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FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY SECTORS

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Abstract

The French language is the sixth most widely used language globally, and proficiency in it is essential in the growing international tourism and hospitality sectors, where effective foreign language communication is highly demanded. However, students in the French Language Education Study Program are primarily prepared for careers as educators, despite preliminary data indicating a strong preference among graduates for non-education sectors, specifically tourism and business. This study addresses a significant research gap by exploring how French Language Education students with their unique linguistic and cultural mastery perceive career opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industry. This research aimed to identify these perceptions, analyze influencing factors, and assess students' career readiness outside the education sector. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected from sixth to eighth semester students specializing in Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques (FOS) using semi-structured interviews and analyzed with the Miles and Huberman model. The findings reveal that students generally hold positive perceptions of career opportunities, driven by external factors such as the increasing number of foreign tourists and high earnings potential as well as internal factors including strong confidence in French proficiency and the influence of FOS-related courses. Main barriers identified include a lack of specialized training and limited practical experience. The study concludes that students possess a strong, informed understanding and generally high readiness for non-education careers, suggesting a need for a curriculum that integrates multilingual vocational preparation and fieldwork to enhance global competitiveness and support the tourism workforce.

Keywords: French Language Education, Career Opportunities, Tourism, Hospitality Industry, Student Perceptions

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), there are approximately 321 million French speakers worldwide. Similar estimates indicate that French is spoken by at least 76 million native speakers, as well as 235 million speakers who use it fluently in daily life, and an additional 77–110 million speakers who use French as a second language, making it the sixth most widely spoken language after English, Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, and Arabic. French language proficiency in the hospitality industry is not merely an added value but an essential requirement amid the growth of

global tourism (Sunaryono et al., 2024; Ishak et al., 2025). Furthermore, jobs in this sector, such as tour guides, hotel receptionists, airport service staff, and other hospitality roles, require effective communication skills in foreign languages, including French (Ab et al., 2023; Salsabilah et al., 2025). The tourism sector itself is considered a modern industry with significant potential to drive economic development, create jobs rapidly, and stimulate other productive sectors (Sari et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2025).

However, in theory, there is a mismatch between pedagogically oriented educational curricula and the practical competencies required in the tourism industry. Students in the French Language Education Program are essentially prepared to become educators in both formal and non-formal institutions, equipped with pedagogical competencies and educational character development. In reality, field conditions indicate a significant horizontal mismatch. This is supported by the researcher's preliminary survey of alumni from a state university in Bandung, where 68.4% of graduates actually work in the non-educational sector. This finding aligns with research conducted by Geni et al. (2009), which recorded a figure of 65% for a similar phenomenon in Jakarta. This theoretical gap is exacerbated by variations in students' perceptions of job opportunities, which directly influence their readiness and motivation. Although courses in French for Specific Purposes (FOS) are available, the existing literature remains limited in explaining how external factors (the job market) interact with internal factors (personal abilities) in shaping the career decisions of language education students.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to analyze the factors influencing students' interest in choosing careers outside of education. This analysis is crucial because it serves as the data foundation for evaluating whether such interest is driven by the appeal of the tourism industry (pull factors) or by students' low self-efficacy in teaching roles (push factors). The relevance of this analysis to the overall research objectives is to bridge the gap between academic output and the demands of the global market. Understanding students' perceptions and attributions will provide a foundation for institutions to formulate more adaptive curriculum policies, ensuring that graduates not only master linguistic and educational aspects but also possess professional readiness relevant to the dynamics of the modern industry. Based on these considerations, this study aims to:

- a. Determine French Language Education students' perceptions of career opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors.
- b. Analyze the factors influencing students' interest in pursuing careers outside of education.
- c. Assess the extent to which French Language Education students are prepared to face career challenges in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Dynamics of Foreign Language Competence in The Tourism Sector

Previous research has consistently shown that proficiency in a foreign language is a key determinant of success in the tourism sector. Research on the analysis of perceptions regarding career opportunities is particularly important for senior students, with various studies conducted from diverse perspectives and academic programs. For example, Hutagalung (2020) examined the use of German in tourism and found that students are often unfamiliar with specialized vocabulary in hospitality and tourism terminology, leading them to frequently borrow terms from English, which negatively impacts their linguistic competence as workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Similarly, (Harahap, 2024) highlights English as one of the most widely used foreign languages,

which often leads to a skills gap among local workers. In line with this, (Dewi, 2023) explains the critical role of foreign languages in tourism promotion, reservations, services, and guiding. However, foreign languages such as English and German have demonstrated how students' perceptions of the workplace are shaped. These perceptions are influenced by intrinsic motivation and information about career opportunities (Syamsudin et al., 2023).

Critical analysis: although these studies emphasize the important role of foreign languages, there is a tendency to generalize linguistic challenges to all languages. Hutagalung's (2020) research shows that reliance on English actually weakens proficiency in certain other foreign languages (such as German or French). This highlights a gap in language education curricula, which often fail to integrate industry-specific technical vocabulary (French for Specific Purposes), leading to a professional culture shock when students enter the workforce in the tourism sector.

2.2 Attribution Theory and The Formation of Career Perceptions

Perception is a cognitive process that involves processing environmental information to form an individual's understanding of specific objects or situations (Nisa et al., 2023; Simbolon et al., 2025), encompassing the reception, selection, interpretation, organization, evaluation, and response to sensory stimuli and data (Mubarok, 2025). In this context, students' understanding of career opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors influences their attitudes and career choices. Regarding social and self-perception, Harold Kelley, a social psychologist who developed the Kelley Covariance Model in formulating attribution theory, emphasizes the importance of considering the relationship between two variables or covariates when attempting to understand why a person behaves in a certain way (Azan et al., 2025). Attribution is used to analyze the factors influencing actions, whether caused by individual traits or environmental conditions (Wiratraur et al., 2025). Furthermore, Kelley's attribution theory explains how individuals understand the causes of an event through three main dimensions: consensus, consistency, and uniqueness. This theory is crucial for analyzing how students attribute factors influencing employment opportunities, whether internal or external (Fuah et al., 2025).

Individual perceptions do not arise spontaneously, but rather through a series of processes and factors that influence a person's perspective. This results in everyone having different interpretations, even of the same observed object (Nisa et al., 2023). This aligns with the factors influencing individuals according to Stephen P. Robbins, including:

- a. The perceiver: when observing something and attempting to explain it, a person is influenced by personal characteristics such as attitudes, goals, interests, experiences, knowledge, and expectations.
- b. The object of perception: the object of perception can be a person, an object, or a specific situation. These characteristics generally influence how people view them. Perceptions involving others in such situations lead to the grouping of similar individuals, objects, or events, distinguishing them from other groups.
- c. Situation: perception must be analyzed within a context, meaning the situation in which the perception arises and requires attention. These conditions are elements that play a role in how a person forms their perception.

An object or event generates a stimulus, which then affects the sensory organs (receptors). The object is then observed and interpreted by the sensory organs, which serve as the primary tools for individuals in forming perceptions and receiving stimuli

(Tanjung et al., 2022; Maukari et al., 2026). Perception is not merely a process of information reception, but a complex cognitive construction (Nisa et al., 2023; Mubarak, 2025). Using Harold Kelley's Covariance Model, individuals evaluate actions based on consensus, consistency, and uniqueness (Azan et al., 2025).

Critical Analysis: Recent literature (such as Said & Iskandar, 2020; Miysell & Wasisto, 2020) has extensively explored how perception influences career interest. However, a critical analysis of this literature reveals that most studies still focus on individual internal factors. There remains room to investigate how the interaction between environmental situations (external factors according to Robbins) and the personal attributions of French Language Education students specifically shapes resistance to or, conversely, attraction toward non-teaching professions.

2.3 Work Readiness: Integration of Internal and External Factors

Students' readiness to enter the job market is influenced by career planning, resilience, and practical experience (Azky & Mulyana, 2024). Internship experience (Angelina et al., 2023) and social support are key variables in the transition from academia to the workforce. According to Azky & Mulyana (2024), the factors influencing students' readiness to face job opportunities are divided into internal and external factors as follows:

a. Internal factors:

- Career planning: Activities undertaken by individuals related to achieving professional goals, aligned with their desired career path through self-awareness, decision-making, exploration, and preparation for entering the real working world (Latif et al., 2017, in Azky and Mulyana, 2024).
- Resilience: An individual's ability to cope with and endure life's challenges. Individuals with high resilience view difficulties as a growth process and strive to achieve specific goals (Agusta, 2014, in Azky and Mulyana, 2024).
- Internship or field work experience (PKL): Plays a crucial role in preparing students to enter the workforce, as through this program, students learn to perform tasks according to assigned roles and experience the real job market, thereby gaining insights and understanding of what is required in the workplace (Angelina et al., 2023, in Azky and Mulyana, 2024).

b. External factors: Social support. With adequate social support, individuals can adapt more easily to new circumstances. This makes it easier for someone facing challenges during the job search process or when starting a new job at a company (Anjani et al., 2024).

Critical analysis: a review of various documents revealed that while internship programs are considered crucial, there is a disconnect between the types of internships undertaken by education program students and the needs of the tourism industry. Most literature merely describes internships as experiences but has not deeply analyzed how school-based internships (PLP) conflict with career aspirations in the hospitality sector. This study aims to address this gap by evaluating readiness specifically within a cross-sectoral context (from education to tourism).

2.4 Macroeconomic Challenges: Industrial Demand and Unemployment

Employment is a vital aspect of supporting the economy; every individual has the right to employment opportunities. However, the opportunities available must align with skills, education, and industry demand. The expansion of employment opportunities

should be viewed not only from an economic perspective but also from a social one. As a developing country, unemployment remains a serious issue for the government and citizens, as it can affect national income levels and public welfare (Ponto, 2023).

The development of tourism areas in Indonesia must involve community participation so that local residents can benefit from the tourism sector. Measures such as empowerment, entrepreneurship training, and enhancing the role of traditional leaders in tourism development can contribute to achieving this. Through the active participation of local communities in the development of Indonesian tourism, this can also help preserve cultural heritage and traditions (Wibowo et al., 2023; Indrawati & Sari., 2024; Rifdah & Kusdiwanggo, 2024). The presence of the hospitality industry in tourism development indicates that hotels support the growth of the tourism industry in the city (Singgalen, 2024). The annual increase in the number of tourists serves as a source of regional revenue across various business sectors, including the hospitality industry.

Critical analysis: at the macro level, labor absorption must align with industry demand to avoid wasting human resources (Ponto, 2023). The rapid growth of the hospitality industry (Azky & Mulyana, 2024) requires a workforce that is not only technically skilled but also culturally adaptable.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within an interpretivist paradigm; this approach allows for a deeper, contextual exploration of meaning to comprehensively understand and describe the perceptions of students in the French Language Education Program regarding career opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Hasan et al., 2025). This approach is frequently used in social phenomenology, which focuses on research questions regarding who, what, where, and how an event occurs, and then analyzes these to identify emerging patterns. In line with this, Annasthasya et al. (2021) argue that qualitative research is an effort to explore the characteristics of relationships, activities, conditions, or other relevant elements.

The heterogeneous nature of the respondents as French Language Education students allows for diverse perspectives among individuals. Consequently, the research findings were not predetermined by the researcher but were derived through the respondents' participation and subsequent analysis. The use of this method provides the researcher with insight into the underlying dynamics and processes, where human interaction with the environment continues to evolve, remains dynamic, and changes over time (Pugu et al., 2024). This study was conducted within the French Language Education Study Program at the Indonesia University of Education, where social and academic interactions in the FOS (Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques) specialization course served as the primary context for shaping the perceptions of 11 students.

The study population, as defined by Susanto et al. (2024), refers to the totality of individuals, objects, or events that are the focus of the study. In line with this, Sugiyono (2017, as cited in Nuraisyah et al., 2021) describes the population as an area of generalization containing objects or subjects with specific qualities and characteristics determined by the researcher for the purposes of the study and drawing conclusions. In this study, the population consists of students in semesters 6–8 majoring in Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques (FOS). Suriani et al. (2023) explain that a sample is a subset selected from the population to represent all its members, as a high-quality sample reflects the characteristics of the population. Sampling in this study used purposive sampling based on specific criteria, including:

- a. Active French Language Education students in semesters 6 through 8.
- b. Focusing on the French for Specific Purposes (FOS) specialization.
- c. Having taken courses related to the workplace or tourism, and willing to participate as respondents.

Respondents were recruited through an open invitation in the students' internal communication group, as well as through direct invitations. In these interactions, the researcher explained the study's objectives and guaranteed the confidentiality of respondents' identities before obtaining their informed consent.

Ridwan (2013, as cited in Makbul, 2021) argues that research instruments serve as tools that act as a source for researchers in gathering information. The quality of this tool directly influences the quality of the information obtained, highlighting the interdependent relationship between the tool and the data in research. The method used in this study was semi-structured interviews, aimed at exploring issues in greater detail and with more openness. This method allows researchers to delve deeper into respondents' responses regarding each question posed. The researcher also has the flexibility to add questions during the process, provided that the responses to the previously prepared questions yield satisfactory results. In other words, the researcher can adapt the previously designed questions (Latifah & Supena, 2021; Qomaruddin, 2024).

The interview guidelines were developed with guidance from experts in the relevant field. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The data collection procedure followed these steps:

- a. Pre-Interview: researchers developed interview guidelines that were validated by experts in the relevant field.
- b. Conduct: interviews were conducted in person and online (via a meeting platform) based on the informants' availability. Each session lasted 30–45 minutes.
- c. Recording: all conversations were recorded using a voice recorder with the informants' permission to ensure the accuracy of the primary data.
- d. Transcription: the recordings were transcribed into written text and then verified (member checking) with the informants to ensure the validity of the data.

For data analysis, the researchers applied the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three sequential stages:

- a. Data Reduction: summarizing and selecting key data from interview transcripts regarding perceptions, enabling factors, and career barriers.
- b. Data Display: presenting data in the form of thematic tables and key patterns to facilitate understanding of the relationships between variables.
- c. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: drawing conclusions based on the identified patterns and verifying them using Kelley's attribution theory.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study's focus is limited to students at a single educational institution, so the results may not reflect the perceptions of French language students throughout Indonesia in general. Second, this study only explores the perceptions of students (prospective workers) and has not yet incorporated the direct perspectives of employers in the tourism industry to assess competency alignment from both sides. Third, this study focuses only on students who have a greater interest in working outside the education sector.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are summarized into three main themes in line with the objectives of this study, as shown in Table 1, which highlights the most prominent

patterns following the data reduction process, such as grouping similar responses to avoid data duplication and emphasize the core of the discussion.

Table 1. Themes and Main Patterns from Interview Data Theme Main Patterns

Themes	Main Patterns
Knowledge and General Perceptions of Career Opportunities	Broad and positive opportunities with regional variations; positive aspects include global prospects, while negative aspects relate to workload pressures.
Factors Influencing Career Interest	External factors: international job opportunities and income potential; Internal factors: confidence in French language ability and the influence of FOS-related courses.
Career Readiness Outside the Education Sector	Generally high, supported by French language proficiency; some doubts remain due to limited practical experience. Limited practical experience, lack of specialized training, and concerns about career stability.

Source: Researchers (2025)

4.1 General Knowledge and Perceptions of Career Opportunities

Regarding the first research objective on student perceptions, it was found that the majority of respondent's view career opportunities in the tourism industry as highly promising. The findings consistently indicate that respondents have a moderate to high level of understanding regarding career opportunities outside the field of education, particularly those requiring multilingual skills such as tour guides and call center positions. Overall, respondents expressed a very positive view of these prospects, a perception largely influenced by the increasing number of foreign tourists, particularly from French-speaking countries in Europe. This strong consensus among respondents directly reflects external attribution within the framework of Kelley's Attribution Theory, where job opportunities are viewed as a consistent situational factor namely, demand from foreign tourists and generally beyond individual control. Additionally, significant differences were noted across regions, with international tourism destinations like Bali consistently offering greater job prospects. This aligns with the statement made by respondent RM, who said, "In my opinion, opportunities depend on the region. For example, opportunities are greater in Bali because there are more foreign tourists there than in Bandung." However, in general, proficiency in French remains an asset in any tourism sector. Another respondent, SIS, stated, "Consistent job opportunities are more commonly found in Bali because, since their income depends on foreign tourists, they must provide services for these tourists, one of which is having staff who are proficient in French".

The respondents highlighted positive aspects such as the opportunity to interact with international visitors. However, concerns were also expressed regarding industry uncertainties, such as irregular working hours and fluctuations in tourist numbers, which are inherent risks in the tourism sector. At the same time, the majority of respondents expressed strong confidence in their French language skills, reflecting internal attributions regarding their personal readiness to interact effectively in customer service.

4.2 Factors Influencing Career Interests

Furthermore, to address the second research objective regarding the factors influencing career interests, the data indicates a strong influence from FOS courses and the potential for international earnings. Respondents' career interests are significantly influenced by the synergy between internal and external motivations. External factors are

largely based on pragmatic and economic considerations. Dominant external factors, such as the current strong economic conditions in the tourism sector, combined with higher earning potential and rapid career advancement in the global market, collectively provide strong material incentives. This indicates that their interests are substantially influenced by rational considerations, where they perceive the rewards in the tourism sector to be greater than in traditional educational pathways. As one GP respondent put it, “Salaries in the tourism/hospitality sector tend to be more competitive, and career advancement opportunities are faster than in the education sector.” At the same time, the primary internal factor driving motivation is well-honed French communication skills, which they view as a real competitive advantage and a source of self-confidence. This internal motivation is significantly reinforced by a specialized course, Français de l’hôtellerie et de la Restauration. According to the SI and NF respondents, “this course is very helpful, especially for those interested in the hospitality, restaurant, and tourism industries. We learn the basics, and in addition to learning French, we also learn how things work and the culture”. The structured academic mastery within a professional context and the industry-specific terminology acquired through this course strengthen students’ internal consistency—a core concept in Kelley’s Attribution Theory—as their academic competencies provide a strong and logical justification for pursuing a career in the tourism sector. This dualism of attribution explains why students’ interest in transitioning to the non-educational sector is so prominent.

4.3 Readiness and Barriers to Pursuing a Career Outside the Education Sector

Then, to answer the research objective regarding the level of readiness, the interview results indicate that students feel linguistically prepared but require further development in technical aspects. The research findings reveal strong consensus regarding career transition: the majority of respondents stated that they are ready to move into the non-education sector. This readiness is primarily linked to a high level of proficiency in French and a strong personal interest in the tourism industry. This consensus indicates a high overall level of career readiness, a view strongly supported by the perception of opportunities to earn higher incomes in the tourism sector compared to traditional teaching roles. This aligns with respondent ZP’s statement: “I am very ready because my interests lie outside the education sector, and what I’ve experienced is very interesting and promising”. However, this readiness is not universal; a small proportion of respondents felt less prepared, primarily due to limited practical experience during their studies and concerns about adapting to the fast-paced work environment typical of the tourism industry. As respondent AI noted, “I feel fairly prepared to work outside of an educational setting, but I still feel unprepared for the fast-paced work rhythm.” However, this readiness is offset by significant structural barriers, including a lack of direct practical experience and concerns regarding the industry’s fast-paced work rhythm.” Another respondent, ST, highlighted that barriers often stem from a lack of field experience and the need for specialized training. This underscores the need for a curriculum that integrates certified internships and industry partnerships to bridge the gap between educational outcomes and market demands.

This study makes an important contribution to the literature on foreign language students’ career perceptions by demonstrating that linguistic ability is no longer the sole determinant of work readiness. In contrast to the previous study by Anjani et al. (2024), which focused on students’ general motivation to learn, these findings reveal that specific courses such as FOS (Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques) act as a psychological bridge

that shifts students' perceptions from those of educators to those of professional practitioners. This study expands the literature by highlighting a readiness gap in which students feel highly confident linguistically but feel technically and operationally helpless due to a lack of industry exposure in the teacher education curriculum.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted throughout this study, it can be concluded that students in the French Language Education program demonstrate a strong and well-informed understanding of career opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Their positive perceptions of job prospects are influenced by external conditions, particularly the growing demand for multilingual services driven by an increase in the number of international visitors, as well as internal factors such as their confidence in their French language proficiency. These findings address the primary research objective, demonstrating that language proficiency serves not only as a communicative asset but also as a motivational driver that strengthens students' interest in pursuing careers outside the education sector. This study also indicates a generally high level of career readiness to transition into non-educational fields, particularly when aligned with students' linguistic abilities.

On a theoretical level, this study expands the application of Attribution Theory within the context of career transitions among language education graduates. While attribution theory generally views success from the perspective of internal factors (ability) and external factors (market conditions), this study introduces the dimension of Curricular Attribution. These findings indicate that students attribute their career readiness not to natural talent, but to the specific curriculum structure they have followed. This offers a new perspective for career perception theory, suggesting that a specific academic environment can radically alter students' career orientation, even when their initial identity is that of a prospective teacher.

Based on these findings, future research agendas should shift from merely exploring what students think toward analyzing competency alignment. Further research involving tourism industry stakeholders is needed to validate whether these students' positive perceptions align with the qualifications required by the international job market. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to track whether students with these positive perceptions actually succeed in transitioning to the tourism industry after graduation, as well as to conduct comparative studies among various universities offering French language programs to examine the impact of curriculum differences on career readiness.

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