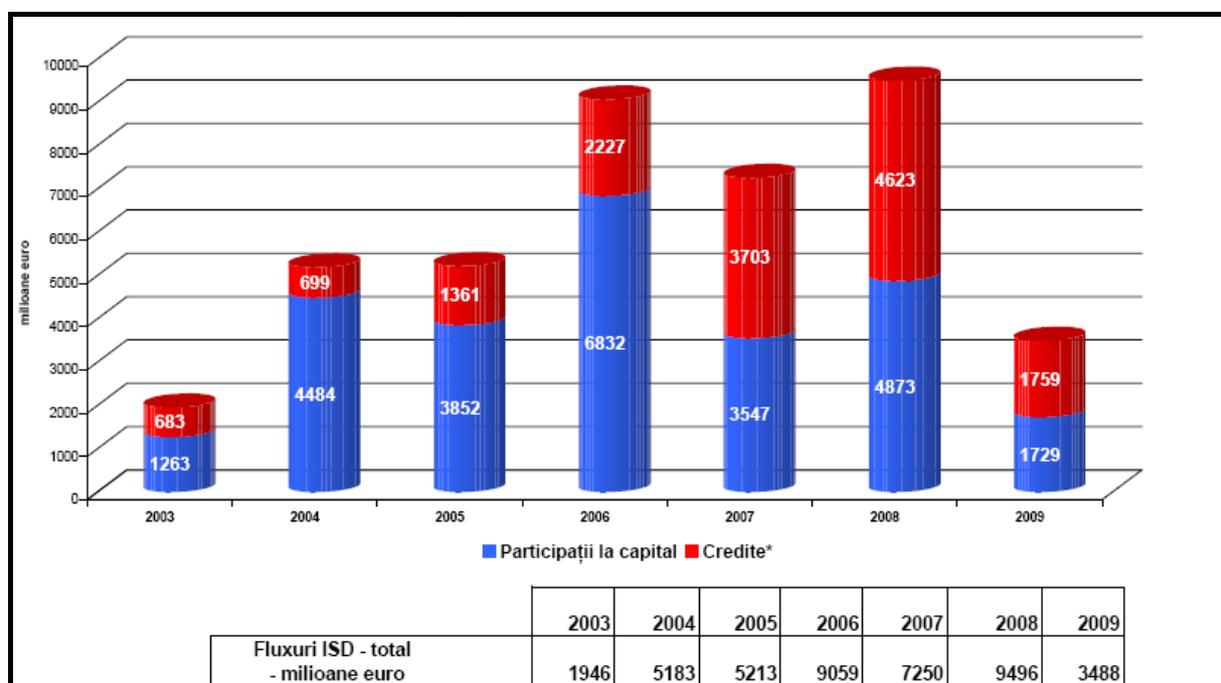


Figure 3. The evolution of the foreign direct investments 2003-2009 (www.bnr.ro)

There are no official statistics issued by the National Bank regarding the foreign direct investments for the year 2010; however, the Romanian Agency for Foreign Investments published on its website the data on the investments made monthly in Romania in 2010:

Month	Jan	Febr	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Stock	302	466	754	1135	1433	1838	1909	1956	2070	2145	2269	-
Monthly flow	302	164	288	381	298	405	71	47	114	75	124	-

Figure 4. Foreign direct investments attracted by Romania in 2010 (www.arisinvest.ro)

The main economic activities where most of the foreign investments were directed are the industry, finance and insurance, civil engineering, trade, IT etc.

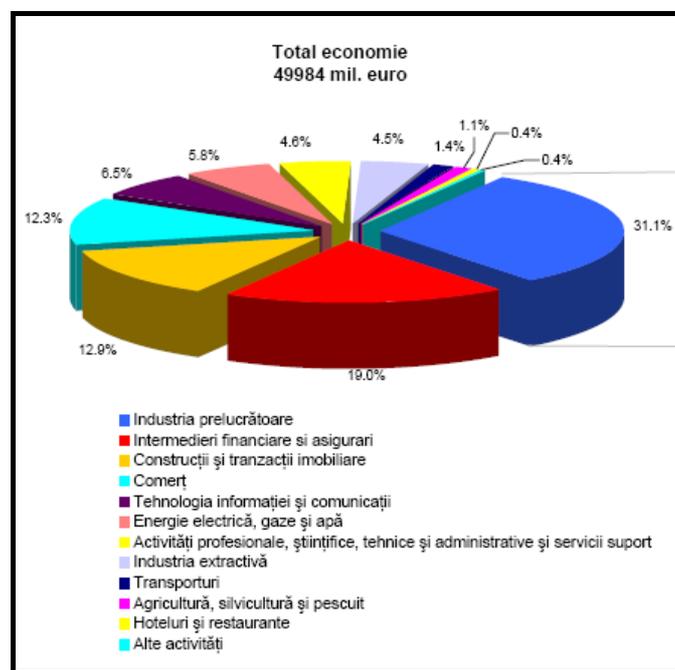


Figure 5. The main economic activities (www.bnr.ro)

Unfortunately for the other regions, most of the foreign money invested goes to Bucharest (63.4%).

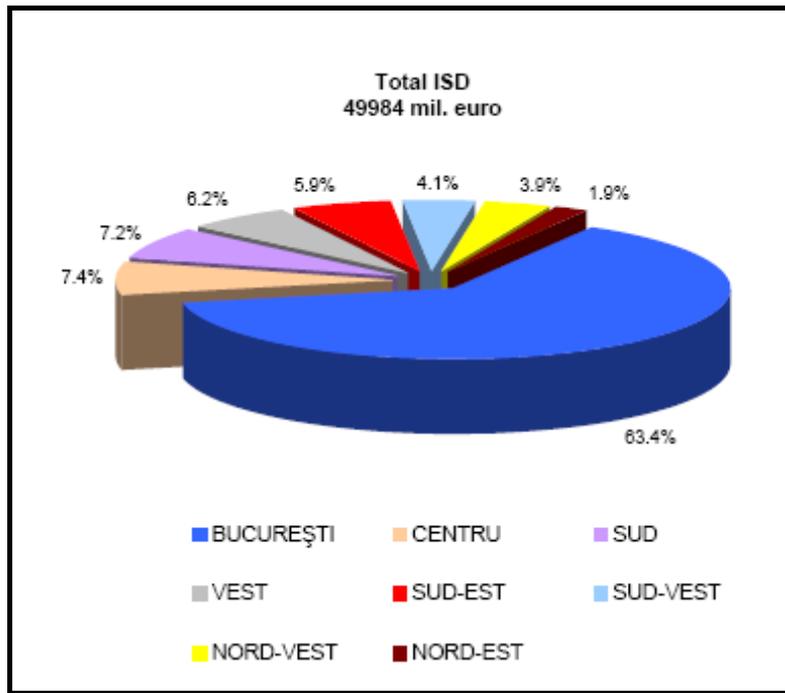


Figure 6. The main development regions (www.bnr.ro)

The main countries that invested in our economic branches can be seen in the chart below.

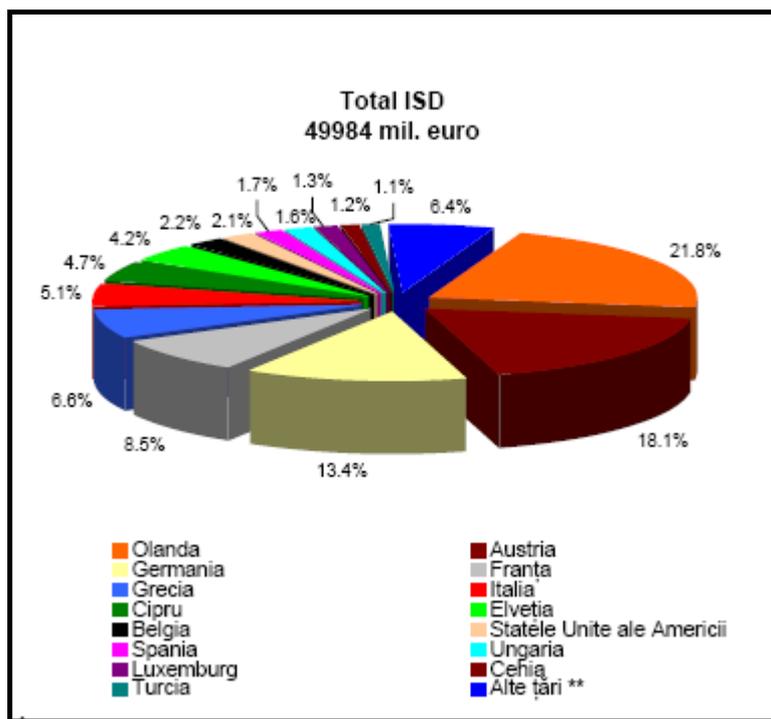


Figure 7. The main investing countries (www.bnr.ro)

Foreign investments increased the number of places of work in our country. The candidates were asked not only to be well prepared in the respective field, to have the necessary specialty knowledge, but also to speak several foreign languages, this way developing the international relations. Mention should also be made that, in the first trimester of this year, Romania has increased the exports by 30% as compared to the same period of 2010⁹.

Foreign direct investments and the expansion of the trading activities abroad lead to the creation of new jobs. Statistics show that in 2008, 11,403 new jobs were created as a result of the FDI, while in 2009 the number decreased to 6,384¹⁰.

But in order to work with the foreign investors, people in Romania not only have to be well qualified in their field of activity, but they also have to possess good linguistic skills. This idea is supported by the survey conducted by the Eurobarometer for the European Commission regarding the employers' perception on the graduates' employability. 201 Romanian companies, both public and private, were included in the research, and 35% of

⁹ <http://www.ziua-decj.ro/economie/exporturile-din-romania-au-crescut-cu-30--68417.html>, 12th June 2011.

¹⁰ <http://www.eyeim.com/press.htm>, 12th June 2011.

them declared that 1 out of 5 employees are graduates. Most of the graduates hired by these companies had a diploma in economics and business administration or technical studies.

In what the skills and aptitudes relevant for the employment process are concerned, the study shows that, in Romania, the following have been evaluated as being the most important:

Skills and aptitudes	Percentage
Teamwork	80%
Ability to use the computer	79%
Ability to adapt to new situations	70%
Communication skills	70%
Analytical and problem-solving skills	66%
Planning and organizational skills	61%
Decision-making skills	47%
Foreign language knowledge	42%

Let us see, in this respect, the case of HP, who invested in Romania, creating a subsidiary in Bucharest. In 2010, the company recruited 600 new employees, mostly focused on support services, and they proudly state that within HP Romania, there are 22 foreign languages spoken by their employees. In an interview given for the Wall-Street Journal, Anca Tapai, Recruitment Manager for HP Romania, stressed the fact that foreign language knowledge is an extremely important asset, and they were looking for people able to speak, apart from English, which is a must, German, French, Spanish, Italian or Scandinavian languages in order for them to be able to “adapt to the requirements of a multinational environment”¹¹.

3. Students’ attitudes towards language learning

In the period of time ranging from January 2011 until June 2011, we carried out a research on the attitudes of students enrolled at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. We wanted to see whether the Romanian university took into consideration the recommendations made by the European Union institutions in what multilingualism is concerned and whether the Romanian students are aware of the importance of foreign languages for their future employment.

¹¹ www.wall-street.ro, 12th June 2011.

Mention should firstly be made that, ever since 1995, Babeş-Bolyai University has been organized on three "lines of study" in order to respect the national minorities in Transylvania (Romanian line of study, Hungarian line of study and German line of study).

Therefore, we chose the quantitative research method, as "Quantitative research is explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)" (Mujis 2004: 1). The quantitative method is used to collect numerical data to explain a certain phenomenon. There are cases when many data that are not in numerical format may be collected for the quantitative research by designing research instruments that convert the phenomenon into a quantitative one, which can afterwards be statistically analysed.

Many believe that the quantitative research cannot explain all phenomena, that this type of research is used only by those who wish to quickly get rid of the analysis of a phenomenon and that only the qualitative research may give a true perspective on the facts, but, according to Mujis (2004), this is not true. Why? Because, although the qualitative research may offer a deeper analysis on certain phenomena,

"a well-designed quantitative study will allow us not just to look at what happens, but to provide an explanation of why it happens as well. The key lies in your research design and what variables you collect". (Mujis 2004: 10)

Furthermore, it is obvious that a qualitative research is much more subjective than a quantitative research.

The questionnaire was elaborated and addressed to students enrolled in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of studies in the above-mentioned Romanian university. For the drafting of the questionnaire we followed the standard steps for the elaboration of a viable questionnaire for our research topic. Therefore, we set as objective to analyse the linguistic skills of students enrolled at Babeş-Bolyai University.

For the sampling we chose the "simple random sampling", which is the most known and used method, as we considered it to be the best way to carry out an unbiased research, granting this way to every students the possibility to take part in our research. This type of sampling is advantageous as it is the most suitable for generalisation and for the inclusion in our research of all necessary subgroups.

After having established the general objectives, we went on to the drafting of the questionnaire. It comprises both closed as well as open-ended questions. The open-ended questions, as it is well known, are those questions where respondents formulate their own answer, while closed questions propose formulated answers to the respondent who has to choose the one/ones he/she considers appropriate in their case.

For the elaboration of the questionnaire, we took into consideration several basic rules which state that the questions addressed have to be as simple and clear as possible, to include

the “I don’t know” option in order not to force the respondent to give an answer that may lead to errors etc. The questionnaire was applied to 140 students from the faculties of history and political sciences within Babeş-Bolyai University.

After having collected the questionnaires, we processed the data. Our questionnaire is made up of 32 questions separated into three distinct parts. The first part, *General Information*, gathered information on the faculty where the students were enrolled, as well as on the year of studies. The second part gathered information on the students’ linguistic knowledge, by addressing questions referring to their mother tongue, the number of foreign languages known, the age when they started to learn foreign languages, the enumeration of the foreign languages they spoke, as well as a section where students were asked to self-evaluate their language skills as per the European Framework of reference for Languages. The purpose of the third part of the questionnaire, *Foreign languages in higher education and students’ attitudes towards foreign language learning*, was to analyse the students’ satisfaction in what the teaching of foreign languages was concerned as well as the degree of implementation by the university/faculty of the European Union recommendation on the learning of at least two languages other than mother tongue from an early age and at all education levels. Let us see the partial results of the survey¹².

3.1 General information

According to the analysis made in the SPSS programme, after the insertion of all data and after having established all the variables, we saw that, out of the 140 respondents to the questionnaire, 33 were males and 107 were females.

3.2 Language knowledge

As to the number for foreign languages spoken, the statistics showed that nine of the male respondents declared knowing only one foreign languages; sixteen declared knowing two foreign languages; eight of them declared knowing three foreign languages.

As to the female sampling, things are a bit different as out of the 107 female respondents, only two declared knowing one foreign language, forty-five know two foreign languages, forty know three foreign languages, fourteen know four foreign languages and three declared knowing five foreign languages.

Your gender * Foreign languages known Crosstabulation

¹² All data were inserted in the statistics programme SPSS. We established the necessary variables according to which data were analysed and compared.

Count

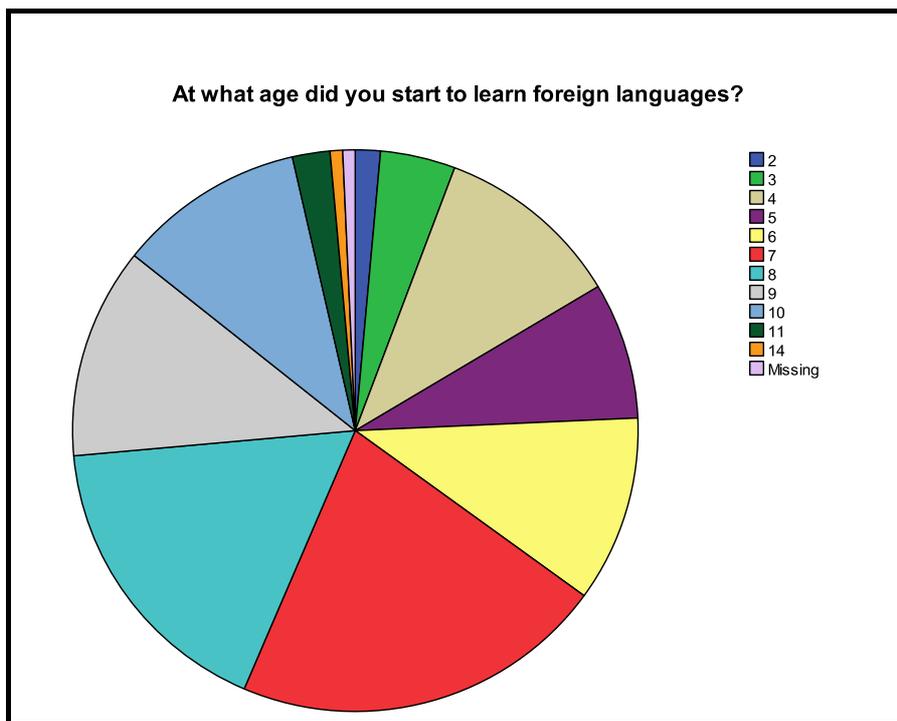
		Foreign languages known					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Your gender	Male	9	16	8	0	0	33
	Female	2	45	40	17	3	107
Total		11	61	48	17	3	140

From the above chart we may see that there seems to be a connection between gender and the number of foreign languages. Females seem to be more able to learn foreign languages, as once they start learning one, they continue learning the second, the third.

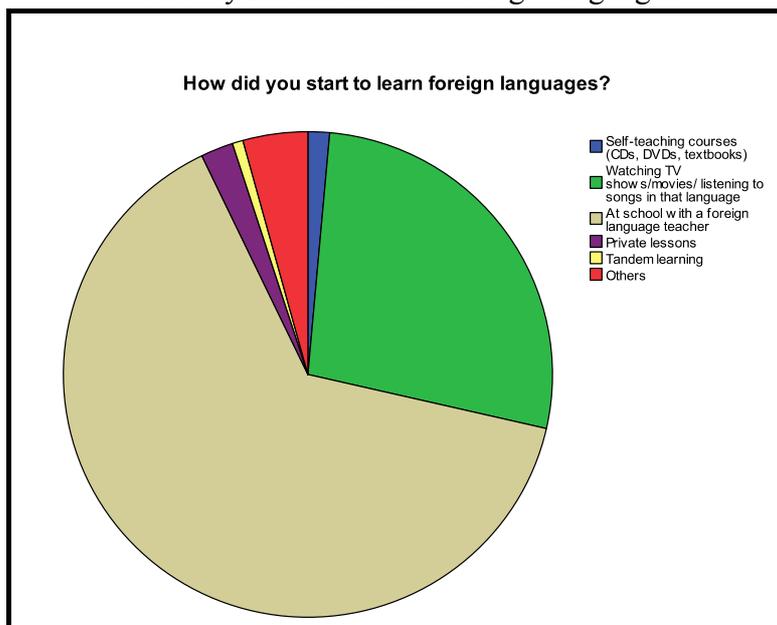
It is well known that one of the main recommendations of the European Union is the learning of at least two languages other than the mother tongue. That is why we wanted first of all to see the age when the respondents started to learn a foreign language and how. As we shall see in the chart below, many of the Romanian students who participated in the survey declared having started to learn a foreign language at an early age¹³.

The age when students started to learn foreign languages

¹³ It is very well known the fact that the city of Cluj-Napoca won the *Piccolongo* competition for the early foreign language learning. See more at <http://piccolingo.europa.eu/en>, 28/03/2011.



How they started to learn foreign languages



4. Foreign languages in higher education and students’ attitudes towards foreign language learning

Babeş-Bolyai University is known for its multilingual and multicultural organization established, in 1995, through its Charter. Therefore, it has twenty-one faculties and three “lines of study” (Romanian, Hungarian and German). At bachelor’s level, the university offers 104 specialisations in Romanian, 55 in Hungarian, 13 in German, 8 in English and 1 in French. At master’s level, there are 179 courses in Romanian, 36 in Hungarian, 7 in German, 34 in English, 11 in French, 3 in Italian and 3 in Spanish.

Babeş-Bolyai University is a good example in Europe in what concerns language policy. A survey carried out by the European Language Council, in 2002-2003¹⁴, showed that, out of the 150 universities that were sent the questionnaire, only 21 responded. Out of these 21 universities, only three of them had at that time a language policy, either under the form of a single, compact document (the case of Babeş-Bolyai University) or as a documentation made up of several documents that mentioned the use of languages in their universities (the case of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece and the case of the Freiburg University in Switzerland).

The case of Babeş-Bolyai University is considered a case of good practice in what regards language policies in higher education¹⁵. Adopted in 2001, under the title *For a European Language Policy*, the documents explicitly situates the language policy in the European context of 2+1 (learning at least two languages other than the mother tongue), underlining the necessity for the students to acquire certain compulsory skills (communication skills, intercultural communication skills etc.) for the formation of European citizens. The document also presents the infrastructure of the University for the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Within the university there are two language centres (ALPHA and LINGUA), which, apart from offering language courses for people of all ages, also issue language certificates for the graduates of the university who, at the end of their studies, have to prove that they have a certain level of linguistic skills. When enrolling at the university, students are expected to be at a B1/B2 level according to the CEFR. The purpose of the language courses offered during the academic studies is to bring students at a C1/C2 level.

Given this background, we wanted to see whether students are aware of the importance of foreign languages or not. We included in the questionnaire an open question (“Is foreign language knowledge important from your point of view? Please motivate your answer”). Therefore, we were able to classify the answers according to their types:

¹⁴ Angela Chambers, University of Limerick, Ireland, *Language policy in higher education in Europe: a pilot survey*, www.userpage.fu-berlin.de, 12/01/2011.

¹⁵ See the ENLU (European Network for the Promotion of Language Learning among All Undergraduates) document, *Benchmarks for a Higher Education Language Policy*, at www.userpage.fu-berlin.de/~enlu/downloads/TF1_report_final.rtf, 29/01/2011. See also Angela Chambers, *op.cit.*

- Foreign languages are important for the students' personal development (students answered here that foreign language knowledge is important for them to communicate with other persons from different cultures, to go on vacation abroad etc.) and
- Foreign languages are important for the students' professional development (students answered here that foreign language knowledge is important for them to develop their communication skills and, most of all, to find a good job).

It is very important to see that students are aware of the necessity to learn foreign languages, and to learn as many and as varied as possible. That is why we included a question asking them to mention which languages are the most important from their point of view.

The first foreign language mentioned as being the most important nowadays

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	126	90,0	92,0	92,0
	French	1	,7	,7	92,7
	German	7	5,0	5,1	97,8
	Chinese	3	2,1	2,2	100,0
	Total	137	97,9	100,0	
Missing	System	3	2,1		
Total		140	100,0		

The second foreign language mentioned as being the most important nowadays

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	6	4,3	4,9	4,9
	French	50	35,7	40,7	45,5
	German	45	32,1	36,6	82,1
	Italian	3	2,1	2,4	84,6
	Spanish	9	6,4	7,3	91,9
	Swedish	1	,7	,8	92,7
	Chinese	4	2,9	3,3	95,9
	Japanese	3	2,1	2,4	98,4
	Portuguese	1	,7	,8	99,2
	Russian	1	,7	,8	100,0
	Total	123	87,9	100,0	
Missing	System	17	12,1		

The second foreign language mentioned as being the most important nowadays

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	6	4,3	4,9	4,9
	French	50	35,7	40,7	45,5
	German	45	32,1	36,6	82,1
	Italian	3	2,1	2,4	84,6
	Spanish	9	6,4	7,3	91,9
	Swedish	1	,7	,8	92,7
	Chinese	4	2,9	3,3	95,9
	Japanese	3	2,1	2,4	98,4
	Portuguese	1	,7	,8	99,2
	Russian	1	,7	,8	100,0
	Total	123	87,9	100,0	
Missing	System	17	12,1		
Total		140	100,0		

The third foreign language mentioned as being the most important nowadays

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	1	,7	1,2	1,2
	French	30	21,4	36,1	37,3
	German	23	16,4	27,7	65,1
	Italian	1	,7	1,2	66,3
	Spanish	6	4,3	7,2	73,5
	Swedish	1	,7	1,2	74,7
	Norwegian	1	,7	1,2	75,9
	Chinese	9	6,4	10,8	86,7
	Japanese	1	,7	1,2	88,0
	Arabic	2	1,4	2,4	90,4
	Portuguese	4	2,9	4,8	95,2
	Finnish	2	1,4	2,4	97,6
	Russian	2	1,4	2,4	100,0
	Total	83	59,3	100,0	
	Missing	System	57	40,7	
Total		140	100,0		

The fourth foreign language mentioned as being the most important nowadays

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	French	1	,7	3,7	3,7
	German	4	2,9	14,8	18,5
	Italian	3	2,1	11,1	29,6
	Spanish	4	2,9	14,8	44,4
	Chinese	8	5,7	29,6	74,1
	Japanese	2	1,4	7,4	81,5
	Portuguese	4	2,9	14,8	96,3
	Russian	1	,7	3,7	100,0
	Total	27	19,3	100,0	
Missing	System	113	80,7		
Total		140	100,0		

Seeing that English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese are the languages that have been mentioned the most, we further asked the students which languages they studied at the faculty they enrolled, in order to see whether their linguistic needs were being covered or not.

The results have shown that, out of the 140 students who participated in the survey, all of them declared they studied one foreign language as part of the curriculum (89.3% study English, 3.6% study French, 5.7% study German, 0.7% Spanish and 0.7% Norwegian). Only 13 respondents declared they studied a second language at their faculty: 5% study English, 0.7% French, 2.1% German, 0.7% Chinese and 0.7% study Portuguese (i.e. 9.3% of the total number of participants in the survey). Only one student declared studying a third language (Chinese 0.7%).

5. Conclusions

After having seen some result of the survey carried out among the Romanian students enrolled at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, we may say that the foreign languages offered to students is rather varied and covers a wide range of languages.

Students are satisfied with the languages taught, as the study has further showed. As such, they gain linguistic skills that, as students themselves declared, will help them find a good and well-paid job. Well trained students also help increase the amounts of foreign investments in our countries and foreign investments may boost the Romanian economy.

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