

Institute of Tourism Studies
In affiliation with
The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management

***Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the
workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry***

A Thesis submitted on the 28th of August 2022

by:

Matthew Luke Schembri

Student Number: 1901684/1

Submitted to:

Dr. Carlos Grima

In partial fulfilment for the requirements of
The Degree of Master of Business Administration

Declaration

I, *Matthew Luke Schembri*, declare that this is an original piece of work, produced entirely by me, and that all source material has been appropriately referenced. In addition, I attest that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of any other course, degree, or qualification at this or any other university or institute of learning.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Luke Schembri', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Student's signature

Abstract

The increase in service-based industries and globalisation have created a diverse, complex, and multi-cultural labour market. This research aimed to extract insights into the perceptions formed by local restaurant patrons with respect to the international workforce within Maltese restaurants. This study primarily delved into factors for internationalisation: the industry's alarming labour shortages, migration patterns, and the push and pull factors of a server's job. A mixed method research (MMR) approach was adopted for this study, implementing a triangulation technique to increase contextualisation, credibility, and generalisability. This research design involved 425 questionnaire respondents, five focus group participants and four in-depth interviews. The quantitative aspect of the study was addressed via the questionnaire's close-ended questions, whilst qualitative data was gathered via a focus group with restaurant patrons, in-depth face-to-face interviews with restaurant professionals, and open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Questionnaire respondents were segregated by demographic qualities to analyse any differences in preferences or perceptions. The value and importance of 'service quality' emerged among prominent factors contributing to the holistic restaurant experience in Maltese restaurants. Respondents with low educational attainment (completion of secondary education) valued 'service quality' and the server's ability to speak fluently in their native language significantly higher than the rest of the participants. A server's professional behaviour and attitude were chosen as the most valued server qualities amongst locals. A high rate of intercultural service encounter failures was recorded, especially amongst participants visiting restaurants on a weekly basis. The major contributor to service failure was the language barrier. The general perception of the industry's efforts in providing the necessary cross-cultural and communicative training was negative. The majority of respondents also valued using their native language during service encounters, meaning that retaining Maltese speakers in a front-of-house team may lead to a competitive advantage. This element was particularly noticeable amongst female respondents. This research concluded that the rapid internationalisation of the workforce affects the local restaurant clientele, highlighting the lack of cross-cultural and communicative training amongst Maltese restaurants. Various managerial implications are provided, and numerous areas needing further research were drawn from this study.

Keywords: Restaurant Industry; Cross-cultural Service Encounters; Customer Perceptions; Service Quality; Servers; Malta

Acknowledgements

A special thanks goes to my patient and supportive supervisor, Dr Carlos Grima, for his continuous feedback and guidance throughout this research study. I would also like to give my gratitude to the institute, for delivering a well-managed, flexible, and interesting programme.

I am grateful that I have met three extraordinary classmates, and I could not have completed this academic journey without them; Celine Van Der Mark, Malcolm Zerafa, and Mary Rose Briffa. We formed the perfect team to tackle group assignments, presentations, and late-night feedback sessions. I would also like to give many thanks to two close friends; Rachel Cachia and Kyle Zammit, who went out of their way to help me gather questionnaire respondents during my data gathering process.

On a personal level, I am deeply grateful to my sister Annalise, who encouraged me to pursue this master's degree. A special thanks goes to my parents, who have endlessly supported the advancement of my studies. Finally, I am deeply indebted to my wife Krista and son Nate for all the sacrifices, encouragement, and emotional support shown throughout this exciting academic journey.

Table of Contents

Chapter One - Introduction	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Motivation for Research	2
1.3 Scope of Study	3
1.4 Research Objectives.....	3
1.5 The Research Problem	4
1.6 The Research Question	4
1.7 Study Rationale.....	4
1.8 Research Methods.....	5
1.9 Study Structure	5
1.10 Definition of Key Terms	6
1.11 Summary	7
Chapter Two - Literature Review.....	8
2.1 Malta's Tourism and Employment Trends	8
2.2 National Employment Policies	9
2.3 Labour Shortage in the Hospitality World.....	10
2.4 Migration - The Perfect Solution to Address Labour Shortages?	10
2.5 Service Quality and Service Encounters in a Hospitality Setting	12
2.6 Maltese Cultural Dimensions on Service Encounters	14
2.7 The Multicultural Workforce in the Hospitality Industry	15
2.8 Cross-Cultural Interactions	16
2.9 The Impact of Multicultural Servers on Local Customers.....	17
2.10 Cross-Cultural Training in the Hospitality Environment.....	18
2.11 Communication within a Restaurant Setting.....	20
2.12 The Gap in Knowledge	20
2.13 Summary	21
Chapter Three - Methodology	24
3.1 The Research Problem & Questions	24
3.2 Analysing Cross-Cultural Service Encounters.....	25
3.3 Research Instruments and Setting.....	25
3.4 Sample Size and Population.....	28
3.5 Hypotheses.....	30
3.6 Pilot Study	31
3.7 Ethical Consideration.....	31
3.8 Strengths and Limitations	32
3.9 Summary.....	32
Chapter Four – Findings.....	33
4.1 Questionnaire Findings	33
4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics.....	34
4.1.2 Respondents' Choices	39

4.1.3 Demographic Segmentation	49
4.2 In-Depth Face to Face Interviews	60
4.2.1 Differences in the Restaurant Labour Market according to Industry Professionals.....	60
4.2.2 Client Requests for Specific Servers	61
4.2.3 Restaurant Managers' Experiences regarding Server Encounter Difficulties.....	61
4.2.4 The Importance of Cross-Cultural Training for Foreign Servers	62
4.2.5 Perceptions on Maltese Servers making up the Majority of the Front-of-House Team.....	62
4.2.6 The Future of the Maltese Restaurant Labour Market as per Restaurant Professionals	63
4.3 Focus Group Results.....	64
4.3.1 Changes Observed by Maltese Restaurant Clients	64
4.3.2 The Term 'Server' in the Eyes of Maltese Nationals	65
4.3.3 Perceptions of Foreign Servers Working in the Maltese Restaurant Industry	65
4.3.4 Personal Service Encounter Difficulties	66
4.3.5 Server Nationality Observation	66
4.3.6 Thoughts on Future Restaurant Trends.....	66
Chapter Five - Discussion	68
5.1 The Value of 'Service Quality' within a Maltese Restaurant Setting	68
5.2 Hypothesis 1 - Foreign Servers working in the Maltese Restaurant Industry are given the Necessary Communicational and Cross-Cultural Training.....	69
5.3 Hypothesis 2 - Maltese Restaurant Clients encounter Difficulties during Service Encounters with Foreign Servers.....	70
5.4 Hypothesis 3 – The Language Barrier is the Cause of Most Service Encounter Failures between Foreign Restaurant Servers and Local Patrons	71
5.5 Hypothesis 4 - Maltese is the Preferred Language during Restaurant Service Encounters amongst Locals	72
5.6 Summary.....	73
Chapter Six - Conclusion	75
6.1 Summation of Research	75
6.2 Managerial Implications	77
6.3 Study Limitations.....	78
6.4 Recommendations for Future Research	79
6.5 Summary.....	80
References.....	81
Appendices.....	89
Appendix A – Recruitment Letter and Questionnaire (Google Forms).....	89
Appendix B - In depth Interview (I.D.I) Question Form	95
Appendix C - Focus Group Discussion Pointers.....	96
Appendix D – In depth Interviews (I.D.I) Abstracts.....	98
Appendix E – Signed Consent Forms (I.D.I).....	106
Appendix F – Signed Consent Forms (Focus Group).....	110
Appendix G – Ethics Application Form	115

List of Tables

Table 1 - Maltese adult sample size calculation	29
Table 2 - Restaurant choice factor preferences	39
Table 3 - Server quality preferences.....	41
Table 4 - Server quality classification	43
Table 5 - Demographic variables tested by inferential statistics	49
Table 6 - Hypotheses test summary on the importance of 'service quality'	50
Table 7 - Tukey Kramer output on educational attainment cohort.....	51
Table 8 - Hypotheses test summary on a server's quality of 'language fluency'	52
Table 9 - Tukey Kramer output on educational attainment cohort.....	53
Table 10 - Hypotheses test summary on cross-cultural encounter difficulties	54
Table 11 - Chi-Square output on restaurant visit frequency cohort.....	55
Table 12 - Hypotheses test summary on provided training in delivering service on par with local servers	56
Table 13 - Hypotheses test summary on preferences towards restaurants having native speaking servers	57
Table 14 - Chi-Square output on gender cohort	58
Table 15 - Chi-Square output on educational attainment cohort.....	59
Table 16 - Interviewee's demographic characteristics.....	60
Table 17 - Focus group participants' demographic characteristics.....	64

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Questionnaire respondents by nationality.....	33
Figure 2 - Questionnaire respondents by gender.....	34
Figure 3 - Questionnaire respondents by age group	35
Figure 4 - Questionnaire respondents by language fluency.....	36
Figure 5 - Questionnaire respondents by educational attainment.....	37
Figure 6 - Questionnaire respondents by frequency of restaurant visits.....	38
Figure 7 - Restaurant choice factor weighted mean scores	40
Figure 8 - Server quality weighted mean scores	42
Figure 9 - Questionnaire respondents by whether they encountered difficulties when served by foreign servers	44
Figure 10 - Questionnaire respondents by nature of service encounter difficulty	45
Figure 11 - Questionnaire respondents by whether necessary training is provided to deliver service on par with local servers	47
Figure 12 - Questionnaire respondents by preference to restaurants with native-speaking servers	48

Chapter One - Introduction

This chapter describes the elements of this study, commencing by examining the Maltese restaurant industry and the global phenomenon of labour shortage within the hospitality industry in general. This examination lays the foundation for this study, being the local perspective regarding the industrialisation of the restaurant labour force.

1.1 Background

Service as an economic activity may well be described as the production of intangible products (Kanyan, Ngana and Voon, 2016), which, although it cannot be seen, felt, or heard before consumption, contributes to a considerable share of a country's gross domestic product (GDP). In fact, service-based industries in Malta account for more than 85% of the Maltese economy (Jobsplus, 2021). One of these industries is the food service industry, which was valued at €362.8 million in 2022 (IBISWorld, 2022). The production and consumption of services often happen simultaneously, where a service provider and a customer interact with each other during this activity, with both parties involved deemed inseparable (Sizoo, 2002). Service-based activities are considered advantageous for both customers and businesses, as customers are being provided with a service that meets their needs and requirements whilst the activity renders a profit for the business (Kanyan, Ngana and Voon, 2016). Despite the declining market share of the Maltese restaurant and take-away food industry by an average yearly rate of 3.6% over the past five years, this service-based industry employs 7,224 people (Jobsplus, 2021; IBISWorld, 2022).

The rapid increase in the globalisation of the world economy instigated people from around the globe to travel for numerous reasons, such as relocation and employment (Sharma et al., 2018). The hospitality industry is experiencing alarming labour shortages worldwide, with the current local labour market producing over 10,000 new jobs annually since 2018 (Iversen, 2018). There is a growing dependence on migrant, international workers to satisfy both numerical and skills gaps within the

Maltese labour market, specifically among local businesses and especially within the hospitality sector. In fact, the accommodation and food industry in Malta employs a total of 19,523 employees, of which 49.8% are non-Maltese workers (Jobsplus, 2021; IBISWorld, 2022).

Globalisation and the increase in service-based industries have created a culturally diverse and complex labour market. This has attracted the attention of various scholars to research this dynamic shift in the internationalisation of the service-based industries' workforces (Cao, Robb and Lu, 2008; Zolfagharian, Hasan and Iyer, 2018). Service encounter analysis and studies have become more relevant in present times, as the number of changing variables within these settings is increasing, and any interactions within service encounters affect customers' perceptions of the quality of service (Manzur and Jogaratnam, 2006). These encounters are considered critical moments of truth, where customers form and develop their opinions and impressions of the organisation (Sizoo et al., 2005).

Therefore, it is surprising that the restaurant industry within the Maltese hospitality sector has been neglected in terms of investigating local customers' perceptions and expectations of foreign servers. The growth in service-based economies has significantly increased the time customers spend obtaining services, and certain exposures to service failures (Cao, Robb and Lu, 2008). Incongruent service encounters originate from language and cultural differences between service providers and customers, often leading to abnormal and unexpected situations (Akhtar et al., 2020). Language plays a vital role in cross-cultural service encounters, as customers tend to base their evaluation of 'service quality' on it (Zolfagharian et al., 2018). When service providers do not demonstrate cross-cultural competencies during their encounters, this often leads to displeased customers, frustrated service providers, and loss of future business for the organisation (Sizoo, 2002).

1.2 Motivation for Research

The researcher is an operations manager for two restaurant outlets in Malta and has been working in the industry for the past fourteen years. The noticeable changes in the labour market throughout these years have instigated the interest in how locals

perceive the internationalisation of the workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the limits of restaurant owners and managers in adapting their offerings for the local clientele due to limited external tourism. Hence, locals' perceptions are increasingly imperative when considering that unusual factors may hinder external tourism, as has already happened. The study sheds insight into the general perceptions of locals dining in Maltese restaurants and provides important implications that senior restaurant management teams and the researcher themselves could adopt when addressing pressing issues within Malta's multicultural restaurant labour force.

1.3 Scope of Study

The scope of this research is to highlight the Maltese clientele in terms of their restaurant preferences, what they expect from their servers, dining experiences, and service encounter difficulties. The study focuses on foreign servers to highlight any key elements in Malta's restaurant service delivery and the changes brought about by rapid workforce internationalisation. Other hospitality settings such as hotels and accommodation industries are excluded from this research. Ethnic-style restaurants are not considered in this study due to their human resource preferences when enhancing their authenticity. Fast food restaurants are also omitted due to their operational nature revolving around limiting or restricting interaction times during service encounters. This study focuses on just one position within a typical restaurant: the front-of-house server.

1.4 Research Objectives

As the title suggests, the objective of this study is to extract insights into local perspectives with respect to the internationalisation of restaurants' labour forces. The importance of 'service quality' within a restaurant experience is extracted via these perceptions. Different server qualities and their value emerge as well as prominent factors contributing to service failures. Furthermore, language preferences during service encounters are established along with customers' perceptions of the industry's efforts to adapt to a multicultural workforce.

1.5 The Research Problem

The literature reviewed in ‘Chapter Two’ shows that the hospitality industry has long been encountering labour shortages, with numerous international migrants relocating to satisfy these shortages. This trend seems homogenous in the local scenario, as the employment and training corporation Jobsplus and the National Statistics Office show concrete evidence that the hospitality labour market will continue to absorb international workers to fulfil these shortages (Jobsplus, 2021; NSO, 2022c). This creates the need for further investigation into the restaurant industry’s employment dynamics, as well as customers’ general perceptions of ‘service quality’. Numerous scholars (Kim et al., 2016; Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017; Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017) have shed insights into possible traits that emerge during cross-cultural encounters, which is why a study into the ongoing transformation of the restaurant industry’s labour market seems imperative.

1.6 The Research Question

The main research question of this study is:

‘What is the local clientele’s perception of the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry?’

This main research question is further analysed and dissected into numerous factors pertaining to the locals’ general perceptions. As there are no closely related studies, this original work reflects the locals’ perceptions during the study’s timeframe: 2020 to 2022.

1.7 Study Rationale

This research aims to enhance the knowledge surrounding service encounter studies, particularly on intercultural service encounters within a vital sector in the Maltese hospitality sector. This research benefits restaurant organisations as the results shed light on numerous aspects within the local restaurant scenario, thus providing the

necessary managerial implications to better ‘service quality’ throughout the industry. According to (Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990)), both customer satisfaction and service quality depend directly on the management of these encounters. They are solely responsible for preparing service providers for any service interactions they might encounter. These implications ultimately target unknown areas within the industry, thus retaining and improving local customer satisfaction levels whilst solidifying businesses’ service delivery.

1.8 Research Methods

This study employs a Mixed Method Research (MMR), in which triangulation was used to combine the obtained qualitative and quantitative data. A questionnaire was formulated and distributed to local adult restaurant customers to obtain the relevant statistical data to perform estimations on the Maltese population. Furthermore, the questionnaire had open-ended questions to obtain some qualitative data. The qualitative aspect of this study was later supported by a focus group discussion with five restaurant customers and in-depth face-to-face interviews with four random restaurant managers. Secondary research was done prior to the primary data collection process by researching numerous journals, books, and reputable statistics relevant to the subject being researched.

1.9 Study Structure

This chapter introduces the study by delving into its background, scope, research problem, and the motivation for conducting this research. Chapter two explores the secondary data found in relation to this study, and relevant sub-sections were formulated to create an in-depth literature review. The third chapter includes the methodology of the study, which describes the methods and reasoning behind the data collection instruments used. The fourth chapter lists all the findings and the numerous statistical tests that were performed to compare quantitative data across different demographic variables. Chapter five discusses the findings of the previous chapter in relation to similar studies carried out by prominent researchers in the field. The last

chapter includes a summary of the study with several managerial implications and recommendations for future research.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

This section defines key terms to help the reader understand this study. Firstly, it is beneficial to clarify that a '*server*' is a front-of-house employee whose duty is to serve clients in a hospitality environment.

This study focuses on cultural differences within a hospitality setting; thus, on various occasions, the term 'multicultural' is used in numerous contexts when there are situations involving people hailing from different cultural backgrounds. To be more precise, the term '*multiculturalism*' refers to a society which contains several cultural or ethnic groups living alongside each other without necessarily engaging in interactions with each other (Guilherme and Dietz, 2015). A '*service encounter*' may be described as the time during which a customer interacts with a service, which also includes physical interaction with personnel such as the service provider, or in this research, the '*server*' (Sizoo, 2002). Within this research, primarily focusing on interactions within the Maltese restaurant industry, an '*intercultural encounter*' is a service encounter between a foreign server and a Maltese client where both parties are aware of the other's cultural differences. '*Cross-cultural*' deals explicitly with the differences encountered by people of different cultures. These differences include linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017).

The term '*migrant*,' refers to a person who moves from their place of residence to improve their living conditions or in search of employment. Migrants are usually categorised according to their origin or sometimes by their status. An '*asylum seeker*' is a person who escapes from their own country for religious, political, or economic reasons, or because of war, whilst a '*refugee*' is the status given to the asylum seeker by the hosting country when the person qualifies and is granted entry due to sufficient proof and reason for fleeing their country of origin (Dictionary, 2022). An '*EU National*' is a person coming from a country within the European Union whilst '*Third Country National*' (TCN) is a person originating from outside the European Union.

1.11 Summary

Internationalisation has introduced several new elements and challenges in managing a multicultural labour force. This comes from the fact that culture shapes the attitudes and behaviours of service employees and plays a vital role in the perception of service quality (Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). In a successful service-based organisation, such as a restaurant, senior management personnel must oversee and monitor the quality of its service encounters just as it would manage other critical elements, such as food and labour costs. Analysing these service encounters within the local restaurant industry should provide compelling cross-cultural implications, considering that this area of study within the local scenario has little empirical support. This gap in research starts being addressed with a review of relevant literature in chapter two.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

This literature review examines three critical areas. Primarily, it provides a basic understanding on the importance of Malta's hospitality and tourism sector, its national employment policies, and the Maltese cultural dimensions. Secondly, the cause of international labour shortages and migration are thoroughly explored as the main contributors of internationalisation within hospitality industries. Finally, service quality, service encounters, training and communication are explored within a multicultural setting.

2.1 Malta's Tourism and Employment Trends

In Malta, tourism is a vital and rapidly changing industry that is acknowledged as the most significant agent of social and economic change (MTA, 2021). With a staggering 2,771,888 inbound visitors in 2019, Malta is constantly embracing historic levels of visitors (NSO, 2022a). The rapidly paced travel and tourism industry in Malta contributed 11.6% to Malta's GDP in 2019. Although the industry's contribution to the GDP may have fluctuated in recent years, there was still constant growth in this regard. In relation to the exponential growth in the tourism industry, the Maltese islands are adapting at a fast pace to take advantage of this expanding opportunity in order to attain high international levels of competitiveness (MTA, 2021).

Malta's population is still increasing, at 444,033 inhabitants in 2022. The number of people currently in employment is 274,493 which amounts to 59.2% of the population (NSO, 2022b; Worldometer, 2022). Malta has traditionally been a country with more emigrants rather than immigrants, but this has changed drastically over the years. In fact, Malta's accession to the EU in 2004 had a major impact on the migration flow towards Malta. The island is recognised as having an English-speaking population, a favourable climate, and an ongoing increase in demand for the labour workforce. These factors attract various foreigners to relocate to Malta (Holicza and Chircop, 2018). In 2019, the number of foreign nationals working in Malta amounted to 67,596, which correlates to approximately 26% of Malta's total labour force. 53%

of the foreigners employed in Malta originated from EU member states, whereas 46% are third-country nationals (Jobsplus, 2022).

The economic growth in Malta is creating the need for approximately 10,000 new jobs per year, according to the economist and chairman of Jobsplus, Clyde Caruana. With Malta's ageing population on the increase, the percentage of Maltese nationals available to fulfil the new positions is only 25% if Malta continues on its thriving economic path (Iversen, 2018). The rest of the newly available positions must be naturally filled in by a foreign workforce, immigrants who respond to the shortage in Malta's labour supply.

2.2 National Employment Policies

Several countries rely on expatriate workers to fulfil staffing shortages, especially in the hospitality industry. However, this element invokes controversy, particularly among domestic job seekers. Australia and the United Kingdom, amongst others, impose certain restrictions or quotas on the number of expatriates that can be admitted, such as enforcing a cap on applications for types of work visas. Another instance of this scenario, when opportunities were minimised for expatriates, was the Saudisation in Saudi Arabia. This was when several enterprises were obliged to fill their workforce with Saudi nationals up to a stipulated level (Sadi and Henderson, 2005).

Malta's national employment policy emphasises increasing Maltese nationals' skills and flexibility to advance into higher value-added sectors. With the help of the European Social Fund (ESF), educational and training opportunities have been offered to several companies and workers. The policy entails that labour shortages should be tackled by offering opportunities to unemployed or inactive locals, and then offering opportunities to the population of beneficiaries of protection or asylum seekers, and EU Nationals. Lastly, if still not resolved, job opportunities can be offered to third-country nationals (MTA, 2021).

2.3 Labour Shortage in the Hospitality World

Choi, Woods and Murrmann (2000) defines the labour market as the supply of workers in search of employment in a particular area, which varies accordingly depending on the scarcity and availability of job opportunities. There are different reasons and explanations provided by various authors with respect to the phenomenon of the hospitality industry's labour shortages, such as the image portrayed by a hospitality job within itself; it is considered as a job with low pay that is only adequate for low-skilled individuals (Shariff and Abidin, 2017). Jobs in the hospitality industry are also considered as tedious; they involve repetitive tasks and hard physical activities (Holicza and Chircop, 2018). As described by Choi, Woods and Murrmann (2000), other industry push factors are the long and unsociable hours, uncomfortable shifts, and highly individualised job functions.

Despite this, the industry is considered the biggest employer of unskilled workers; the industry provides several opportunities to the non-skilled and uneducated population, unlike several other industries, which mostly employ skilled and educated personnel. It fulfils an important societal role since many employees are at the beginning of their transition to the real world of employment (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000).

2.4 Migration - The Perfect Solution to Address Labour Shortages?

Asia is the leading provider of foreign workers in the hospitality industry worldwide (Shariff and Abidin, 2017). The proportion of EU citizens working in Malta's accommodation and food industry is approximately similar to third country nationals; however, the latter group is gradually increasing and presumed to be the majority of the foreign workforce in the coming years (Jobsplus, 2021). Janta *et al.*, (2011) and Shariff and Abidin (2017) suggest that international labourers in the industry are increasing annually. However, the uncertainty remains whether this industry can balance the demand and supply of labour in this rapidly growing sector. Choi, Woods and Murrmann (2000) state that the world has an unevenly distributed population, introducing labour shortages in several regions or countries. Immigration has played an essential role in responding to the industry's labour shortage.

In Malta, immigration can be categorised into three. Some migrants are generally from sub-Saharan countries and the Middle East, who are referred to as asylum seekers. They are searching for a better life due to difficult situations in their home countries, such as wars. Other immigrants have different motives for residing in Malta; these classify either as EU nationals or third-country nationals. Third-country nationals hail from all the other countries outside the EU (Holicza and Chircop, 2018).

Several scholars and authorities state that mass migration is often initiated by low earnings in home countries, high unemployment rates, and lack of opportunities (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000; Janta *et al.*, 2011; Jobsplus, 2021). Other push factors may be related to the country's public sector, such as inadequate health services or the reduction of several subsidies (Janta *et al.*, 2011). Meanwhile, the demand for seasonal workers is a significant pull factor, instigating several foreigners to relocate to a new region or country, and pushing them to improve their knowledge and proficiency in a particular language (Janta *et al.*, 2011). Others might relocate to fulfil their dreams or search for a better standard of living (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000).

The selected foreign employees may be useful to the company in penetrating new international markets and break barriers between the host country and the countries of origin (Shariff and Abidin, 2017). In certain organisations, the employment of migrants may reduce the threat of wage inflation (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) confirmed in 2016 that migration in Malta positively impacted the national economy, with an annual national increase of 2.5% (Holicza and Chircop, 2018). The exhausted domestic labour force is relying on third-country nationals to satisfy labour shortages in industries of manual labour and repetition amongst other service industries. The influx of migration towards Malta was fuelled by the creation of new job opportunities and not because of existing ones. This is supported by the NSO (2022c), which show a decreasing unemployment rate despite the increasing number of foreigners settling in Malta.

A well-managed and diverse workforce would satisfy legal and ethical obligations, as well as be beneficial for an organisation by adding diversity, increasing competitive advantage, and reducing staff turnover rates. Other benefits of implementing a diverse, multicultural workforce are increased work-group

performance, an inclusive work climate, and enhanced social cohesion (Vassou, Zopiatis and Theocharous, 2017).

The employment of foreign nationals in the industry may have negative consequences; the local workforce might be unwilling to engage in the same conditions as the foreign employees (Shariff and Abidin, 2017). In fact, several migrants are willing to work at a lower rate than certain unemployed locals, as the work conditions and remuneration rates are still better than those in their home country. Another negative aspect of employing foreign workers in a country with a high tourism rate is the image it projects. Tourists might generate their cultural opinions of the host country based on their cross-cultural interactions with foreign nationals and not with locals. This migration flow towards touristic destinations may also affect locals in negative ways, such as the potential increase in land prices, and changes in social organisations and cultural values (Shariff and Abidin, 2017).

Several authors perceive the Maltese community as resistant to integrating with foreigners looking to make Malta their temporary or permanent base. In fact, in 2015, the Migrant Integration Policy Index rated Malta in 33rd out of 38 countries (Holicza and Stone, 2016). A sentiment of ‘fear of invasion’ might still be present amongst Maltese nationals, especially among the older generations due to their recollections of the country’s historic events. The attitude of the Maltese in relation to foreigners was described as selective and utilitarian (Holicza and Chircop, 2018). However, Maltese nationals are starting to realise that foreigners in Malta are adding value to the country’s economy; they fulfil the unwanted jobs in the Maltese labour market (Holicza and Chircop, 2018).

2.5 Service Quality and Service Encounters in a Hospitality Setting

A service encounter is defined as a period of time in which a consumer has a direct interaction with a service (Shostack, 1987). This encounter is usually considered as a social situation involving two or more persons, dependant on the economic, social, and personal characteristics of each person.

As described by Wang and Mattila (2010), the service encounter is a core element that service firms such as restaurants are constantly trying to improve and understand. Service is also considered as ‘the degree of excellence’ intended or expected in meeting customer demands (Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). The service in a hospitality environment is articulated by Hau-siu Chow *et al.*, (2007) as individualised, intangible, and subjective. The customers’ perceptions on service, based purely on their interactions with servers, is an important factor that evaluates satisfaction as well as service quality.

The ‘SERVQUAL’ model (Parasuraman, Ziethaml and L.Berry, 1985) provides the most acknowledged and used conceptualisation of service quality. This model identifies gaps between customer expectations and their needs. However, recent studies found that restaurant customers in different countries have different expectations of service quality; hence, these different dimensions are not captured by the SERVQUAL model (Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007).

In a quantitative study by Kong and Jogaratnam (2007), analysing service quality expectations between American and Korean casual dining restaurant customers, perceptions of good service quality varied greatly between the two. This confirms Winsted (1999)’s theory that cultural difference is a great influencer of service quality, and that the service offered to local clientele must be ‘tailor made’ and not universalistic in order to be effective. Little has been done to investigate the effects of culture on buyer perceptions of employee behaviours cross-nationally (Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007).

The quality of the service provided is considered inseparable from the quality of the service provider, which in this case, is a restaurant server. In fact, Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) claim that the behaviour and attitude of the service provider affect the customer’s perception of service quality. Keaveney (1995) highlights that firms who do not take failures in service encounters seriously are penalised, as customers switch to other service providers. Failures in service encounters are detrimental and should be monitored like any other areas, such as costs and labour. Wilson *et al.*, (2021) compare the service performance to drama, where a service encounter transforms to role theory; the service providers are the actors, and the customers are the audience.

Akhtar et al., (2020) distinguish two types of service encounter barriers: interactional and instructional. This is done by analysing situational abnormality and discomfort, which influence revisit intentions by guests. The use of incongruent language in service encounters is a crucial factor, creating miscommunication and misunderstandings. Tension, anger, frustration, and stress are feelings derived from such communicational incongruence which Akhtar et al., (2020) found in their research when assessing service encounter barriers and their psychological discomforts. Kim et al. (2016) also state that disconfirmation arises from discrepancies between prior and post expectations of the service performance. This means that if a service encounter does not exceed the customer's expectation, in other terms having a 'negative disconfirmation', consumers are likely to feel dissatisfied.

2.6 Maltese Cultural Dimensions on Service Encounters

Several researchers use (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (1980)'s individualism-collectivism, power distance dimensions to understand client's orientations and culture towards service interactions (Sharma, Tam and Kim, 2012). Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (1980)'s cultural dimensions are the most widely accepted by researchers delving into cross-cultural encounters by examining consumer behaviour ideologies across different countries (Kim et al., 2016). These studies enhance the importance of understanding the value of awareness of 'other' cultures, and the importance of managerial implications for multicultural training of service staff. It is also crucial to understand the frame of mind of the persons involved in these interactions, to have a better understanding of what is considered good or bad according to their opinions and judgement (Kim et al., 2016).

Amongst the Maltese population, it is noticeable that younger generations are likely to be more individualistic, whilst the older members of the society tend to maintain a collectivistic attitude (*Maltese culture*, 2022). Different cultural dimensions outlined by Kong and Jogaratnam (2007) imply different mental programming and reasoning that influence activities, values, and motivations.

A future, individualistic Maltese generation can lead to customers that are more likely to require efficient and satisfactory service when compared with people in collectivist cultures (Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan, 2000). This trait was uncovered in observations conducted on individualistic groups; independence and a demand for error-free service encounters were apparent (Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007, p.278). Individualistic customers also value error-free service when interacting with service employees such as restaurant servers. Donthu and Yoo (1998) also outline that individualistic customers expect that servers show empathy, attention, and respect, as these individuals tend to care for themselves and their immediate families unlike collectivists who display care and empathy to a wider community. Winsted (1999) uncovered a pattern in service encounters where individualistic countries tend to appreciate personalised treatment, whereas collectivists appreciate consistency.

2.7 The Multicultural Workforce in the Hospitality Industry

Several studies on tipping behaviours suggest an emotional component to the service exchange between servers and customers. Furthermore, certain reciprocation of expressions, vocalisations, postures, and movements enhances the emotional state of a customer in a positive manner (Koku and Savas, 2016). Eye contact, smiling, and turn-taking were also outlined as communication cues that can easily be misinterpreted (Victor, 1992).

The most important factors attributed to tipping, which, in this case, can also be correlated to the guest's satisfaction, were the server's attitude, their ability to explain the menu in detail, and their body language (Koku and Savas, 2016). A relationship between tipping and the language used by the server was also noticed by (Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh, 2013); clients tend to tip more when interacting with a server in their mother tongue.

Delving into the relationship between the service provided and the server's emotions, Michalkó, Irimiás and Timothy (2015) studied migrant employees, their feelings towards their work, and how they can affect their work performance and efficiency. However, the interesting pattern of foreign workers moving into a labour market suggests that the majority do not perceive the sector as a suitable career

pathway; in fact, the hospitality industry is often seen as an ‘entry point’ into the international labour market. This factor challenges the foreign workers’ motives and feelings towards the industry, as the hospitality sector might be perceived as having the freedom to travel and explore other opportunities (Michalkó, Irimiás and Timothy, 2015).

A gap in knowledge was identified by (Kim and Baker, 2019) in terms of how the server’s ethnicity influences consumer judgements. Their research found a relationship between the ethnic origin of the server and the customer’s perception of authenticity. The authors also indicated that physiological studies found that customers judge employees’ ethnicities in both a covert and non-conscious manner (Kim and Baker, 2019). Harrison-Walker (1995, in Kim and Baker, 2019, p. 3) also stated that people tend to draw conclusions on specific characteristics of other people, in this case being the front-of-house servers, based on their nationality, skin colour, and physical appearance. This was also confirmed by Hekman *et al.* (2017), who examined how customer ratings are influenced by racial bias. They determined that certain customers exhibit a pattern of negative attitudes, especially towards low-status ethnic groups. The front-of-house personnel play an important role, as customers tend to perceive the food and whole dining experience to be more authentic when served by locals (Kim and Baker, 2019). The interactions of service employees affect customers’ affective responses and emotional attachments to a particular place or destination (Cave, Prayag and Ryan, 2012).

2.8 Cross-Cultural Interactions

Studies on cross-cultural interactions were initiated in the 1980s due to increased cultural diversity within the workplace. Numerous researchers started to examine the effects of cross-cultural encounters by developing a valid and reliable instrument that can be used to measure a person’s ability to effectively interact with another person from a different culture (Holt, 1993, in Sizoo, 2002).

In measuring the intercultural skills of a particular individual, Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) came up with the ‘Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory’ known as ‘ICSI’. This theory-based instrument was developed to measure an individual’s ability to

modify their behaviour to suit other cultures. Two personality behaviours outlined by Harrison, Chadwick and Scales (1996) that impact cross-cultural interactions are self-efficacy and self-monitoring. Self-efficacy can be defined as the level of confidence that a person has in carrying out a specific task whilst exhibiting and sustaining new behaviours. High self-efficacy behaviours are receptive to feedback and appropriately affect new behaviour, thus making people more able to adapt socially and incorporate new skills and patterns. On the other hand, self-monitoring can be defined as the ability to adjust to new external situational factors, where behaviour is adapted to meet the requirements of the changing environment (Harrison, Chadwick and Scales, 1996).

Another widely used cross-cultural measurement instrument is the ‘Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory’ known as ‘CCAI’, which was first introduced by Meyers (2001). This instrument contains tools organisations can use to identify competent individuals with excellent intercultural skills (Sizoo, 2002). The four scales which constitute the ‘CCAI’ are emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy.

2.9 The Impact of Multicultural Servers on Local Customers

The attitudes and behaviours of servers are major contributors to the perception of service quality. These qualities are found to differ between servers from different cultures (Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). Several scholars suggest that intercultural service encounters may impose several issues, misunderstandings, or introduce complexity within a service interaction due to different cultural backgrounds (Wang and Mattila, 2010; Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). This is because certain behaviours in one culture may be considered inappropriate in another, even in the hospitality setting (Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). Cushner and Brislin (1996) explained that dissimilar cultural backgrounds could easily induce misapprehension, which leads to frustrated servers, dissatisfied customers, and ultimately, a loss in business. A difference in cultural backgrounds, which may also include incompatible values and norms and different communication styles, tends to create stress for the server. This results in emotional reactions, behavioural responses (Wang and Mattila, 2010), and ethno-cultural identity conflicts (Sharma *et al.*, 2018). A service interaction between

members of different demographics, attitudes, and experiences tends to have a lower success rate, as studied in both the similarity-attraction paradigm and social identity theory (Wang and Mattila, 2010).

Bennet (1986) portrays a six-step model that evolves as clients increase their inter-cultural interactions. Primarily, the model depicts a 'denial of difference' between the two parties, followed by a 'defence' mechanism where the cultural differences are perceived as a threat. As interactions increase, the 'minimisation' stage states that the parties may accept small differences between the two, however, the 'acceptance' stage is where the differences in cultural backgrounds and norms are acknowledged. This progresses to the 'adaptation' stage, where behaviours are modified to ultimately maintain a sense of 'integration' between the two sides of inter-cultural interactions. It is believed that the Maltese population are prone to multicultural interactions with the increase in foreigners residing in Malta, and according to Holicza and Chircop (2018), Maltese nationals are at the final stages of the intercultural interactions model. This is because immigration is no longer perceived as the country's biggest threat, and a level of acceptance and integration is already in place.

2.10 Cross-Cultural Training in the Hospitality Environment

The growth of the hospitality industry has sparked reciprocal growth within the labour force's racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. This growth initiated the need for hospitality HR managers to reinforce their communicational competencies, language skills, and, most importantly, their cultural awareness. These factors are considered the first step in overcoming the several barriers that many are facing within the evolving industry to improve intercultural and cross-cultural communication. Understanding the link between effective communication and cultural awareness is essential in knocking down boundaries in cross-cultural and intercultural communication (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017).

Mattila (2000, in Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007) emphasises how important it is that service firms implement cultural customisation training as part of their customer-contact interaction training. Hospitality managers themselves are expected to interact

with numerous employees of different cultures and train them accordingly to overcome the cultural barriers that might hinder their level of service. In fact, Manzur and Jogaratnam (2006) suggest that managers should create awareness and appreciation for diversity, helping employees to develop superior communication and training techniques that deliver enhanced customer satisfaction to their guests. Cross-cultural training is, in fact, believed to be the reposition that employees take to reduce misinterpretations, miscommunications and misevaluations during their service encounters. (Manzur and Jogaratnam, 2006).

For a communicative interaction to be considered successful between a client and a server, the latter should be equipped with a unique set of competencies, including approachability, gestures, facial expressions, posture, grammar, attentiveness, and correct choice of vocabulary (Martin, Hammer and Bradford, 1994). Researchers found various characteristics that represent cross-cultural competence in service employees. Apart from the previously mentioned communication skills, personal traits such as curiosity regarding cultural diversity, human warmth and empathy, and the ability to refrain from judgemental attitudes are important in managing cross-cultural interactions (Sae, 2008; Black and Gregersen, 2000; Mendenhall, 2001; Gudykunst, 2003, 1998; Kealey and Protheroe, 1996, in Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017).

Woods (2012) notes that several employees know the work associated with their position, but often lack proper form in delivering these services. Clients tend to evaluate the quality of service when encountering cross-cultural differences. In fact, a study found that clients examine how sensitively differences in culture are addressed in a company's training (Winsted, 1999). The interaction between a server and client in a hospitality setting encapsulates the service quality. Hence, restaurant managers should analyse all variations of employee behaviour in relation to guest perception when they are from different cultural backgrounds (Manzur and Jogaratnam, 2006).

Kong and Jogaratnam (2007) outlined an instance when cross-cultural training was given importance; Korea's 'TGI Fridays'. Front-of-house employees were trained to kneel at tables when interacting with guests, in order to be at eye level. This gesture was highly successful, as the management understood Korean cultural perspectives and grasped their domestic values (Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007).

2.11 Communication within a Restaurant Setting

Cross-cultural communication is a field of study of its own; it focuses on how communication progresses between people of different cultures (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017). Griffin (2004, in Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017) defines effective communication as the means of sending a message in such a way or manner that the actual message is received as close as possible to the meaning intended.

This research concerns communication issues that may arise between servers and patrons, as this should lead to comprehension between both parties. After successfully exchanging information, the server can perform a suitable action (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017). Various scholars describe intercultural communication as a way a person from a particular culture comes in contact and communicates with another person or group of another culture (Ferraro, 2002; Gudykunst, 2003; Lustig and Koester, 2010, in Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017). These communications between people of different backgrounds can be analysed from different perspectives, such as linguistically, ethically, racially, culturally, and religiously. Akhtar et al. (2020) clearly point out that incongruent communication in these encounters might cause a consumer to misunderstand and perceive the situation as abnormal, ultimately triggering unfavourable behavioural reactions.

2.12 The Gap in Knowledge

Numerous studies were conducted to determine customer satisfaction levels from a 'customer expectation-disconfirmation paradigm' point of view, thus not considering the interaction between the server and the customer (Bianchi 2001; Oliver, 1993, in Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007). In fact, the 'SERVQUAL' model presented by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and L.Berry (1985) is the most accepted model to conceptualise service quality. This model is used to conceptualise the gap between the expectations and needs of customers, but does not include cultural dimensions. Hence, further analysis is required to determine the effects of cultural differences on service quality.

This research assesses the industry's cross-cultural communication competencies and whether the Maltese restaurant industry is taking advantage of this potential source for competitive advantage to improve overall customer satisfaction (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017). This research focuses on service encounters to deduce whether Maltese restaurants are investing in cross-cultural training or not, and how effective these training programs are. It also sheds light on the customer's expectations of the waiting staff's behaviour during interactions, and if, in their opinion, the cultural training suits the Maltese restaurant clientele.

In the extremely competitive tourism and hospitality sector, restaurant professionals and other employees within the industry dealing and interacting with customers daily are exhibiting their levels of communicative and cross-cultural competencies. These ultimately leave lasting impressions on clients of a particular organisation, the overall tourism sector, as well as the economy at large (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017).

2.13 Summary

This review of theoretical literature shows various elements contributing to cross-cultural interactions within the tourism service industry. The literature delved into essential factors, such as the economic and social changes that Malta has been undergoing these past years, to understand why several industries in Malta had to employ foreign nationals to fulfil their labour shortages. Several push and pull factors are outlined for engaging people in working within the hospitality industry, more specifically, within the restaurant industry. Various perceptions of the industry generated over the years are outlined, such as the 'hard work and low pay' theory or that the hospitality industry is only adequate for low-skilled individuals (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000; Shariff and Abidin, 2017).

Malta and other countries are reaching out to international labourers to satisfy labour shortages. Malta is hosting foreign nationals from all over the world, with the Asian continent being the main provider of hospitality workers. The impact of the influx of foreign nationals on the host country and its population is also considered

prior to analysing the perception of cross-cultural interactions, as locals may hold sentiments unrelated to the restaurant encounter experience.

The service encounter, being a core element of the restaurant industry, is explored to determine the factors that conceptualise service quality. The 'SERVQUAL' model is the most used within service literature, as it identifies gaps between customer expectations and their needs. Sizoo (2002) considers this encounter a social situation involving two persons with different economic, social, personal, and cultural characteristics. Thus, a service encounter varies depending on these differences. Akhtar et al. (2020) also outline service encounter barriers, such as language pronunciations, miscommunications, and misunderstandings, which are noted to affect service quality and the intended message. Dissatisfaction, tension, anger, frustration, and disappointment are among the feelings and discomforts that may emerge from unsatisfactory service encounters (Akhtar et al., 2020). Hofstede's individualism-collectivism and power distance theories also weigh on consumer behaviour patterns in hospitality settings (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 1980). Different mental programming and reasoning influence values, motivations, and expectations of service quality.

The literature also delves into the qualities of a multicultural workforce; behaviours, expression, vocalisations, eye contact, postures, and other cues are analysed to determine their effect on cross-cultural service encounters (Koku and Savas, 2016). Behavioural studies on tipping are also tools that determine server preferences amongst patrons. However, server preferences are not only influenced by service quality, but also by ethnicity, skin colour, and physical appearance (Kim and Baker, 2019). Cross-cultural interactions are studied by several scholars who developed two promising instruments: the 'Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory' and the 'Cross-cultural Adaptability Inventory'. These measure a person's capability to effectively interact with another from a different culture (Sizoo, 2002).

Due to the present multicultural hospitality labour force, managers realise the need for effective communication and cross-cultural awareness amongst their employees to minimise the boundaries associated with intercultural communicative encounters (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017). This study aims to understand the cross-cultural part of service encounters better, as very few studies have delved into

this factor as a determinant of service quality. The importance of conducting cross-cultural training as outlined in literature is tested in the Maltese restaurant industry.

Chapter Three - Methodology

This chapter explores the research problem derived from the gap in knowledge outlined in the literature review. The procedure for acquiring the local people's perception of being served by foreign servers is described, and hypotheses are formulated. The instruments used to test the hypotheses and the data collection procedures are discussed and explained.

3.1 The Research Problem & Questions

With the growing number of foreign nationals working within the Maltese hospitality industry, it has become very important for service firms such as restaurants to pay particular attention to the service encounter and how it is evolving (Jobsplus, 2022; Sizoo, 2002). The lack of awareness of cross-cultural competencies during service encounters could result in service failures, unsatisfied local patrons, frustrated foreign servers, as well as loss of business for the restaurant and the tarnishing of the Maltese hospitality industry's reputability in general.

The main research question underpinning this study is:

What is the local people's perception of foreign restaurant servers?

From this research question, others were derived:

Are Maltese restaurants giving foreign servers the necessary communicational and cross-cultural training?

Do Maltese patrons encounter difficulties during service encounters with foreign servers?

What is the most prominent barrier local customers face during service encounters with foreign servers?

Do Maltese patrons prefer to converse in Maltese during a restaurant service encounter?

3.2 Analysing Cross-Cultural Service Encounters

Various researchers have adopted different approaches to analyse service encounters. Bitner, Booms and Tetreault(1990) used the critical incident technique ‘CIT’ to collect 700 incidents through interviews and observations that recorded the behaviour of employees that led to a service failure. Ethnographic techniques were used by Arnould and Price (1993), where the subjects were observed throughout the duration of the service encounter. Another observation method was used by Botschen and Bstieler (1996), where the sequence-oriented problem identification ‘SOPI’ method was used, an instrument where an observer tries to identify flaws in the sequence of service to pinpoint the stage where service encounters were failing. Cultural differences were measured by Reisinger and Turner (1998) by conducting interviews with both parties to assess the abilities and efforts of the service personnel as well as the expectations and characteristics of the clients. Another common instrument several hospitality organisations use is the distribution of a feedback card or a digital feedback form. However, some patrons are reluctant to give negative feedback while they are still at the venue. Even when researchers distribute or conduct surveys at a particular firm, respondents are highly likely to assess their current situation or experience and not their generalised opinions.

Hence, when considering a research design to examine service encounters between foreign servers and Maltese nationals, a researcher should keep in mind that a service encounter is an intimate interaction, where not every sentiment and perception can be derived from just observation. A restaurant may also allow researchers to observe or question guests; although it might not be the most ideal timing for clients to participate in research, patrons unconsciously relate the questions of study to the establishment and immediate surroundings.

3.3 Research Instruments and Setting

A mixed-method research (MMR) approach was used, involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. This is considered to be the ‘third major research paradigm’ or the ‘methodological movement’ (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The MMR approach integrates two forms of data gathering as a result of different

designs. This allows the involvement of philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks, and ultimately provides a more thorough understanding of the research problem at hand, rather than just the approach (Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020). The MMR approach has become common in various social science disciplines, and can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century; the combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques to extract surveys, observations, and conduct demographic analysis was considered more suitable to recognise dynamic interactions that had not been addressed by previous traditional methods (Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020).

In-depth interviews (IDI), questionnaires, and a focus group are used in this research, combining qualitative and quantitative primary data to expand the study's strength and validity. MMR is useful in expanding the scope, since different methods may be used for different or particular parts of the study (Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020). This method also increases the researcher's confidence in using innovative methods to understand a problem or phenomenon, and challenge present theories (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The questionnaire design (see Appendix A) was developed to test the hypotheses under investigation. Hence, any responses from foreign participants participating in this study were omitted. This instrument consisted of 13 questions: the first six gathered the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents, whereas the other seven gathered preferences, thoughts, and perceptions. The demographic variables were nationality, age group, gender, level of education, language fluency and frequency of restaurant visits.

There were five different cohorts with respect to age: 18-25, 26-34, 35-49, 50-64 and 65+. For gender, one could pick whether they are male, female or non-binary. Respondents were given a choice of languages they are fluent in, as well as a choice for the educational level attained: primary, secondary, post-secondary, bachelor's degree or diploma, and postgraduate degree. The frequency of restaurant visits was categorised as daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, yearly, or never.

In question seven, respondents had to rank important characteristics when choosing a restaurant, such as food quality, service quality, menu, ambience, and value. This question helped the researcher understand how important service quality

is to Maltese patrons, and how much they value high-quality service encounters. Question eight delved into the ranking of server qualities, such as professional behaviour, smart appearance, ability to communicate in a language the guest is fluent in, profound menu knowledge, observation and attentiveness, and quickness and agility. This question helped the researcher identify whether Maltese patrons value service encounters in languages they are fluent in. In questions nine, ten, and eleven, the researcher delved directly into the main scope of this research, by inquiring whether locals encounter problems with foreign servers. With the use of open-ended questions and multiple-choice answers, respondents voiced their opinions and perceptions on the most common barriers faced, and other dissatisfactory characteristics. Questions twelve and thirteen compared local and foreign servers in the eyes of local patrons, by inquiring whether service quality is on par between the two, and whether locals prefer to converse in their native tongue during service encounters.

A focus group and in-depth interviews were employed to increase the validity of the findings, as well as truly understand the meaning underlying the patterns emerging from the quantitative data. The researcher adopted the focus group approach as one of the most prominent instruments in investigating motivations, decisions, and priorities. This guided group discussion addressed particular and relevant topics most beneficial to the researcher (Podoshen, 2013; Lune and Berg, 2017). The focus group was led by introductory statements, engagement, and exploratory questions, followed by some follow-up questions on the discussion at hand, several direct questions, as well as a few exit questions to conclude (see Appendix C).

The in-depth interviews (IDIs) with restaurant managers helped the researcher understand the perception of the other participants that are involved in these service encounters and responsible in conducting cross-cultural training to their front of house. This useful means of access in gathering knowledge from restaurant professionals should associate certain meanings with phenomena or events. Semi-structured questions (Appendix B) were used in these interviews to not limit or somewhat standardise the opinions of these respondents (Lune and Berg, 2017).

The setting for the qualitative instruments was the environment in question, being a restaurant. In-depth interviews were held at the premises where restaurant

managers work. This element increased the researcher's chances of conducting the interviews, since it was more convenient for the participants. The focus group was also held at a restaurant; the participants had easy access to the premises, a relaxing ambience, and were gathered around a table with refreshments. Being in a restaurant environment, participants connected with their surroundings and elaborated on their experiences and encounters. The restaurant used for the focus group was closed to other patrons at the time, so that maximum privacy was afforded to the participants.

3.4 Sample Size and Population

The relevant population for this research is adult Maltese citizens. As per the most recent data available before data collection, the Maltese adult population was 409,226 on 31st December 2020 (NSO, 2020). To determine the sample size needed for this research questionnaire, a sample size generation tool was used with a sampling error of 0.5 and a 95% confidence level, resulting in 385 participants, as shown in Table 1. To gather adequate participants representing each of the different demographic variables introduced, quota sampling was used for the questionnaire to ensure that each cohort was represented by a minimum of 30 participants.

To support the quantitative data, four random restaurants were chosen to fulfil the qualitative aspect of this research, this being the IDIs with restaurant managers. Although the restaurants were chosen randomly, fast food restaurants and ethnic cuisine restaurants were omitted due to limited-service interactions and other recruitment preferences or policies.

A focus group consisting of 5 participants was the third instrument used to formulate detailed qualitative data. These participants were chosen to represent different educational backgrounds, age and genders.

<u>Sample Size Calculation</u>	
Estimate of True Proportion	0.5
Sampling Error	0.05
Confidence Level	95%
<u>Intermediate Calculations</u>	
Z Value	-1.96
Calculated Sample Size	384.146
<u>Result</u>	
Sample Size Needed	385
<u>Finite Populations</u>	
Population Size	409,226
Calculated Sample Size	383.787
Sample Size Needed	384

Table 1 - Maltese adult sample size calculation

3.5 Hypotheses

Several hypotheses may be tested in relation to the research questions. The hypotheses below represent the researcher's predictions based on existing theories, studies, and literature presented by previous researchers and scholars (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Hypothesis 1

- H_{O1} Foreign servers working in the Maltese restaurant industry are given the necessary communicational and cross-cultural training.
- H_{A1} Foreign servers working in the Maltese restaurant industry are not given the necessary communicational and cross-cultural training.

Hypothesis 2

- H_{O2} Maltese restaurant patrons encounter difficulties during service encounters with foreign servers.
- H_{A2} Maltese restaurant patrons do not encounter difficulties during service encounters with foreign servers.

Hypothesis 3

- H_{O3} The language barrier is the cause of most service encounter failures between foreign restaurant servers and local patrons.
- H_{A3} The language barrier is not the cause of most service encounter failures between foreign restaurant servers and local patrons.

Hypothesis 4

- H_{O4} Amongst local patrons, Maltese is the preferred language during restaurant service encounters.
- H_{A4} Amongst local patrons, Maltese is not the preferred language during restaurant service encounters amongst locals.

3.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study was performed in preparation for this study, where a small-scale version or ‘trial run’ of the research instruments was carried out (Teijlingen, Vanora and Vanora, 2002). This stage provided pointers regarding how the research project could fail and indicated whether certain aspects of the research instruments were appropriate (Kim, 2011). A sample of 25 surveys was distributed by the researcher to various respondents. These respondents identified difficulties and misunderstandings in the questionnaires which had not caught the researcher’s attention, and aided in better developing the questions for the research.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

In the primary data gathering process, an email was sent to several restaurant managers or owners to determine their availability for an in-depth interview. The email was followed up by a phone call a week later as a reminder to those who did not acknowledge the email. The right of refusal and the right to withdraw their data at any stage were clearly stated (Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020). Given that the researcher works in this industry, a consent form with a declaration of transparency was given to the interviewees to assure them that the data acquired will be used solely for research purposes and not for competitive advantages. Acknowledging the hectic lifestyle of restaurant managers, the time and date were chosen by the interviewees. The interviewees and focus group participants signed a consent form to take part in this research, which also included a reassurance in writing that the anonymity of the restaurant and the individual would be ensured (Bryman and Bell, 2011 in Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020). The online questionnaire also had a detailed explanation of the context of the study, and participants were advised that there are no known risks in participating and that their identity and responses would be kept private in accordance with the general data protection regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and the data protection act (Cap 586).

3.8 Strengths and Limitations

The questionnaire was the main research instrument used to gather data from the true population. Although it featured open-ended questions, elaborate responses and experiences may have been omitted. The use of the focus group and interviews as part of the triangulation method helped in extracting a more detailed understanding of these findings. These qualitative instruments provided a good basis to further understand the perceptions of both professionals within the industry and local patrons. However, these participants represent a very small sample of the true population. Participants taking part in the focus group and interviews were vetted; however, the responses and discussions may have been subjective or biased. This research is also limited to one hospitality area, the restaurant industry. This is because different settings might induce different perceptions, and thus generalisations for other sectors such as hotels cannot be made. Ethnic restaurants were not considered due to their holistic nature of empowering their foreign national servers to further authenticate the experience. Fast food restaurants were also omitted due to their limited service encounters.

3.9 Summary

Previous research conducted by scholars was analysed to determine effective instruments used to obtain perceptions of service encounters within a hospitality environment (Sizoo, 2002). The data collection and analysis procedures described in this chapter allowed for the testing of four hypotheses in relation to this research. The triangulated mixed-method approach is believed to maintain the right approach. The chosen research instruments forming part of this MMR should obtain accurate results concerning the Maltese perception regarding the restaurant service quality delivered by foreign servers.

Chapter Four – Findings

The following chapter focuses on the results from the questionnaire carried out amongst the Maltese adult population, a focus group with Maltese restaurant clients, and the in-depth face-to-face interviews with restaurant managers. These research tools allowed the researcher to gather data to address the research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to visually represent the responses and draw conclusions on the perceptions of the Maltese population.

4.1 Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire was answered by 430 respondents; 425 of these respondents were Maltese, whilst 5 were foreign (Figure 1). This study focused on the perception of Maltese nationals, so the data gathered from foreign respondents was omitted. There were no incomplete or invalid questionnaires.

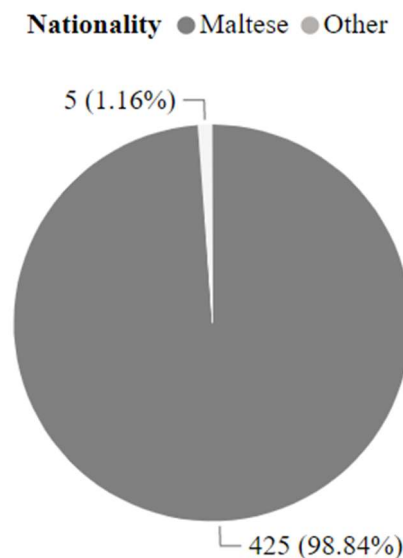


Figure 1 - Questionnaire respondents by nationality

4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

The following section demonstrates the demographic qualities of the questionnaire respondents. These demographic variables are visually represented using Microsoft Power Bi as a descriptive statistic tool.

4.1.1.1 Gender

The questionnaire was answered by 281 females and 144 males, as shown in Figure 2. Unfortunately, the balance in gender does not fully represent the population. However, this factor was taken into consideration when performing inferential analysis.

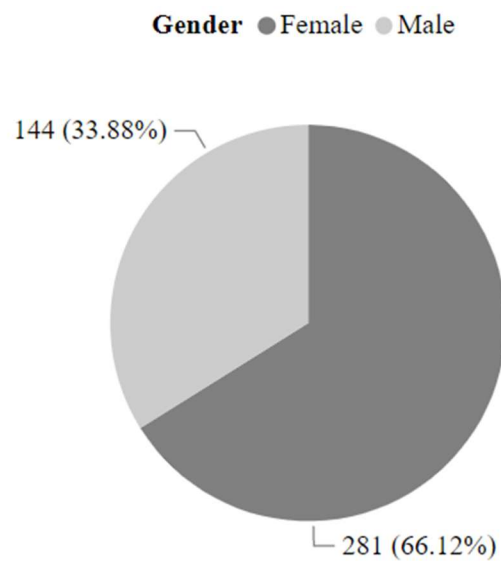


Figure 2 - Questionnaire respondents by gender

4.1.1.2 Age Group

The age group distribution varied (see Figure 3). While 12.5% of the respondents formed part of the '18 – 25' age group, 30.1% of the respondents were aged within the '26 – 34' group, 34.1% of the respondents fell within the '35 – 49' age group, 13.9% of the respondents were aged '50 – 60', and 7.1% of respondents formed part of the '65+' age group.

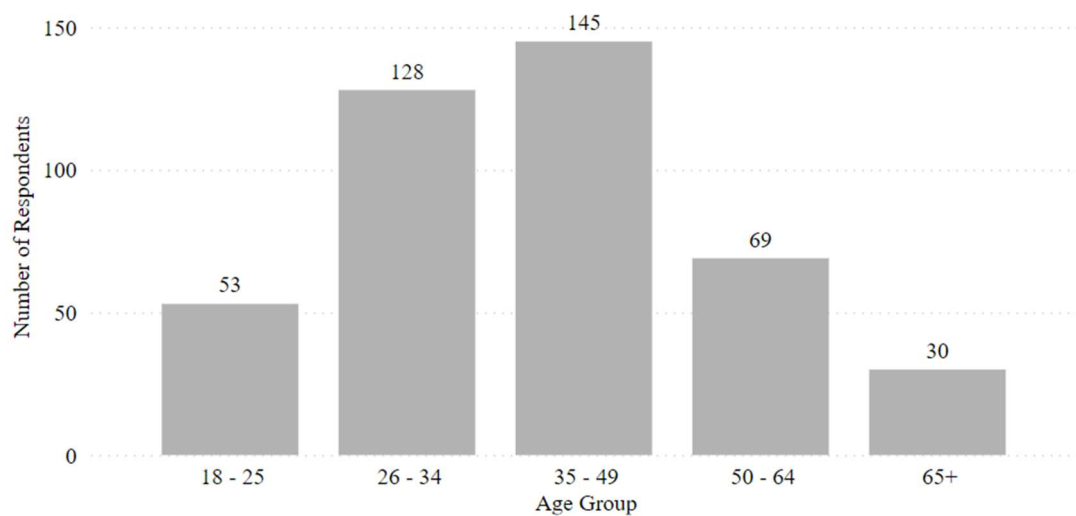


Figure 3 - Questionnaire respondents by age group

4.1.1.3 Language Fluency

All the participants listed fluency in either Maltese or English. However, six respondents considered themselves not fluent in Maltese, while 32 respondents considered themselves not fluent in English. Figure 4 shows the number of respondents fluent in Maltese and English, respectively. Other language fluencies chosen by participants were not listed in these findings, as they hold no relevancy for the study considering that Maltese and English are the two official languages in Malta.

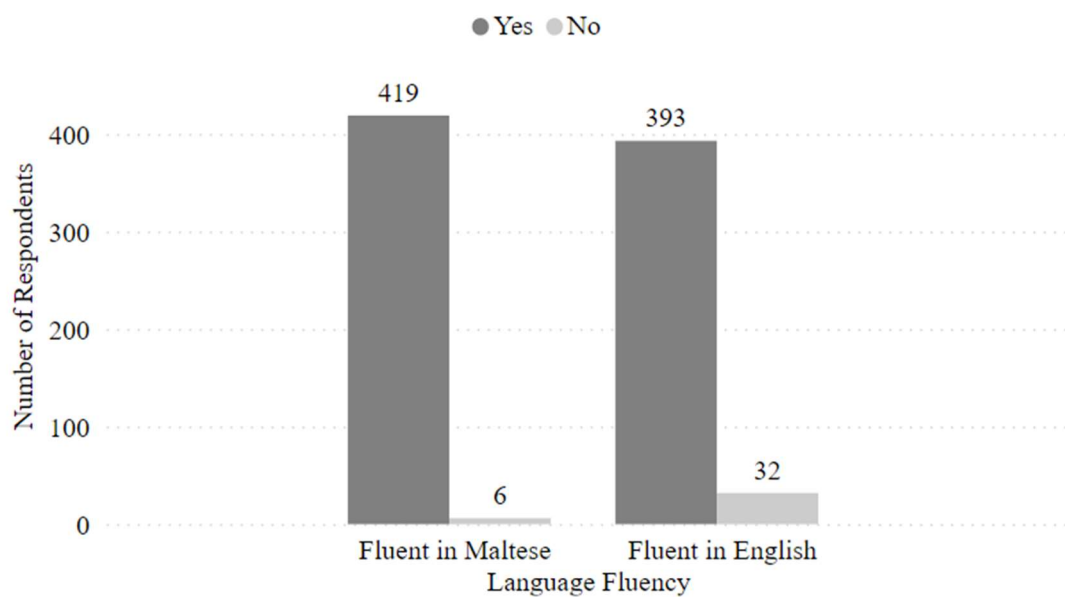


Figure 4 - Questionnaire respondents by language fluency

4.1.1.4 Educational Level

Respondents were also categorised by the educational level attained, as shown in Figure 5. While 146 respondents achieved a bachelor's degree or diploma, 113 respondents attained post-secondary education, and 87 respondents finished their secondary education. Postgraduate degrees were held by 64 respondents, while 12 respondents finished their primary education, and three respondents achieved tertiary level.

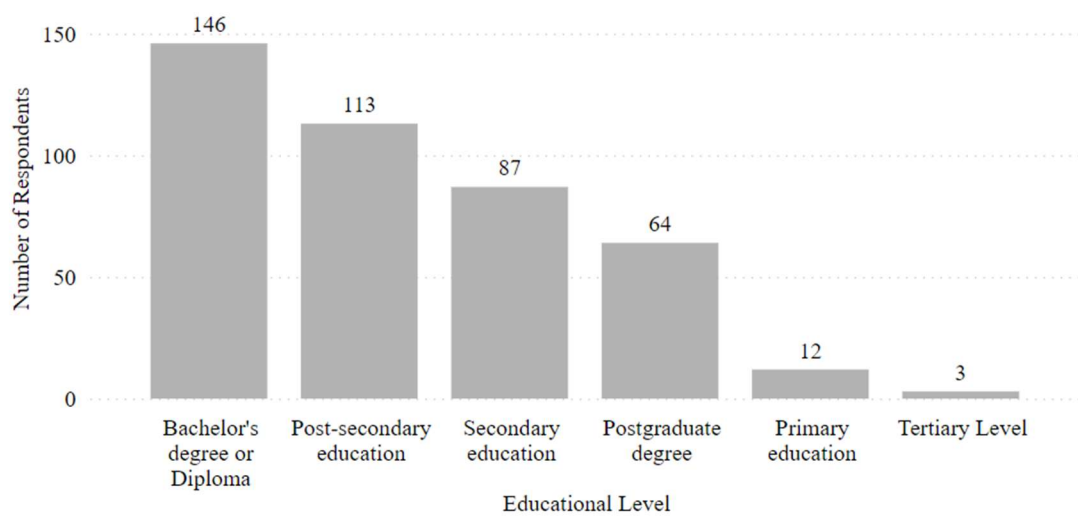


Figure 5 - Questionnaire respondents by educational attainment

4.1.1.5 Restaurant Visit Frequency

The last variable differentiating respondents was the frequency of their visits to restaurants in Malta. The most prominent categories were weekly, monthly, and seasonal frequency, with the number of respondents choosing these options being 210, 160, and 45, respectively. Few respondents also opted for daily, yearly, and never. These results are all illustrated in Figure 6.

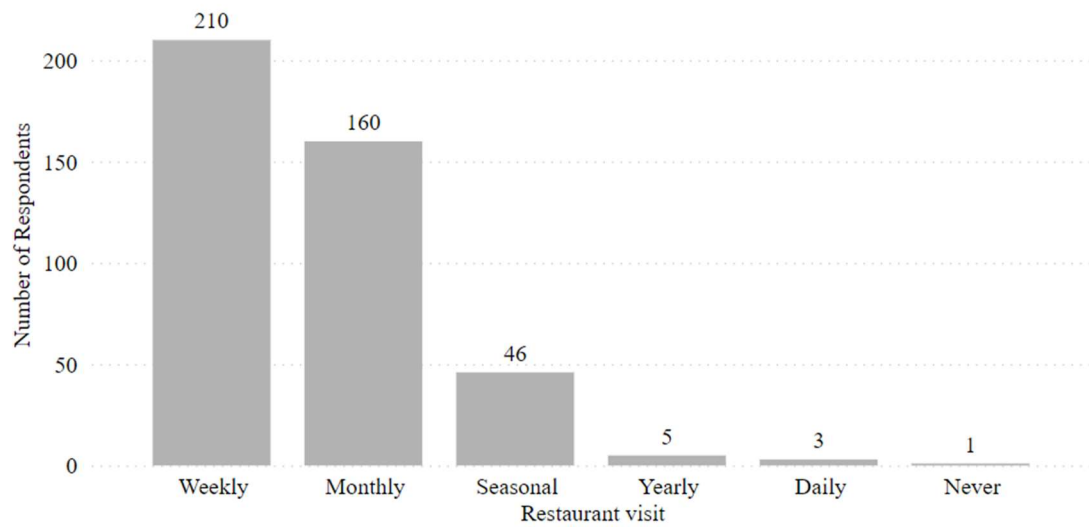


Figure 6 - Questionnaire respondents by frequency of restaurant visits

4.1.2 Respondents' Choices

The following subchapter delves into the questionnaire responses directly related to the research; the perceptions and opinions of the participants on servers and service encounters. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to fully visualise the findings and draw appropriate conclusions about the Maltese population.

4.1.2.1 The Value of Service Quality

Question 7 asked respondents to rank the deciding factors in order of importance when choosing a restaurant. This question helped the researcher understand the value of 'service quality' amongst Maltese restaurant patrons. The respondents' choices are tabulated in Table 2.

	<u>1st</u> <u>Preference</u>	<u>2nd</u> <u>Preference</u>	<u>3rd</u> <u>Preference</u>	<u>4th</u> <u>Preference</u>	<u>5th</u> <u>Preference</u>	<u>Total</u>
Service Quality	61	110	157	69	28	425
Food Quality	237	108	61	18	1	425
Menu Variety / Type of Cuisine	63	101	83	105	73	425
Budget / Value for Money	40	60	72	99	154	425
Ambience	24	46	52	134	169	425

Table 2 - Restaurant choice factor preferences

Each preference was assigned a weight to determine whether there were any significant differences between these factors. The first preference was weighted with a five, second preference a four, third preference a three, fourth preference a two, and fifth preference a one. A weighted average method was used to highlight the sample

mean scores for each of the five factors that go into choosing a restaurant, as listed in Figure 7

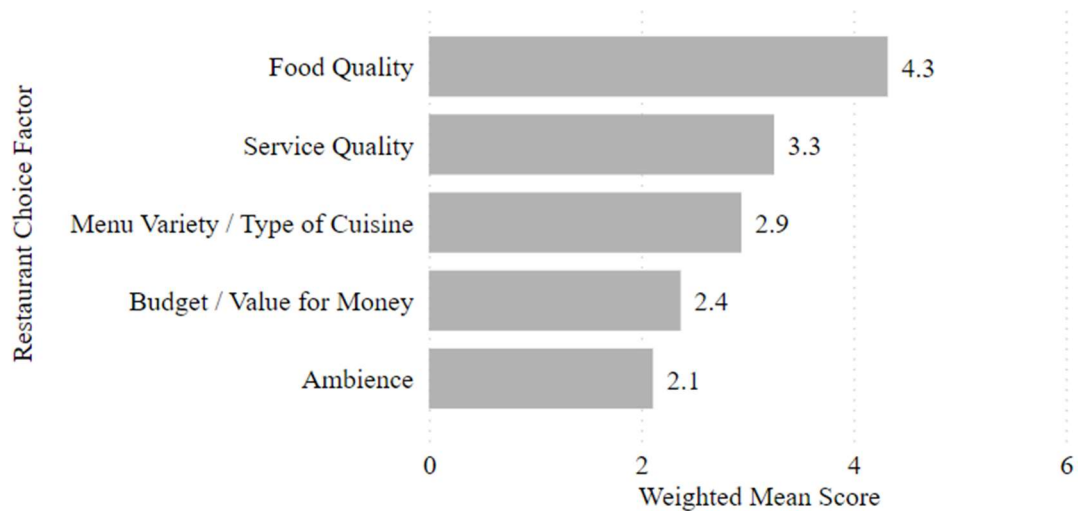


Figure 7 - Restaurant choice factor weighted mean scores

Once the weighted mean scores of these factors were calculated, the following hypotheses were speculated on:

- H_0 All restaurant choice factors means are equal.
- H_A At least one restaurant choice factor mean is different from the rest.

An analysis of variance using one-way ANOVA showed that $F(4,2120) = 2.3761$, $p = .000$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, concluding that there is a statistically significant difference between any of these five restaurant choice factors.

A Tukey-Kramer posthoc test was carried out to analyse whether any of the factors maintain a statistically common mean. However, all factors seem to have a statistically different mean score; ($CD = 2.222$). This result shows that the score for 'food quality' ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.89$) is significantly higher than 'service quality' ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.09$); whereas 'service quality' is significantly higher than 'menu variety / type of cuisine' ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.33$). Thus, 'service quality' emerged amongst the Maltese population as the second most important factor when choosing a restaurant.

4.1.2.2 Server Qualities

Question 8 delved further into the ‘service quality’ factor by asking respondents to rank various server qualities in their order of preference. Table 3 shows how the questionnaire respondents valued these factors.

	<u>1st</u> Preference	<u>2nd</u> Preference	<u>3rd</u> Preference	<u>4th</u> Preference	<u>5th</u> Preference	<u>6th</u> Preference	<u>Total</u>
Server maintains a professional behaviour and attitude	173	92	76	46	25	13	425
Server has a smart appearance and attire	40	80	83	72	69	81	425
Server can communicate in a language in which you are fluent	95	64	74	79	57	56	425
Server has a profound knowledge of the menu	60	85	86	85	59	50	425
Server is observant and attentive	21	37	55	81	140	91	425
Server is agile and offers quick service	36	67	51	62	75	134	425

Table 3 - Server quality preferences

A weighted average method was also used to rank server qualities to formulate a sample mean for each quality. Figure 8 provides the weighted mean of how respondents valued these different qualities.

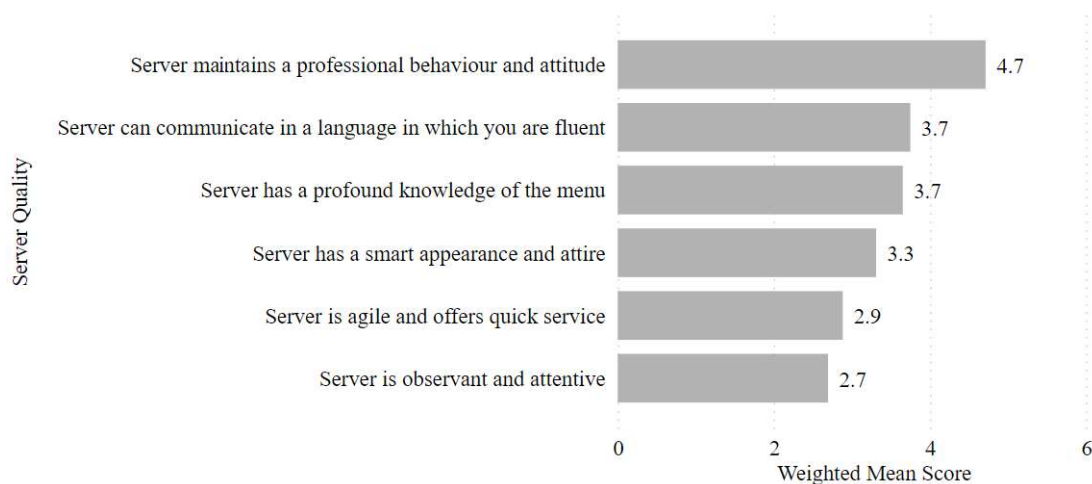


Figure 8 - Server quality weighted mean scores

These sample means were tested by the hypotheses below:

- H_0 All server quality means are equal.
- H_A At least one service quality mean is different from the rest.

An analysis of variance using one-way ANOVA was once again used, resulting in $F(5,2544) = 2.2$, $p = .000$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was once again rejected, concluding that there is a statistically significant difference between any of these six qualities.

A Tukey-Kramer posthoc test was carried out to analyse if any of the server qualities maintain a statistically common mean. The result was $CD = 0.308$. The server quality of interest in this study, which is the ability to communicate in a language that a guest is fluent in ($M = 3.748$, $SD = 1.702$), was not significantly different from the server quality of having a profound knowledge of the menu ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.570$). However, there was a statistically significant difference for the server quality of maintaining a professional behaviour and attitude ($M = 4.713$, $SD = 1.400$), which was considered to be the most essential. Table 4 below ranks the qualities according to statistical significance.

1st Preference	Server maintains a professional behaviour and attitude
2nd Preference	Server can communicate in a language in which you are fluent / Server has a profound knowledge of the menu
3rd Preference	Server has a smart appearance and attire
4th Preference	Server is observant and attentive / Server is agile and offers quick service

Table 4 - Server quality classification

4.1.2.3 Service Encounter Difficulties

Question 9 was a direct question where respondents chose whether they experienced any difficulties when served by a foreign server. From the 425 respondents, 226 answered 'yes', 95 answered 'no', whilst 104 did not recall any instance of such a service encounter and opted for the 'I do not recall' choice. Based on these choices, a pie chart showing the sample proportions is illustrated below in Figure 9. While 53.18% of the respondents encountered difficulties when served by foreign servers, 22.35% did not encounter such service failures, whilst 24.47% of the respondents did not recall any difficulties when being served by foreign servers. To reach an estimation about the population, a statistical inference technique using confidence intervals was used to extract 'P', the Maltese population proportion, where ' \hat{P} ', the sample proportion of Maltese experiencing difficulties when served by foreign servers, was found to be 0.532. In obtaining 'P', a 95% confidence interval was used: ' $z = 1.96$ ' and a sample size of ' $n = 425$ ', resulting in a 95% CI [0.48, 0.58] when using a population size of 409,226. This result shows within a 5% marginal error that between 48% to 58% of the Maltese adult population have encountered difficulties in one or more instances when served by a foreign server.

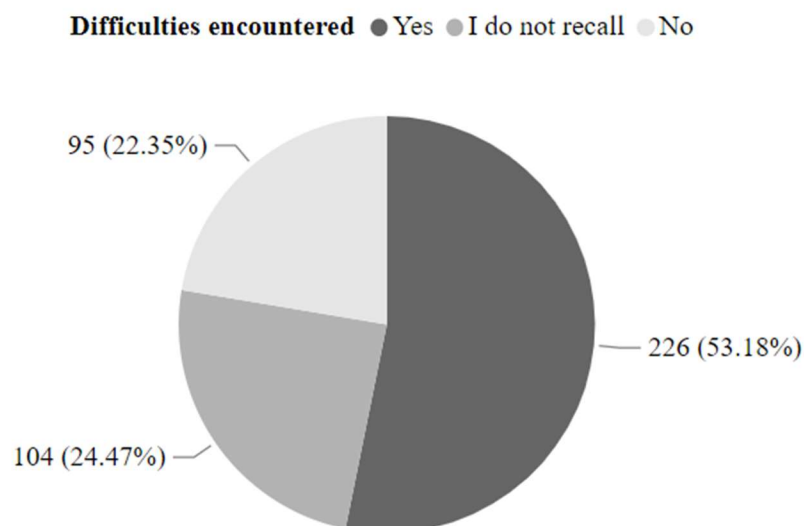


Figure 9 - Questionnaire respondents by whether they encountered difficulties when served by foreign servers

Question 10 was open-ended, where respondents were asked to describe the difficulties they faced during service encounters with foreign servers. Nearly a fifth of respondents (41 respondents; 18%) included the word ‘English’ in their answer, whilst ‘language barriers’ came in second at 15% of the respondents, followed by the term ‘communication’, which came in third at 13% of the respondents. Other common terms in the respondents’ answers were ‘wrong order’, ‘fluency’ and ‘understand’.

Respondents were then asked to select a particular factor which causes the most difficulties in their opinion. Figure 10 shows that in Question 11, the majority of respondents opted for ‘language barrier’, which accounts for 66.4% of the total respondents. ‘Lack of experience’, ‘lack of hospitality-related training’, ‘lack of cultural awareness’, and ‘others’ accounted for 10.8%, 10.3%, 6.8%, and 2.4%, respectively. Only 14 respondents chose ‘none of the above’, corresponding to 3.3%.

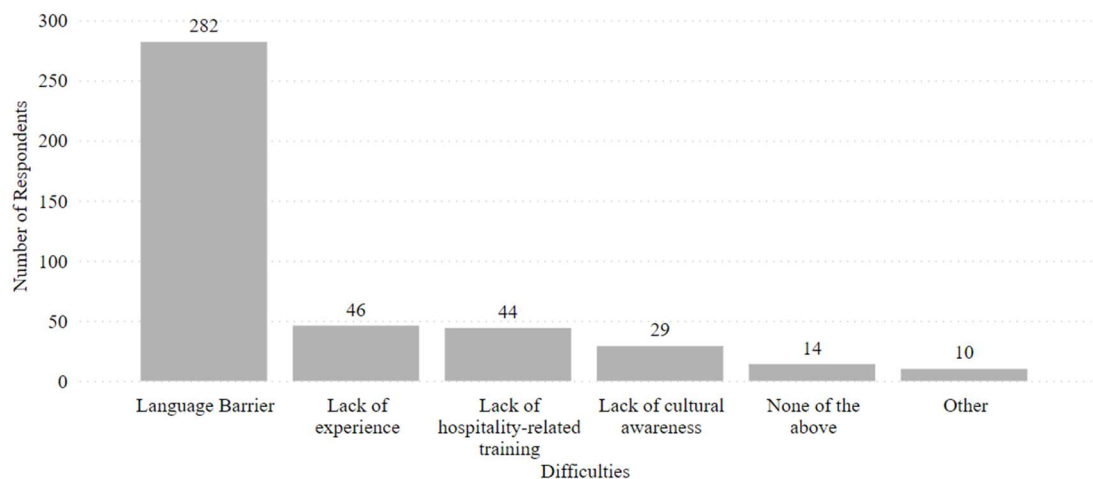


Figure 10 - Questionnaire respondents by nature of service encounter difficulty

4.1.2.4 Perceptions on Server Training

Respondents were asked for their opinions on training in Question 12 by comparing the level of service delivered by locals to that of foreign servers. In fact, the question asked whether Maltese restaurants are giving the necessary training to foreign servers to deliver service on par with local servers. Of the 425 respondents, 329 chose to answer this question with a definitive 'yes' or 'no', whilst 96 were not sure whether necessary training is being provided. The sample showed that 62 respondents think that the necessary training is being provided, whilst 267 are not convinced that restaurants are giving foreign servers adequate training to deliver service on par with local servers. As shown in Figure 11, respondents who thought that adequate training is provided made up 14.6% of the respondents, while those opposing accounted for 62.8% of the total respondents. Almost a quarter of the respondents were not sure (22.6%).

Confidence intervals were set again to obtain another estimation of the Maltese adult population 'P' using inferential statistics. The sample proportion of Maltese respondents ' \hat{P} ', those who are convinced that foreign servers are given the necessary training, was found to be 0.146. To obtain 'P', a 95% confidence interval ' $z = 1.96$ ', the sample size ' $n = 425$ ', and a finite population size of 409,226 were used, resulting in a 95% CI [0.11, 0.18]. This result shows that with 95% confidence, only 11% to 18% of the adult Maltese population believe that restaurants are training foreign servers to deliver service on par with local servers.

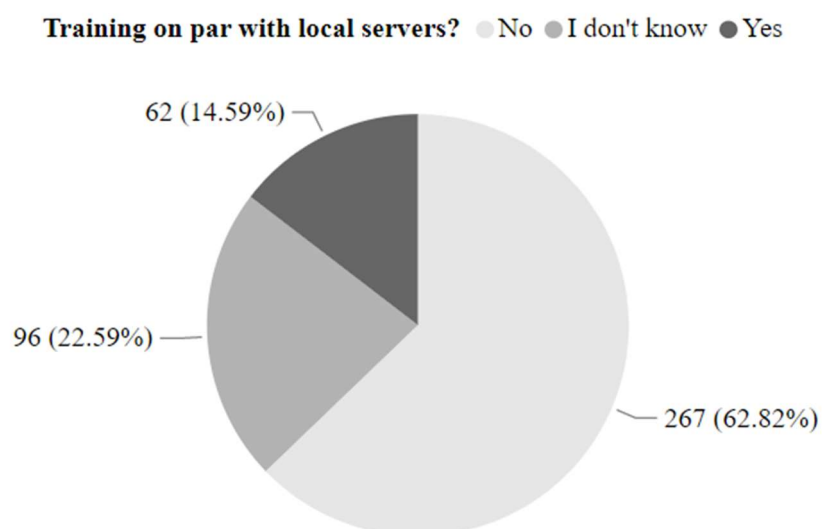


Figure 11 - Questionnaire respondents by whether necessary training is provided to deliver service on par with local servers

4.1.2.5 Perceptions of Native-Speaking Servers

Questionnaire respondents ended the questionnaire by voicing their opinions on the importance of having most servers speak their native language. Respondents were asked if such a factor is pivotal when choosing a particular restaurant. The results show that 247 respondents answered 'yes', 134 answered 'no', whilst 44 respondents opted for 'I don't know' when asked if they prefer to go to restaurants where most servers can communicate in the patron's native language. The respondents who preferred choosing restaurants with native-speaking servers accounted for 58.12%, while those against accounted for 31.53%. 10.35% of respondents were unsure. These results are shown in Figure 12.

With the sample proportion ' \hat{P} ' being 58.12%, the population proportion ' P ' was once again derived by using confidence intervals. Using ' $z = 1.96$ ', a sample size ' $n = 425$ ', and a finite population of 409,226, the results were obtained with a 95% CI[0.53, 0.63]. Therefore, with 95% confidence, 53% to 63% of the adult Maltese population prefer to visit restaurants where most servers can speak their native language.

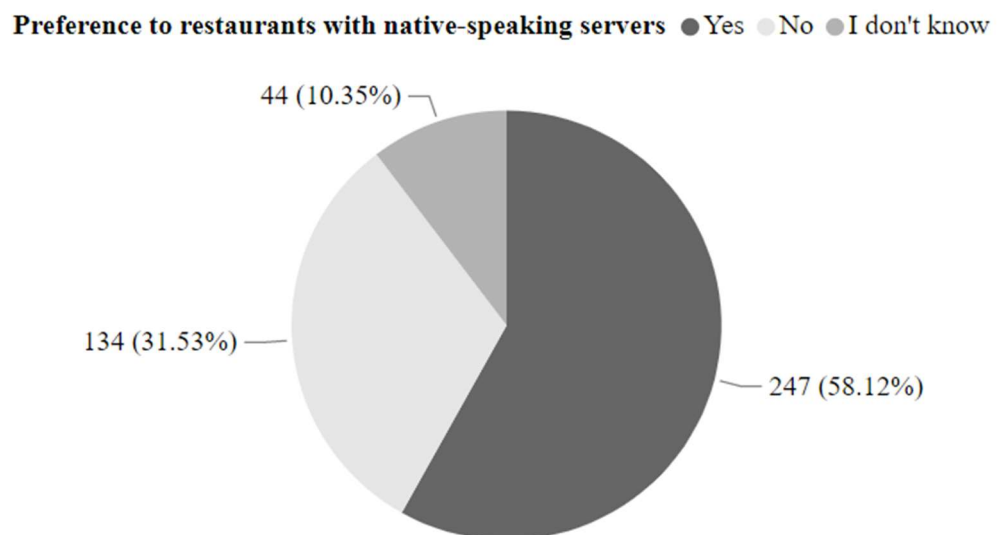


Figure 12 - Questionnaire respondents by preference to restaurants with native-speaking servers

4.1.3 Demographic Segmentation

The results obtained from the questionnaire respondents were further analysed across different demographic variables and factors, and the appropriate inferential tests were performed. Considering the number of respondents per cohort, the following variables, as shown in Table 5, were tested against each other to determine any statistical differences in the responses.

Gender	Male	Female			
Age Group	18 to 25	26 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65+
Education Level	Secondary education	Post-secondary education	Bachelor's degree or diploma	Postgraduate degree	
Restaurant Visit Frequency	Weekly	Monthly	Seasonal		

Table 5 - Demographic variables tested by inferential statistics

4.1.3.1 Demographic Analysis of Service Quality

Question 7 extracted the importance of ‘service quality’ when choosing a restaurant. This quality was found to be the second-most important factor after food quality. The following hypotheses in Table 6 were generated to determine if ‘service quality’ holds the same value across different demographic variables.

<u>The importance of ‘service quality’ when choosing a restaurant</u>				
<u>Null Hypothesis</u>	<u>Test</u>	<u>Level of Sig.</u>	<u>P-Value</u>	<u>Result</u>
The importance of service quality is the same across categories of gender	Independent t-Test	0.05	0.691	Do not reject the null hypothesis
The importance of service quality is the same across categories of age	One-way ANOVA	0.05	0.053	Do not reject the null hypothesis
The importance of service quality is the same across different levels of education	One-way ANOVA	0.05	0	Reject the null hypothesis
The importance of service quality is the same across different visit Frequencies	One-way ANOVA	0.05	0.135	Do not reject the null hypothesis

Table 6 - Hypotheses test summary on the importance of ‘service quality’

‘Service quality’ was not found to be statistically different across different gender and ages, as well as amongst patrons with different frequencies of restaurant visits; however, this was not the case amongst respondents with different educational backgrounds. The Tukey Kramer procedure indicated that respondents with a secondary education level ($M = 3.701$, $SD = 1.152$) valued ‘service quality’ more than those with a significantly higher educational level. The other three cohorts were found to have the same statistical mean: post-secondary education ($M = 3.221$, $SD = 1.050$), bachelor’s degree or diploma ($M = 3.027$, $SD = 1.076$) and postgraduate degree ($M =$

3.141, SD = 0.923). Hence, no differences were observed between these groups. The mean and standard deviation are tabulated below in Table 7.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D</u>
Secondary education	3.701	1.152
Post-secondary education	3.221	1.05
Bachelor's degree or diploma	3.027	1.076
Postgraduate degree	3.141	0.923

Table 7 - Tukey Kramer output on educational attainment cohort

4.1.3.2 Demographic Analysis of Server Language Fluency

Question 8 asked the respondents to rank different server qualities. The server quality of being able to communicate fluently in a language the participant is fluent in was the second-most important variable across the respondents. The following hypotheses were formulated to determine whether there are any differences amongst respondents with different demographics, as shown in Table 8.

<u>The value of language fluency in foreign servers</u>				
<u>Null Hypothesis</u>	<u>Test</u>	<u>Level of Sig.</u>	<u>P-Value</u>	<u>Result</u>
The value of language fluency in foreign servers is the same across categories of gender	Independent t-Test	0.05	0.153	Do not reject the null hypothesis
The value of language fluency in foreign servers is the same across categories of age	One-way ANOVA	0.05	0.058	Do not reject the null hypothesis
The value of language fluency in foreign servers is the same across different levels of education	One-way ANOVA	0.05	0.002	Reject the null hypothesis
The value of language fluency in foreign servers is the same across different visit frequencies	One-way ANOVA	0.05	0.205	Do not reject the null hypothesis

Table 8 - Hypotheses test summary on a server's quality of 'language fluency'

The value of language fluency value was found to be of equal importance across different gender, ages, and visit frequencies. However, it held a different level of importance among respondents with different levels of education. The Tukey Kramer procedure indicated that postgraduate degree respondents ($M = 2.984$, $SD = 1.527$) valued this quality the least. However, there were no statistical differences across respondents with the other three educational backgrounds, these being secondary education ($M = 4.023$, $SD = 1.628$), post-secondary ($M = 3.779$, $SD =$

1.619) and bachelor's degree or diploma ($M = 3.753$, $SD = 1.783$). This result shows that postgraduate respondents value server fluency significantly less than the rest of the respondents. The mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 9.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D</u>
Secondary education	4.023	1.628
Post-secondary education	3.779	1.619
Bachelor's degree or diploma	3.753	1.783
Postgraduate degree	2.984	1.527

Table 9 - Tukey Kramer output on educational attainment cohort

4.1.3.3 Demographic Analysis of Service Encounter Difficulties

Question 9 required respondents to answer whether they experienced difficulties when served by a foreign server. As stated above, 53.18% of the respondents encountered difficulties when served by foreign servers. Therefore, hypotheses were formulated to determine whether demographic variables affected respondents' responses. These hypotheses are tabulated below in Table 10.

<u>Difficulties</u> when served by foreign restaurant servers				
<u>Null Hypothesis</u>	<u>Test</u>	<u>Level of Sig.</u>	<u>P-Value</u>	<u>Result</u>
Frequency of difficult encounters when served by foreign restaurant servers is the same across categories of gender	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.260	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Frequency of difficult encounters when served by foreign restaurant servers is the same across categories of age	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.129	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Frequency of difficult encounters when served by foreign restaurant servers is the same across different levels of education	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.060	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Frequency of difficult encounters when served by foreign restaurant servers is the same across different visit frequencies	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.011	Reject the null hypothesis

Table 10 - Hypotheses test summary on cross-cultural encounter difficulties

The proportion of respondents opting for “yes”, “no”, and “I do not recall” were statistically insignificant across gender, ages, and educational levels. However, a statistically significant difference was found across the frequency in restaurant visits, variable $X^2 (4, N = 416) = 13.07, p = .011$. Respondents who visit restaurants weekly encounter more difficulties when served by a foreign server than respondents who visit

less frequently. Table 11 below shows the observed and expected frequencies of such responses.

	<u>Observed Frequencies</u>				<u>Expected Frequencies</u>			
	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Seasonal</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Seasonal</u>	<u>Total</u>
Yes	129	72	21	222	112.07	85.385	24.548	222
No	38	40	15	93	46.947	35.769	10.284	93
I do not recall	43	48	10	101	50.986	38.846	11.168	101
Total	210	160	46	416	210	160	46	416

Table 11 - Chi-Square output on restaurant visit frequency cohort

4.1.3.4 Demographic Analysis of Server Training Perceptions

Question 12 analysed Maltese patrons' opinions on training, and whether foreign servers are given enough to deliver the same service quality as local servers. 62.82% of the respondents were not convinced that such training from restaurant operators is being provided. Numerous hypotheses were formulated in Table 12 to test whether the responses were affected by demographic variables. It was noted no statistically significant differences were found to reject the null hypotheses.

<u>Necessary training given to foreign servers to deliver service at par to local servers</u>				
<u>Null Hypothesis</u>	<u>Test</u>	<u>Level of Sig.</u>	<u>P-Value</u>	<u>Result</u>
Proportions of respondents on training of foreign servers to deliver service on par with local servers are the same across categories of gender	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.745	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Proportions of respondents on training of foreign servers to deliver service on par with local servers are the same across categories of age	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.06	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Proportions of respondents on training of foreign servers to deliver service on par with local servers are the same across different levels of education	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.686	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Proportions of respondents on training of foreign servers to deliver service on par with local servers are the same across different visit frequencies	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.161	Do not reject the null hypothesis

Table 12 - Hypotheses test summary on provided training in delivering service on par with local servers

4.1.3.5 Demographic Analysis of Native-Speaking Servers' Perceptions

Finally, this study examined if there are respondents prefer restaurants with most servers speaking the participants' native language. In fact, Question 13 showed that 58.12% of the respondents do prefer these restaurants. The following hypotheses were formulated and tabulated in Table 13 to determine whether demographic characteristics affected responses.

<u>Preference towards restaurants with native-speaking servers</u>				
<u>Null Hypothesis</u>	<u>Test</u>	<u>Level of Sig.</u>	<u>P-Value</u>	<u>Result</u>
Preference towards restaurants having native-speaking servers is the same across categories of gender	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis
Preference towards restaurants having native-speaking servers is the same across categories of age	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.109	Do not reject the null hypothesis
Preference towards restaurants having native-speaking servers is the same across different levels of education	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis
Preference towards restaurants having native-speaking servers is the same across different visit frequencies	Chi-Square Test	0.05	0.998	Do not reject the null hypothesis

Table 13 - Hypotheses test summary on preferences towards restaurants having native speaking servers

Two of the above hypotheses were rejected. This shows that preference towards restaurants having native speaking servers is not the same across gender, $X^2(2, N = 425) = 16.97, p = .000$ and educational levels, $X^2(6, N = 410) = 32.67, p = .000$. Table 14 shows the discrepancy in observed and expected frequencies across gender,

where it is noted that a higher proportion of female participants prefer native speaking servers when compared with male respondents. As shown in Table 15, participants who completed secondary education responded “yes” more frequently than other respondents with higher educational levels.

	<u>Observed Frequencies</u>			<u>Expected Frequencies</u>		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Yes	69	178	247	83.689	163.311	247
No	64	70	134	45.402	88.598	134
I don't know	11	33	44	14.908	29.092	44
Total	144	281	425	144	281	425

Table 14 - Chi-Square output on gender cohort

<u>Observed Frequencies</u>					
	<u>Secondary education</u>	<u>Post- secondary education</u>	<u>Bachelor's degree or diploma</u>	<u>Postgraduate degree</u>	<u>Total</u>
Yes	69	63	78	24	234
No	14	42	50	27	133
I don't know	4	8	18	13	43
Total	87	113	146	64	410
<u>Expected Frequencies</u>					
	<u>Secondary education</u>	<u>Post- secondary education</u>	<u>Bachelor's degree or diploma</u>	<u>Postgraduate degree</u>	<u>Total</u>
Yes	49.654	64.493	83.327	36.527	234
No	28.222	36.656	47.361	20.761	133
I don't know	9.124	11.851	15.312	6.712	43
Total	87	113	146	64	410

Table 15 - Chi-Square output on educational attainment cohort

4.2 In-Depth Face to Face Interviews

Four random restaurant managers were chosen for in-depth face-to-face interviews. This was to extract qualitative data to support the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire. The participants maintained different demographic qualities with different ages, gender, and levels of education. Their experience in the restaurant industry varies from 6 to 16 years. Their demographic characteristics are exemplified below in Table 16.

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Language Fluency</u>	<u>Educational Level</u>	<u>Experience</u>
Interviewee 1	Male	40	Maltese, English	Secondary education	16 years
Interviewee 2	Male	30	Maltese, English, Italian	Postgraduate degree	14 years
Interviewee 3	Male	25	Maltese, English	Bachelor's degree or diploma	6 years
Interviewee 4	Female	45	Maltese, English, Italian	Post-secondary education	13 years

Table 16 - Interviewee's demographic characteristics

4.2.1 Differences in the Restaurant Labour Market according to Industry Professionals

Interviewees were asked to describe and compare the current restaurant labour market with five years ago. All interviewees acknowledged that there have been drastic changes in this regard, and that the most noticeable change was the lack of Maltese servers within the industry. Interviewee 2 suggested that the Maltese restaurant industry has intensified, grown, and become more competitive, thus dispersing the number of Maltese servers across numerous restaurants. Interviewees 1 and 2 mentioned that salaries and remuneration packages have become less attractive over the years, especially compared with other industries. Interviewee 1 also pointed out that a server's job is labour-intensive and stressful compared with other positions in other industries with similar remuneration packages. Meanwhile, Interviewees 3 and

4 stated that up until a few years ago, many Maltese students used to work within the industry during the summer period; however, this occurrence has diminished up to a point where no Maltese applications come through vacancies posted on local platforms.

4.2.2 Client Requests for Specific Servers

Interviewees were asked whether they encountered any requests or preferences from patrons with respect to the server assigned to their table. All interviewees expressed that this request is quite common within the industry. Interviewee 1 stated that patrons ask for a specific server by name when they are acquainted with the server or when they have formed a bond by visiting the restaurant on a regular basis. Interviewees 3 and 4 pointed out that patrons ask for Maltese-speaking servers when they have communication problems, or the guests are not fluent in English. Interviewees 2 and 3 also pointed out that ethnic and racial biases play a role in these requests. Interviewee 3 observed that some Maltese patrons have different preferences among foreign servers of different nationalities, such as preferring Filipino servers to Indian servers. Another blunt and racial patron request expressed by Interviewee 2 was when a particular guest requested that no Asian servers should approach his table.

4.2.3 Restaurant Managers' Experiences regarding Server Encounter Difficulties

The interviewees were asked to comment on the fact that more than half of the questionnaire respondents admitted that they had encountered difficulty when served by a foreign national. All interviewees mentioned the language barrier as the primary source of service encounter failure. Interviewee 1 added on a lack of skill and job training, together with the current scenario: most foreign servers working in Malta are using the restaurant industry as a point of entry in Malta's labour market and are not pursuing the role as a long-term career. Interviewee 2 expressed that although some servers are proficient in English, local patrons may find it challenging to understand their accents.

4.2.4 The Importance of Cross-Cultural Training for Foreign Servers

Interviewees were asked to comment on whether foreign servers lack cross-cultural training. Interviewees 1 and 4 agreed with the statement, saying that most foreign servers are not accustomed to Maltese characteristics. They added that Maltese patrons sometimes perceive their cultural norms and body cues as rude. Interviewee 2 suggested that the Maltese government should impose and provide this training upon their arrival in Malta, while Interviewee 3 stated that the level of culture adaptation varies greatly from one individual to another.

4.2.5 Perceptions on Maltese Servers making up the Majority of the Front-of-House Team

Interviewees were asked whether a restaurant holds a competitive advantage when most of its servers are local. All interviewees believe that this scenario is advantageous to local patrons. Interviewee 1 expressed that he receives positive feedback from local clients on most of his servers being local. As expressed by the clients, they feel much more at ease and comfortable interacting with Maltese servers. Interviewee 2 added that local servers understand better the dynamics of local cuisine and culture, allowing them to serve clients better. Interviewee 2 also delved into the element of local servers having a more robust understanding of a guest's expectations, as these are similar to the servers' expectations when they themselves visit a restaurant. Interviewees 2 and 3 mentioned that speaking the same native language may enhance conversations between servers and guests, especially regarding cooking methods, dietary requirements, and detailed menu explanations. Interviewee 3 added that local servers tend to form a greater bond with the local clientele, building solid relationships which increase the chances of having these patrons as return clients. Interviewee 4 noticed different tipping behaviours revolving around the server's nationality. The Maltese clientele was observed to tip more when served by local servers.

4.2.6 The Future of the Maltese Restaurant Labour Market as per Restaurant Professionals

The future of the Maltese restaurant industry does not seem bright according to these four interviewees. When asked for their predictions of what the labour market will look like in the near future, Interviewees 1 and 4 said that unless remuneration packages increase drastically, the few locals working within the industry will choose a different industry with better remuneration and less work intensity. Interviewee 1 also added that the ones who remain are the ones who are passionate about this work. Interviewees 2 and 4 added that within the next five years, if the salaries offered do not reflect the increased standard of living and compete with other industries, half of the restaurants will have no option but to close their doors. Profit margins within the restaurant industry are getting thinner, which is why drastic changes are necessary. Interviewee 3 stated that the industry should change its dynamics to attract younger generations.

4.3 Focus Group Results

The focus group was made up of five participants. These five participants were asked to detail their perceptions of the restaurant labour market and beyond from their points of view as patrons. These five participants said they consider themselves regular restaurant clients, with an average of one restaurant visit a week. In Table 17, the demographic qualities of these participants are listed.

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Language Fluency</u>	<u>Educational Level</u>
Participant 1	Male	59	Maltese, English	Secondary education
Participant 2	Male	29	Maltese, English	Post-secondary education
Participant 3	Female	57	Maltese, English, Italian	Bachelor's degree or diploma
Participant 4	Female	30	Maltese, English	Bachelor's degree or diploma
Participant 5	Female	28	Maltese, English	Postgraduate degree

Table 17 - Focus group participants' demographic characteristics

4.3.1 Changes Observed by Maltese Restaurant Clients

Participant 3 opened this discussion by pointing out the increase in foreign nationals as servers. For this participant, the norm is to converse in English when visiting a restaurant. An increase in the number of restaurants opening in Malta was also noticed by Participants 2 and 5, while Participant 1 mentioned that numerous concepts and different cuisines are making their way to our shores. Participants 1 and 4 also pointed out that there has been a spike in prices in the last few years.

4.3.2 The Term ‘Server’ in the Eyes of Maltese Nationals

Participants were asked what comes to mind when they hear the term ‘server’. The first word that all participants agreed on was ‘foreign national’. Participant 3 described that a server needs to have fine etiquette to serve guests in the most professional manner. Participant 4 described that a server holds the same level of importance as a chef in the eyes of the guests within a restaurant setting. Participants 2 and 5 suggested that the job is no longer perceived as a career path among Maltese nationals, and Participant 5 also added that the job is considered stressful, involves long hours, and requires working on weekends and public holidays.

4.3.3 Perceptions of Foreign Servers Working in the Maltese Restaurant Industry

Participants had different opinions regarding foreign servers within the restaurant industry. Participant 1 stated that a high percentage of foreign servers enter the Maltese restaurant labour industry without experience or training as there is a huge labour shortage, making it easy to get employed. Participant 3 pointed out that most foreign servers are not trained to deliver the expected service, especially when it comes to the explanation of menu items and dietary requirements. Participant 4 stated that nationality does not matter as long as they are proficient in their service. Participant 2 expressed the concern that Maltese patrons who are not fluent in English might encounter difficulties placing an order where no Maltese-speaking servers are on duty. This factor may limit these people when choosing a restaurant in the country of their residence. Participant 4 pointed out that basic Maltese words could be implemented within servers’ cross-cultural training to bridge the gap between communicative and language barriers. Participants delved into the factors contributing to a decrease in Maltese servers within the industry. Nearly all participants agreed that the remuneration package is the detrimental factor contributing to this exodus from the industry. Participant 2 ties the influx of foreign servers to the increased labour demand that the industry is facing.

4.3.4 Personal Service Encounter Difficulties

Participants then described the nature of the difficulties they encountered when served by foreign servers in a restaurant. Participant 2 recalled an instance where a beverage order was misunderstood, resulting in being served different beverage items. Participant 3 described that any unusual requests or enquiries concerning cooking methods are generally not known, leaving guests with unknown information or unsatisfactory answers. Another element that contributes to service failure, according to Participant 1, is the lack of motivation seen in certain servers, where a 2-minute task is turned into a 5-minute task, thus resulting in an inefficient service encounter. Participant 5 also described another element causing difficulties: the high labour turnover that the industry faces. Hence, restaurants have new servers all year round, leaving just a few servers who are accustomed to the restaurant's desired operation.

4.3.5 Server Nationality Observation

Four participants agreed that having the majority of servers being local is an advantage due to eliminating any linguistic barriers; however, Participant 4 expressed that as long as servers are knowledgeable and proficient, nationality should not provide a competitive advantage. Participant 5 observed that restaurants in the south of Malta might have a higher percentage of local servers employed. Participant 2 expressed that Maltese servers should also be proficient in English, so this language barrier is not reversed if the guest is English-speaking.

4.3.6 Thoughts on Future Restaurant Trends

Participants 1 and 3 suggested that although the industry is encountering a labour shortage, not everyone should be eligible to work as a server. Hence, the government should impose compulsory training for foreign and Maltese job seekers willing to work as servers, where their serving and language skills can be assessed before employment. Participant 4 suggested that cover charges should be implemented to improve remuneration for servers. Participant 2 suggested that restaurant managers should take cross-cultural training more seriously to address service failures amongst

Maltese patrons. Participants 1 and 5 also recommended that since the industry is facing this labour shortage, employers and government entities should devise a plan to improve remuneration for the industry in general. Lastly, if none of these solutions are implemented, the chances are that unskilled foreign workers will make up the majority of the workforce in the industry.

Chapter Five - Discussion

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study outlined in Chapter 4 with reference to the framework presented in the literature review. The subsections in this discussion address each of the stated hypotheses while presenting insights contributing to the findings. The discussion commences by contextualising the relevance of this study by determining the value placed on ‘service quality’ by Maltese restaurant clients in relation to the holistic restaurant experience.

5.1 The Value of ‘Service Quality’ within a Maltese Restaurant Setting

The findings in Chapter 4 concluded that ‘service quality’ is the second-most important factor when choosing a restaurant according to Maltese restaurant clients. This value exceeds other essential factors such as ‘menu variety’ and the ‘type of cuisine’ being offered, the ‘budget and value for money’ aspect, and the ‘ambience’ found within a restaurant. ‘Food quality’ had a more significant impact than ‘service quality’, as it is the greatest factor contributing to customer satisfaction. This aligns with Al-Tit's (2015) study conducted in Jordan when measuring ‘SERVQUAL’ attributes and influences on customer satisfaction.

The value of ‘service quality’ was observed to hold equal importance across respondents of different ages, sexes, and visit frequencies, but not across respondents with different educational levels. In fact, respondents with the lowest level of educational attainment, these being participants who completed their secondary education, valued ‘service quality’ the highest ($M = 3.701$, $SD = 1.152$). This result complies with Stafford and Wells's (1996) research, where respondents with a higher level of education were observed to be better critics of ‘service quality’ and have higher expectations than less educated clients; however, no significant differences were observed by respondents forming part of different age groups as presented in the works of both Stafford and Wells (1996) and Kong and Jogaratnam (2007). These studies showed that older customers were generally more satisfied with ‘service quality’ than younger clients, especially within an individualistic culture.

5.2 Hypothesis 1 - Foreign Servers working in the Maltese Restaurant Industry are given the Necessary Communicational and Cross-Cultural Training.

The first hypothesis tested was the perception of Maltese restaurant clients in relation to the training being provided to foreign servers within the Maltese restaurant industry. Cross-cultural and communicational training is becoming more relevant as time progresses, mainly due to the noticeable influx of foreign servers working in restaurants (Holicza and Stone, 2016). The inferential statistics performed on Question 12 showed that only 11% to 18% of the Maltese restaurant clients believed that the necessary training is being provided. This estimation of the population clearly shows that most Maltese restaurant clients are not convinced that such training is being implemented within the industry. All demographic categories shared this opinion. These results confirm Kostić Bobanović and Novak's (2017) study on the lack of communicative effectiveness and cross-cultural competencies from front-of-house employees when interacting with clients of different nationalities. Kostić Bobanović and Novak (2017) found that Croatian servers themselves expressed the need for further training in this regard within the hospitality industry in general. Kostić Bobanović and Novak (2017) also noticed that servers working in Britain are less flexible when dealing with misunderstandings and do not possess the required communicative training to clearly communicate with British customers during service encounters.

The server quality that was most valued among locals was professional behaviour and attitude, which directly attributes to the level of cross-cultural competencies that a server possesses. This factor proves Manzur and Jogaratnam's (2006) implications on the importance of cross-cultural training, where restaurant managers should train and encourage their employees to adopt behaviours associated with ingratiation techniques. Unfortunately, as confirmed by Maltese restaurant professionals, cross-cultural training is lacking across servers within the restaurant industry, as high staff turnover rates and the maintenance of a diverse, multicultural workforce proves difficult to train consistently. The focus group participants recommended that basic cross-cultural training become mandatory for foreign servers opting to work in the Maltese hospitality industry. Professionally designed cross-

cultural training programs could be provided by governmental institutions to better the Maltese restaurant industry in general.

As suggested by Alshaibani and Bakir (2017), cultural sensitivity depends on the individual's capabilities relating to intercultural effectiveness. Cultural sensitivity was observed to be different across different nationalities and depending on the cultural setting of one's origin, thus confirming the restaurant professionals' claims as to why some Maltese patrons may prefer servers with a particular nationality (Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). This is apart from other factors such as racial profiling and other personal preferences.

5.3 Hypothesis 2 - Maltese Restaurant Clients encounter Difficulties during Service Encounters with Foreign Servers

To understand the locals' general perceptions on service encounters with foreign restaurant servers, participants were asked whether they encountered any difficulties during their restaurant visits. The data gathered pointed out that most respondents did encounter such difficulties. Inferential statistics used on this research sample showed an alarming estimation of 48% to 58% of the population encountering difficulties when served by a foreign server. A study conducted by Wang and Mattila (2010) aligns with these findings, where the incongruent language used by foreign servers was found to be a pivotal factor in creating misunderstandings, miscommunications, and ambiguity. Furthermore, Sizoo et al. (2005) argued that service encounters between customers and employees of different nationalities increase service encounter failures due to differing cultural values and norms. The result obtained in this study was dissected across different demographic characteristics, showing that weekly restaurant visitors encountered more difficulties than those who visited monthly and seasonally. This finding can easily be interpreted since regular clients are prone to more service encounters, thus increasing the probability of experiencing a service failure.

Other factors contributing to the high rates of service encounter failures, apart from linguistic and cultural barriers, may also be attributed to the nature of the job, as stated by industry professionals and in Wang and Mattila's (2010)

research. Wang and Mattila (2010) observed that restaurant servers experienced abnormal stress levels, leading them to develop a coping mechanism where they try to avoid customers to reduce the number of encounters. Ultimately, this affects the efficiency of the service and customer satisfaction levels.

5.4 Hypothesis 3 – The Language Barrier is the Cause of Most Service Encounter Failures between Foreign Restaurant Servers and Local Patrons

Questionnaire respondents expressed their views on two occasions to determine the most prominent factor contributing to service encounter failures. Quantitative data gathered from Question 11 shows that the ‘language barrier’ option was the most prominent choice among respondents, with the option being selected by 66.35% of the participants. Furthermore, the qualitative open-ended answers suggest similar opinions, as numerous phrases and terms associated with language and communicational problems were described. The phrases that respondents commonly used were ‘English’, ‘communication’, ‘understand’ and the actual term ‘language barrier’, as their answer described the nature of the barrier encountered. The fact that the ‘language barrier’ was found to be the most prominent barrier during intercultural service encounters falls in line with numerous empirical studies analysing intercultural encounters within a hospitality-related setting (Baum et al., 2007; Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017; Akhtar et al., 2020).

Restaurant managers participating in this study also confirmed this hypothesis, adding that their regular clients tell them when they had difficulty communicating with their servers. These communicational difficulties, as pointed out within the focus group discussion, can also be a result of local patrons’ lack of English fluency and not due to the server’s lack of language proficiency. Thus, the language barrier is a two-way street during these intercultural encounters. The language barrier also affects the service delivery and the reputation of the industry in general. Focus group participants relayed occasions where servers could not explain complex things such as cooking methods and things related to dietary requirements due to their limited vocabulary. The participants also described instances of miscommunications leading to getting the wrong orders.

The term ‘understand’, commonly mentioned by questionnaire participants, indicates that certain elements from their encounter were being misunderstood. During an interview with a restaurant manager, this term was also attributed to certain accents that might be challenging for Maltese patrons to understand. This element was also noticed in other studies (Janta et al., 2011), where servers themselves realised they needed to improve their accents to communicate better during intercultural encounters.

The questionnaire also showed that the second-most vital server quality was fluency in the patrons’ language ($M = 3.748$, $SD = 1.702$). This shows how important it is that servers within the restaurant industry have good communication skills. The order in which Maltese clients ranked server qualities differed slightly from the results obtained in a similar study by Gairola and Dimri (2022), where the importance of ‘language proficiency’ exceeded ‘server attitude’. Inferential statistics show that postgraduate respondents ($M = 2.984$, $SD = 1.527$) value this quality the least from other respondents. However, no similar studies were found that focused on how clients across different educational levels value server language fluency.

5.5 Hypothesis 4 - Maltese is the Preferred Language during Restaurant Service Encounters amongst Locals

Questionnaire respondents were asked for their preferences when it comes to the language used during service encounters. Unsurprisingly, local patrons prefer to converse in their native language, resulting in an estimated 53% to 63% of the Maltese population. This language preference sheds light on the characteristics of the Maltese population; they have a greater positive valence for their native language. Therefore, they employ high ethnic identification by asserting their identity through their language. This was confirmed by Cornell and Hartmann (2006) in Zolfagharian, Hasan and Iyer (2018), and Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2013). They revealed that native language preferences during service encounters were present among Hispanics with Spanish, and Canadians with French.

Interesting insights from demographic segmentation show that this preference varies across participants of different sexes and educational levels. The chi-square test of independence was conducted with regards to sex $X^2 (2, N = 425) = 16.97$, $p = .000$,

showing that female respondents value service encounters in their native language significantly more than male respondents. The chi-square test of independence was also conducted with regards to educational attainment $X^2 (6, N = 410) = 32.67, p = .000$, showing that questionnaire participants with a lower educational level, such as the ones who completed their secondary education, prefer to converse in their native language the most.

One of the restaurant managers claimed that elements of racial bias are present, where patrons prefer Maltese servers and Maltese-speaking servers simply because of their beliefs. The interviewee also pointed out that ethnic preferences are also present, whether consciously or not, leading patrons to prefer servers with a certain foreign nationality over others. Favourable tipping behaviours towards Maltese-speaking servers were also pointed out by Interviewee 4. According to the study by Lynn et al. (2008), there was a noticeable bias toward servers of a particular race with regard to tipping. This behaviour aligns with Fojt's (1995) study, where tipping intentions were far more affected by emotional contagion than a server's operational delivery. Counterarguments were raised by the focus group participants, who said that service encounters should be assessed by the level of service delivery and professionalism, and not the language used during service encounters.

5.6 Summary

This chapter draws several conclusions on the perceptions of Maltese restaurant clients in relation to 'service quality' being offered by international servers working within the industry. 'Food quality' was found to be the greatest influencer on customer satisfaction, followed by 'service quality', 'menu variety / type of cuisine', 'budget / value for money', and 'ambience'. These preferences coincided with another study stating that Maltese restaurant clients hold similar preferences to foreign populations when ranking restaurant choice factors (Al-Tit, 2015). 'Service quality' was most appreciated by participants with the lowest educational attainment, which also aligns with previous studies analysing demographic preferences on 'service quality' (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017).

Maltese restaurant customers voiced their opinions with respect to communicational and cross-cultural training being provided to foreign servers within Maltese restaurants. Only 11% to 18% of Maltese clients believe that necessary training is being provided. This finding matches numerous empirical studies carried out by scholars on the need for improved communicational and cross-cultural training amongst a multicultural workforce that such an industry faces (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017; Manzur and Jogaratnam, 2006; Alshaibani and Bakir, 2017). The result of such negligence from the industry is evident in the fact that 48% to 58% of Maltese restaurant patrons faced service encounter failures.

The language barrier seems to be the most prominent reason most cross-cultural encounters fail. The 'language barrier' element was underpinned by issues such as lack of vocabulary, heavy accents, and a lack of communicative skills, which are congruent with numerous studies focusing on barriers experienced during service encounters (Baum et al., 2007; Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017; Akhtar et al., 2020). However, Maltese patrons preferred a 'professional behaviour and attitude' to 'language fluency'. This finding sheds important implications on cross-cultural competencies and why foreign servers should be given the necessary cross-cultural training to perform professionally whilst adopting an attitude that conforms with Maltese characteristics.

Maltese remains local patrons' preferred language during service encounters. This particular insight correlates to Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh's (2013) study where Maltese customers can be classified as high ethnic identifiers. The element of racial bias was raised by both focus group participants and industry professionals as an underlying factor as to why Maltese and Maltese-speaking servers were preferred throughout this study. Tipping behaviour studies also confirm these findings, since servers of particular nationalities were favoured in terms of tipping irrespective of the level of service delivery (Fojt, 1995; Lynn et al., 2008).

Chapter Six - Conclusion

This study has addressed an important matter within the Maltese hospitality sector by looking into the perceptions of the local clientele in light of the rapid internationalisation of the Maltese restaurant labour force. The COVID-19 pandemic forced restaurant professionals to adapt their offerings to the locals' needs and preferences to stay afloat, which is why such a study is relevant as Malta emerges from this dark period for the industry. This chapter summarises the findings of the previous chapters and highlights the most prominent insights. Conclusions based on this study's research are reported with various managerial implications and recommendations for future research. The limitations of this research are considered and presented.

6.1 Summation of Research

This study addressed the primary research question: the perceptions of Maltese restaurant clients regarding the internationalisation of the labour force. To understand this phenomenon, secondary data alongside a mixed method approach were used, where primary qualitative data was extracted from a focus group discussion and interviews with industry professionals, while quantitative data was extracted from restaurant customers via a questionnaire.

The first factor contributing to the internalisation that is affecting numerous industries in Malta is the exponential economic growth; over 11,016 jobs are created annually (Jobsplus, 2021). This growth transformed the labour market. A record low of local unemployment at just 3% was recorded in 2022, whilst numerous working visas were issued to satisfy labour shortages (NSO, 2022c). According to industry professionals, several catering establishments are opening in Malta, dispersing the limited number of local servers across different establishments. The economic growth also forced numerous people working within the hospitality industry to chase new and exciting opportunities within other sectors.

Apart from the economic and industry growth, several factors attributed to the job's nature are contributing to the labour shortage and high rates of staff turnover

within the industry. During the interviewing process, restaurant managers seem to agree that remuneration is the main cause of this phenomenon, having numerous servers earning less than the average basic salary in Malta. The average basic salary in the third quarter of 2021 was €1635.00 (NSO, 2021). This factor was also confirmed by the focus group participants and several scholars analysing push factors surrounding the hospitality industry (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000; Shariff and Abidin, 2017). Furthermore, jobseekers despise jobs in hospitality as these jobs are often associated with low-skilled individuals (Shariff and Abidin, 2017). The job may be tedious, involve repetitive tasks, and require hard physical activities (Holicza and Chircop, 2018). Other push factors of the job may be related to the long and unsociable hours, uncomfortable shifts (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000), and the inability to enjoy the weekend and public holidays, as mentioned by the focus group participants.

Migration seems to be the only solution to satisfy the industry's labour shortages, with the latest Jobsplus reports showing that 48.9% of the accommodation and food service industry employees are foreigners, contributing to over 9,500 employees as of September 2021. In fact, this sector is the second largest employer of foreign nationals, just below the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector (Jobsplus, 2021). Several scholars outlined pull factors towards migration, these being improved remuneration conditions, better opportunities, improved health services and standard of living, and an opportunity to improve language proficiency (Choi, Woods and Murrmann, 2000; Janta *et al.*, 2011; Holicza and Chircop, 2018). The focus group participants also described the industry as a gateway for foreigners to enter the Maltese labour market.

Having outlined the factors contributing to the internationalisation of the workforce, and how the hospitality industry in Malta addresses its labour shortages, this study explicated the perceptions of locals towards the growing cultural diversity within the industry. To do so, quantitative insights were obtained from local restaurant patrons. To represent a true proportion of the population, 425 respondents answered the designed questionnaire, forming numerous demographic groups which were later analysed and compared using MS Power BI and PH stat in MS Excel.

The generation of hypotheses led to conclusions and estimations with respect to the perceptions of the local restaurant clientele. Firstly, 'service quality' was found

to be the second most crucial factor amongst locals when choosing a restaurant. 'Food quality' retains its prominence as the customer's first consideration when choosing a restaurant or rating an experience (Al-Tit, 2015). Secondly, the servers' qualities most appreciated by locals are proficient behaviour and attitude, followed by the fluency in the language used during the service encounter, and the knowledge they possess of the menu. An alarming number of intercultural service encounter failures were recorded; an estimated 48% to 58% of the population reported this. The language barrier seems to be the most prominent factor contributing to such high rates of service encounter failures. The general perception of server training is not positive, as only 11% to 18% of the population believe that the necessary cross-cultural and communicative training is being provided within the industry. Lastly, the study revealed that an estimated 53% to 63% of the Maltese population prefer to visit restaurants where most servers can speak Maltese.

6.2 Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, this study outlines areas that Maltese restaurants can address to better manage the satisfaction of Maltese customers. As clearly noticed throughout this research, the perception and expectation of 'service quality' differ across different cultures and nations. Hence, restaurant and human resources managers should recognise and understand the differences present within the Maltese restaurant industry (Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007). Although many foreign servers may be proficient in their line of work, it should not be assumed that good service delivery in a foreign country would meet the expectations of Maltese customers. To achieve higher satisfaction rates, hospitality professionals should exhibit high professional expertise, an understanding of cultural and communicative diversity, and the intercultural and communicative competencies needed to establish excellent communication with local customers (Kostić Bobanović and Novak, 2017). Multicultural training programs should be specifically orientated around understanding Maltese eating preferences, values, and norms, and constructed for maximal local impact in response to local customer needs.

An essential takeaway from this study was the alarming rate of service encounter failures within the Maltese restaurant industry. Restaurant managers should encourage and implement effective guest satisfaction feedback systems to highlight problematic areas within the restaurant experience and be able to address them internally. Ultimately, this lack of information results in a loss of customers and business.

As indicated earlier, the current hospitality labour market is composed of a large number of foreign nationals. Therefore, enforcing the use of the Maltese language to embrace customer language preferences is ultimately difficult; however, servers should be trained with the adequate skillset to be able to include customers despite their lack of language capabilities. This study shows that Maltese-speaking servers might offer a competitive advantage amongst local patrons. In fact, such servers could aid the business by serving locals unable to communicate in English, which is often the case among the elderly. It is relevant to note that Malta has an ageing population (Statista, 2021).

Finally, remuneration packages within the industry should be revised, as this factor pushes away the remaining locals who are passionate about the food and beverage industry. Cover charge implementation or other incentives should be adopted to retain local servers within the Maltese restaurant industry.

6.3 Study Limitations

The results and estimations of this study are limited in scope, since perceptions associated with other service settings, cultures, and nationalities may vary. Servers were mostly assessed on their cross-cultural and communicative competencies rather than qualities directly related to the job. No evidence or prior studies suggest how the locals' attitudes and perceptions towards internationalisation have evolved or transformed over time. This evidence would have added a vital dimension to the academic understanding of this phenomenon, while informing longer-term strategic planning (Sharpley, 2014).

A more qualitatively based study would have provided more in-depth insights into the reasons behind local perceptions. However, this was not possible due to time constraints and the relatively considerable number of participants who took part in this study. Another limitation of this study is that particular experiences and perceptions could not be linked to a particular style or restaurant class, as this would have provided insightful data on the qualities and competencies of servers working in different restaurant categories.

An element of bias could have slightly compromised certain findings, as restaurant Interviewees were Maltese. Furthermore, the questionnaire needed local customers' perceptions. Preferences toward particular qualities or nationalities may intertwine with other aspects of their social lives that surpass these perceptions (Sharpley, 2014). The use of random sampling for questionnaire participation led to certain demographic groups being inadmissible when performing statistical analysis, due to the low number of participants making up a particular demographic. These groups included daily restaurant goers and participants whose highest educational attainment was completing primary education.

Another limitation of this study is the generalisations that were made, such as the nationalities of the servers in question. For this study, they were classified as one body. Lastly, the researcher noticed that when interviewees talked about their experiences, the content tended to be neutral or slightly negative, as the labour shortage phenomenon is currently a sore and sensitive topic.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This study was restricted to the perceptions of a single nationality in a single country. Future research should reproduce these findings across other countries and ethnicities with different social behaviours. Furthermore, the study can be expanded with regard to other service settings. Research on intercultural service encounters has primarily focused on the customer, which is why studies from a service-provider lens would be imperative (Wang and Mattila, 2010).

This study has also given rise to numerous queries when comparing data across different demographic groups. These findings showed that the lower the educational attainment, the higher the importance granted to ‘service quality’ and the server’s ability to communicate fluently in a language that the customer is comfortable with. Another fascinating insight that should be further analysed is the discrepancy that emerged amongst participants of different gender concerning their preferences towards servers speaking their native language. Insightful findings would emerge if a similar study targeted the perceptions of tourists whilst dining in Maltese restaurants, and assessed the level of ‘service quality’ and cross-cultural competencies and communicative skills possessed amongst servers of different nationalities.

6.5 Summary

The findings of this study within this particular area of the Maltese hospitality industry should encourage more researchers to choose the restaurant industry as a focal setting for their studies, and more restaurants to cooperate in these types of investigations. In fact, findings provide valuable implications for restaurant managers and service firms, such as the adoption of a culture-oriented approach which could become a source of competitive advantage amongst locals. In return, locals would reward a business with strong loyalty once the service offering has been tailored to their expectations. Lastly, it is important to note that intercultural sensitivity is a skill that can be taught as well as measured; hence, this is encouraging for restaurant and human resource managers implementing cross-cultural training. Proper and serious consideration should be afforded towards training their customer-contact employees and tracking their improved service delivery competencies.

References

- Akhtar, N., Siddiqi, U.I., Ahmad, W., Usman, M., Chen X. and Islam, T. (2020) 'Effects of service encounter barriers on situational abnormality and consumers' behavioral intentions at food and beverage restaurants', *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(7), pp. 1513–1534. DOI: 10.1108/APJML-03-2020-0192.
- Al-Tit, A. A. (2015) 'The effect of service and food quality on customer satisfaction and hence customer retention', *Asian Social Science*, 11(1), pp. 129–139. DOI: 10.5539/ass.v11n23p129.
- Alshaibani, E. and Bakir, A. (2017) 'A reading in cross-cultural service encounter: Exploring the relationship between cultural intelligence, employee performance and service quality', *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 17(3), pp. 249–263. DOI: 10.1177/1467358416651474.
- Arnould, E. J. and Price, L. L. (1993) 'River magic: extraordinary experience and the extended service encounter', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20(1), p. 24-45. DOI: 10.1086/209331.
- Baum, T., Dutton, E., Karimi, S. and Kokkranikal, J. (2007) 'Cultural diversity in hospitality work', *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 14(3), pp. 229–239. DOI: 10.1108/13527600710775775.
- Bennet, M. J. (1986) 'A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, pp. 179–196. DOI: 10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2.
- Bhawuk, D. and Brislin, R. (1992) 'Measurement of intercultural sensitivity using the concepts of individualism and collectivism', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 16, pp. 413–436. DOI: 10.1016/0147-1767(92)90031-O.
- Bitner, M. J., Booms, B. H. and Tetreault, M. S. (1990) 'The service encounter: Diagnosing favorable and unfavorable incidents', *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), p. 71-84. DOI: 10.2307/1252174.

- Botschen, G. and Bstieler, L. (1996) 'Sequence-oriented problem identification within service encounters', *Journal of Euromarketing*, 5(2), pp. 19–52. DOI: 10.1300/j037v05n02_03.
- Cao, Z., Robb, D. and Lu, Q. (2008) 'Service failure, recovery and improvement: The case of a Chinese restaurant', *International Journal of Services and Operations Management*, 4(2), pp. 218–242. DOI: 10.1504/IJSOM.2008.016612.
- Cave, J., Prayag, G. and Ryan, C. (2012) 'Visitor interactions with hotel employees: The role of nationality', *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 6(2), pp. 173–185. DOI: 10.1108/17506181211233090.
- Choi, J. G., Woods, R. H. and Murrmann, S. K. (2000) 'International labor markets and the migration of labor forces as an alternative solution for labor shortages in the hospitality industry', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 12(1), pp. 61–67. DOI: 10.1108/09596110010305154.
- Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, D. J. (2018) *Research Design*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cushner, K. and Brislin, R. w (1996) *Intercultural interactions: A practical guide*. 2nd edn. Edited by A. Viriding. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Donthu, N. and Yoo, B. (1998) 'Cultural influences on service quality expectations', *Journal of Service Research*, 1(2), pp. 178–186. DOI: 10.1177/109467059800100207.
- Furrer, O., Liu, B. S.-C. and Sudharshan, D. (2000) 'The relationship between culture and service quality perceptions', *Journal of Service research*, 2(4), pp. 355–371. DOI: 10.1177/109467050024004.
- Gairola, V. and Dimri, R. P. (2022) 'A need analysis on English language skill sets required in hospitality sector', *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(5), pp. 731–740.
- Guilherme, M. and Dietz, G. (2015) 'Difference in diversity: multiple perspectives on multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural conceptual complexities', *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10(1), pp. 1–21. DOI: 10.1080/17447143.2015.1015539.

Harrison, J. K., Chadwick, M. and Scales, M. (1996) 'The relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and the personality variables of self-efficacy and self-monitoring', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 20(2), pp. 167–188. DOI: 10.1016/0147-1767(95)00039-9.

Hau-siu Chow, I., Lau, V. P., Wing-chun Lo, T., Sha, Z. and Yun, H. (2007) 'Service quality in restaurant operations in China: Decision and experiential-oriented perspectives', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 26(3), pp. 698–710. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2006.07.001.

Hekman, D. R., Johnson, S. K., Foo, M. and Yang, W. (2017) 'Does diversity-valuing behavior result in diminished performance ratings for non-white and female leaders?', *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(2), pp. 771–797. DOI: 10.5465/amj.2014.0538.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J. and Minkov, M. (1980) *Cultures and organizations. Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival*. 3rd edn. New York: McGraw Hill.

Holicza, P. and Chircop, G. (2018) 'The continued influx of foreigners in Malta: labour economic impacts and perceptions among the local population', *Bulletin of Science and Practice*, pp. 197–205.

Holicza, P. and Stone, A. M. (2016) 'Beyond the headlines: Economic realities of migration and the labour market in Malta', *Journal of International Studies*, 9(3), pp. 88–98. DOI: 10.14254/2071-8330.2016/9-3/7.

Holmqvist, J. and Van Vaerenbergh, Y. (2013) 'Perceived importance of native language use in service encounters', *Service Industries Journal*, 33(15–16), pp. 1659–1671. DOI: 10.1080/02642069.2011.638919.

IBISWorld (2022) *Restaurants & Takeaway Food Operators in Malta - Industry Statistics 2008–2026*. Available at: <https://www.ibisworld.com/malta/industry-statistics/restaurants-takeaway-food-operators/3420/> (Accessed: 2 April 2022).

Iversen, R. (2018) 'Number of foreign workers could increase by 30,000 in next four years', *Independent Malta*, 12 February. Available at: <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-02-12/local-news/Number-of-foreign-workers-could-increase-by-30-000-in-next-four-years-6736184713>

(Accessed: 12 November 2020).

Janta, H., Ladkin, A., Brown, L. and Lugosi, P. (2011) 'Employment experiences of Polish migrant workers in the UK hospitality sector', *Tourism Management*, (32), pp. 1006–1019. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2010.08.013.

Jobsplus (2021) *Annual Report*. Available at:

<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/publications/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=53933> (Accessed: 12 February 2022).

Jobsplus (2022) *Share of foreign employment by continent / origin*. Available at:

<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/labour-market-information/foreigners-data?msclkid=17858f74bca211ecbd1a9523b165c04d>

(Accessed: 15 April 2022).

Kanyan, A., Ngana, L. and Voon, B. H. (2016) 'Improving the service operations of fast-food restaurants', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 224, pp. 190–198. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.439.

Keaveney, S. M. (1995) 'Customer switching behavior in service industries: An exploratory study', *Journal of Marketing*, 59(2), pp. 71–82. DOI: 10.2307/1252074.

Kim, K. and Baker, M. A. (2019) 'How the employee looks and looks at you: Building customer–employee rapport', *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 43(1), pp. 20–40. DOI: 10.1177/1096348017731130.

Kim, S., Chung, J. E. and Suh, Y. G. (2016) 'Multiple reference effects on restaurant evaluations: a cross-cultural study', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(7), pp. 1441–1466. DOI: 10.1108/IJCHM-05-2014-0220.

Kim, Y. (2011) 'The pilot study in qualitative inquiry: Identifying issues and learning lessons for culturally competent research', *Qualitative Social Work*, 10(2), pp. 190–206. DOI: 10.1177/1473325010362001.

Koku, P. S. and Savas, S. (2016) 'Restaurant tipping and customers' susceptibility to emotional contagion', *Journal of Services Marketing*, 9(3), pp. 1–72. DOI: 10.1108/08876045199500001.

Kong, M. and Jogaratnam, G. (2007) 'The influence of culture on perceptions of

service employee behavior', *Managing Service Quality*, 17(3), pp. 275–297. DOI: 10.1108/09604520710744308.

Kostić Bobanović, M. and Novak, M. (2017) 'Tourism and hospitality professionals ' cross-cultural communication competence : Tourists ' and tourism professionals ' perspectives', *Conference Proceedings of the 8th International Scientific Conference "Future World by 2050"*, pp. 275–304.

Lune, H. and Berg, B. L. (2017) *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. 9th edn. Edited by A. Dodge. Essex: Pearson.

Lynn, M., Sturman, M., Ganley, C., Adams, E., Douglas, M. and McNeil, J. (2008) 'Consumer racial discrimination in tipping: A replication and extension', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 4(38), pp. 1045–1060. DOI: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2008.00338.x.

Maltese culture (2022) *Cultural Atlas*. Include. Available at: <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/maltese-culture/maltese-culture-core-concepts> (Accessed: 2 February 2022).

Manzur, L. and Jogaratnam, G. (2006) 'Impression management and the hospitality service encounter: Cross-cultural differences', *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 20(3–4), pp. 21–32. DOI: 10.1300/J073v20n03_02.

Martin, J. N., Hammer, M. R. and Bradford, L. (1994) 'The influence of cultural and situational contexts on hispanic and non-hispanic communication competence behaviors', *Communication Quarterly*, 42(2), pp. 160–179. DOI: 10.1080/01463379409369924.

Meyers, J. (2001) 'Cross- cultural adaptability inventory', *Encyclopedia of Special Education*, pp. 582–583. DOI: 10.1002/9780470373699.speced0561.

Michalkó, G., Irimiás, A. and Timothy, D. J. (2015) 'Disappointment in tourism: Perspectives on tourism destination management', *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 16, pp. 85–91. DOI: 10.1016/j.tmp.2015.07.007.

MTA (2021) *Malta tourism strategy 2021-2030*, European University Institute. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679&from=PT%0Ahttp://eur->

lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52012PC0011:pt:NOT
(Accessed: 19 April 2021).

NSO (2020) *World Population Day: 11 July 2021*. Available at:
https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/07/News2020_114.pdf
(Accessed: 2 February 2022).

NSO (2021) *Labour Force Survey: Q3/2021*. Available at:
https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2021/12/News2021_232.pdf
(Accessed: 17 March 2022).

NSO (2022a) *Inbound Tourism : June 2022*. Available at:
https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2022/08/News2022_138.pdf
(Accessed: 14 July 2022).

NSO (2022b) *Labour Force Survey : Q1/2022*. Available at:
https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2022/06/News2022_104.pdf
(Accessed: 6 May 2022).

NSO (2022c) *Unemployment Rate: June 2022*. Available at:
https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2022/07/News2022_131.pdf
(Accessed: 17 July 2022).

Parasuraman, A., Ziethaml, V. A. and L.Berry, L. (1985) 'A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research', *Journal of Marketing*, 49(4), pp. 41–50. DOI: 10.2307/1251430.

Podoshen, J. S. (2013) 'Dark tourism motivations: Simulation, emotional contagion and topographic comparison', *Tourism Management*, 35, pp. 263–271. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2012.08.002.

Reisinger, Y. and Turner, L. (1998) 'Cross-cultural differences in tourism: A strategy for tourism marketers', *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 7(4), pp. 79–106. DOI: 10.1300/J073v07n04_05.

Sadi, M. A. and Henderson, J. C. (2005) 'Local versus foreign workers in the hospitality and tourism industry: A Saudi Arabian perspective', *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 46(2), pp. 247–257. DOI: 10.1177/0010880404273889.

- Shariff, N. M. and Abidin, A. Z. (2017) 'Developing international migrant labors pattern: The case of tourism and hospitality industry', *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 7(1), pp. 423–427.
- Sharma, P., Tam, J. L. M., Kim, N., Zhan, W. and Su, Y. (2018) 'Intercultural service encounters: Challenges and opportunities for international services marketers', *Advances in global marketing*, pp. 449–469. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-61385-7_18.
- Sharpley, R. (2014) 'Host perceptions of tourism: A review of the research', *Tourism Management*, 42, pp. 37–49. DOI: 10.1016/j.tourman.2013.10.007.
- Shostack, G. L. (1987) 'Service positioning through structural change', *Journal of Marketing*, 51(1), p. 34. DOI: 10.2307/1251142.
- Sizoo, S., Plank, R., Iskat, W. and Serrie, H. (2005) 'The effect of intercultural sensitivity on employee performance in cross-cultural service encounters', *Journal of Services Marketing*, 19(4), pp. 245–255. DOI: 10.1108/08876040510605271.
- Sizoo, S. L. (2002) *The effect of intercultural sensitivity on employee performance in cross-cultural service encounters*, Bell and Howell Information and Learning Company.
- Stafford, M. R. and Wells, B. P. (1996) 'The effect of demographic variables on perceived claims service quality', *Journal of Insurance Issues*, 19(2), pp. 163–182.
- Statista (2021) *Malta - age structure 2010-2020*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/731254/age-structure-in-malta/> (Accessed: 22 December 2022).
- Teijlingen, V., Vanora, E. and Vanora, H. (2002) 'The importance of pilot studies', *Nursing Standard*, 16, pp. 33–36. DOI: 10.7748/ns.16.40.33.s1.
- Truong, D., Xiaoming Liu, R. and Yu, J. (Jasper) (2020) 'Mixed methods research in tourism and hospitality journals', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(4), pp. 1563–1579. DOI: 10.1108/IJCHM-03-2019-0286.
- UNESCO (2021) *Education and literacy*. Available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/MT> (Accessed: 5 April 2022).

Vassou, C., Zopiatis, A. and Theocharous, A. L. (2017) 'Intercultural workplace relationships in the hospitality industry: Beyond the tip of the iceberg', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 61, pp. 14–25. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.11.001.

Victor, D. A. (1992) *International Business Communication*. 7th edn. New York: Harper Collins.

Wang, C. ya and Mattila, A. S. (2010) 'A grounded theory model of service providers' stress, emotion, and coping during intercultural service encounters', *Managing Service Quality*, 20(4), pp. 328–342. DOI: 10.1108/09604521011057478.

Wilson, A., Zithaml, V. A. Bitner, M. J. and Gremler, D. D. (2021) *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm*. 2nd edn. United Kingdom: McGraw Hill.

Winsted, K. F. (1999) 'Evaluating service encounters: A cross-cultural and cross-industry exploration', *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 7(2), pp. 106–123. DOI: 10.1080/10696679.1999.11501833.

Woods, R. H. (2012) *Managing hospitality human resources*. 5th edn. London: Pearson.

Worldometer (2022) *Malta population*. Available at: <http://www.indexmundi.com/malta/population.html> (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

Zolfagharian, M., Hasan, F. and Iyer, P. (2018) 'Customer response to service encounter linguistics', *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(5), pp. 530–546. DOI: 10.1108/JSM-06-2017-0209.

Appendices

Appendix A – Recruitment Letter and Questionnaire (Google Forms)

The internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry

Disclaimer: Only adults can participate in this survey

Dear Participant,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. If you consent to participate, I will need five minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. I will ensure your anonymity in the data analysis and pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality. Records will be held in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act (Cap 586).

There is no compensation for participating, nor is there any known risk and you can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me on matthew.schembri001@its.edu.mt

** Required

1. What is your nationality? *

☐ Maltese

☐ Other

2. What is your gender? *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. What languages are you fluent in? *

- ☐ Maltese
- ☐ English
- ☐ Italian
- ☐ French
- ☐ Other

4. What is your age group? *

- ☐ 18 - 25
- ☐ 26 - 34
- ☐ 35 - 49
- ☐ 50 - 64
- ☐ 65+

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed? *

- ☐ Primary education
- ☐ Secondary education
- ☐ Post-secondary education
- ☐ Bachelor's degree or Diploma
- ☐ Postgraduate degree

6. How often do you visit a restaurant? *

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Seasonal
- ☐ Yearly
- ☐ Never

7. Rank (from 1 to 5) the following factors in order of importance, when choosing a restaurant *

1 being the most important and 5 the least important

Service Quality
Menu Variety / Type of Cuisine
Food Quality
Ambience
Budget / Value for Money

8. Rank (from 1 to 6) the following qualities you value the most in a server when dining at a restaurant *

1 being the quality you value the most and 6 you value the least

Server maintains a professional behaviour and attitude
Server has a smart appearance and attire
Server can communicate in a language in which you are fluent
Server has a profound knowledge of the menu
Server is observant and attentive
Server is agile and offers quick service

9. Have you ever experienced any difficulties when being served by a foreign server? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I do not recall

10. If you have experienced any difficulties with foreign servers, what were the difficulties you experienced?

11. Which factor do you think causes the most difficulties when locals are served by a foreign server?

Choose one or suggest another factor

- ☐ Language barrier
- ☐ Lack of hospitality-related training
- ☐ Lack of experience
- ☐ Lack of cultural awareness
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other

12. Do you think that foreign servers working in Maltese restaurants are given the necessary training to deliver service at par of local servers?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

13. Do you prefer to go to restaurants where most servers can speak your native language?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Appendix B - In depth Interview (I.D.I) Question Form

Interviewee _____

Gender _____

Languages fluent in _____

Age group _____

Level of educational attainment _____

How long have you been in the restaurant industry?

Have you noticed any differences in the restaurant labour market over the years?

Have you ever had any comments, requests, or preferences from patrons regarding nationalities of servers?

The majority of respondents in the questionnaire have experienced difficulties when being served by a foreign national. From your experience, what are the barriers that most local people face when served by a foreign server?

Do you think that foreign servers are lacking cross cultural training when it comes to serving local guests?

Do you think that having most of your servers local is an advantage? Why?

What does the future hold in terms of the restaurant labour market?

Appendix C - Focus Group Discussion Pointers

Introductory Statements

“I would like to thank each and every one of you in finding the time to attend for this focus group. As I might have already mentioned, this focus group is a data collection instrument which will add value to my research”.

“Today, we will be discussing restaurants, more specifically servers/waiters that work in Maltese restaurant industry”.

Engagement Questions

When was the last time that you have visited a restaurant, and do you consider yourselves regular restaurant goers or not?

What do you think changed the most in restaurant industry during these past years?

Exploratory Questions

What are your thoughts, feelings and associations that come to mind when you think about waiters?

What are your thoughts on foreign nationals working as waiters in the Maltese restaurant industry?

Why do you think that there is an increase in foreign nationals working in the restaurant industry?

Follow up questions.

Based on the discussion at hand, were there any instances where there was a misunderstanding between yourselves and the waiters?

What were the probable causes for such misunderstandings?

Direct questions

Do you think that Maltese restaurant clients prefer being served by Maltese speaking waiters?

Do you think that if the majority of the waiting staff are Maltese speaking; this factor alone will have an advantage over other restaurants which do not have Maltese speaking servers?

Personally, if you had the option to choose your server at the restaurant, would you pick a Maltese speaking server or a non-Maltese speaking server?

Exit questions.

Do you think that there are any other points relevant to this subject?

In your opinion, how will the restaurant industry evolve in the near future when it comes to waiting staff?

Appendix D – In depth Interviews (I.D.I) Abstracts

Interviewee	<u>no.1</u>
Gender	<u>Male</u>
Languages fluent in	<u>Maltese</u>
Age group	<u>35 - 49</u>
Level of educational attainment	<u>Secondary education</u>

How long have you been in the restaurant industry?

14 years

Have you noticed any differences in the restaurant labour market over the years?

The situation in general has worsened; it has become difficult to work in this industry. There are very few Maltese nationals still working in the restaurant industry. The restaurant labour market nowadays is mostly composed of third country nationals. Server wages remain low compared to other industries.

Have you ever had any comments, requests, or preferences from patrons regarding nationalities of servers?

Yes, usually patrons ask for a particular server when they know the individual on a personal level or else through regular visits to the restaurant.

The majority of respondents in the questionnaire have experienced difficulties when being served by a foreign national. From your experience, what are the barriers that most local people face when served by a foreign server?

I think that the language barrier is the most prominent, most particularly the lack of vocabulary and culinary terminology. Foreign servers acquiring a job in Malta may, in some cases do not possess the necessary skills or knowledge of the job. Most foreign people working in Malta as servers is due to necessity and not for the love of the job. It is usually not their preferred line of work, but since there is a shortage within the industry, it is considered as an entry point to Malta's labour market

Do you think that foreign servers are lacking cross cultural training when it comes to serving local guests?

Yes, they are not yet accustomed to the Maltese characteristics. Their culture and religion varies greatly than that of the Maltese, hence certain attitudes which are considered to be normal, might seem rude or inappropriate to Maltese patrons.

Do you think that having most of your servers local is an advantage? Why?

Yes, Maltese patrons do appreciate when most servers are local as they feel more comfortable and consider themselves 'home'.

What does the future hold in terms of the restaurant labour market?

The labour market within this industry will worsen, and as long as there are no remuneration upgrades, all Maltese people still working within the industry will leave in the near future. There are far more industries which are more competitive when targeting Maltese jobseekers, both in terms of salary packages and job intensity.

Interviewee	<u>no.2</u>
Gender	<u>Male</u>
Languages fluent in	<u>Maltese, English</u>
Age group	<u>26 - 34</u>
Level of educational attainment	<u>Bachelor's degree or Diploma</u>

How long have you been in the restaurant industry?

16 years

Have you noticed any differences in the restaurant labour market over the years?

Yes, I have noticed several differences. Primarily because competition increased from seven years ago to today, having numerous restaurants opening, therefore people working in the industry got scattered amongst these restaurants thus making it difficult to find adequate staff. Secondary, competition with salary offers increased; thus, making it quite challenging to keep up with the labour market demands.

Have you ever had any comments, requests, or preferences from patrons regarding nationalities of servers?

Yes, quite a lot, primarily because of the language barrier and the accent which may pose difficulties for patrons to understand, borders also to some clients being racist as well.

Most respondents in the questionnaire have experienced difficulties when being served by a foreign national. From your experience, what are the barriers that most local people face when served by a foreign server?

The language barrier: foreign accents are sometimes misunderstood by the locals.

Do you think that foreign servers are lacking cross cultural training when it comes to serving local guests?

Yes, ideally this is provided by the government upon their arrival to Malta. It is quite a problem when these individuals have never been to Malta and are not accustomed to the culture.

Do you think that having most of your servers local is an advantage? Why?

Big advantage because locals understand the dynamics of local cuisines and cultures. Local servers can understand local patrons better as their expectations are aligned with their own; such as when servers themselves go to a restaurant. Finally, having congruent native language is quite a big advantage.

What does the future hold in terms of the restaurant labour market?

I think in 5 years, half the restaurants that exist today will not exist anymore.

Interviewee	<u>no.3</u>
Gender	<u>Male</u>
Languages fluent in	<u>Maltese, English</u>
Age group	<u>18-24</u>
Level of educational attainment	<u>Bachelor's degree or Diploma</u>

How long have you been in the restaurant industry?

I have been in the industry for seven years

Have you noticed any differences in the restaurant labour market over the years?

Yes, in the past, I used to work with a higher percentage of local people, mostly young Maltese students, however, especially in the past 3 years, most servers are foreigners. A prominent trend of having less Maltese servers seems to be today's reality.

Have you ever had any comments, requests, or preferences from patrons regarding nationalities of servers?

Yes, most local patrons appreciate Maltese speaking servers and point out that they are glad to be conversing in Maltese; however Maltese patrons tend to also have ethnic preferences. I noticed that Maltese tend to appreciate Filipinos to Indians as an example.

The majority of respondents in the questionnaire have experienced difficulties when being served by a foreign national. From your experience, what are the barriers that most local people face when served by a foreign server?

Language barrier, most foreign servers lack spoken English and communicative skills.

Do you think that foreign servers are lacking cross cultural training when it comes to serving local guests?

Some have good manners, and adapt to culture quite fast, while some find it hard to adapt to the Maltese culture and environment. It depends on the individual.

Do you think that having most of your servers local is an advantage? Why?

Yes, most local clients prefer Maltese speaking servers since they can elaborate further their requirements and wishes such as dietary requirements, method of cooking. Having Maltese servers help building strong relationships through longer conversations.

What does the future hold in terms of the restaurant labour market?

Local servers are diminishing, and I believe that in 10 years' time, there will be just a handful of Maltese servers within the industry. The industry is also no longer appealing to the younger Maltese generation as it was years ago.

Interviewee	<u>no.4</u>
Gender	<u>Female</u>
Languages fluent in	<u>Maltese, English, Italian</u>
Age group	<u>35 – 49</u>
Level of educational attainment	<u>Post-Secondary education</u>

How long have you been in the restaurant industry?

13 years

Have you noticed any differences in the restaurant labour market over the years?

Yes, at the start of my career within the restaurant industry, nearly all servers were Maltese as opposed to nowadays, where the majority are all foreign servers. In terms of recruitment, no Maltese applicants are applying for server vacancies.

Have you ever had any comments, requests, or preferences from patrons regarding nationalities of servers?

Yes, local patrons appreciate Maltese servers, especially the elder generation and those not proficient in English.

The majority of respondents in the questionnaire have experienced difficulties when being served by a foreign national. From your experience, what are the barriers that most local people face when served by a foreign server?

The most prominent barriers are the language, communication skills, and the spoken accent.

Do you think that foreign servers are lacking cross cultural training when it comes to serving local guests?

Yes, unfortunately some body ques from foreign servers may seem arrogant or disrespectful in the eyes of Maltese patrons.

Do you think that having most of your servers local is an advantage? Why?

Yes, Maltese guests appreciate Maltese servers much more than foreign servers and they feel much more at ease when conversing. I even noticed favourable tipping behaviours towards local servers.

What does the future hold in terms of the restaurant labour market?

I believe that the restaurant industry is at its peak, where restaurant will now face serious challenges due to an increase in raw material cost and overheads.

Restaurant industries are and will continue to face enormous problems in attracting labour due to the unattractive remuneration packages being offered.

Appendix E – Signed Consent Forms (I.D.I)



Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Jeffrey Grech
Participant name

[Signature]
Participant signature

28/06/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

[Signature]
Researcher signature


28/06/2022
Date

INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

Aviation Park, Aviation Avenue
Hal Luqa LQA 9023, Malta

T: +356 2379 3100 | E: info@its.edu.mt

www.its.edu.mt

 [instituteoftourismstudies](https://www.facebook.com/instituteoftourismstudies)

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

ANDREA MICALEA
Participant name

[Signature]
Participant signature

28/06/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

[Signature]
Researcher signature

28/06/2022
Date

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Luca Zammit
Participant name

[Signature]
Participant signature

04/06/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

[Signature]
Researcher signature

04/06/2022
Date

INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

Aviation Park, Aviation Avenue
Hal Luqa LQA 9023, Malta

T: +356 2379 3100 | E: info@its.edu.mt

www.its.edu.mt

 instituteoftourismstudies

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you some questions. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Ruth Gatt
Participant name


Participant signature

05/06/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name


Researcher signature

05/06/2022
Date

INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

Aviation Park, Aviation Avenue
Hal Luqa LQA 9023, Malta

T: +356 2379 3100 | E: info@its.edu.mt

www.its.edu.mt

 instituteoftourismstudies

Appendix F – Signed Consent Forms (Focus Group)



Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the focus group report, and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Krista Zammit
Participant name

[Signature]
Participant signature

17/05/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

[Signature]
Researcher signature

17/05/2022
Date

INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

Aviation Park, Aviation Avenue
Hal Luqa LQA 9023, Malta

T: +356 2379 3100 | E: info@its.edu.mt

www.its.edu.mt

 instituteoftourismstudies

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the focus group report, and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

ANNA LUISE FARRUGIA SCHEMBRI
Participant name

[Signature]
Participant signature

17/5/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

[Signature]
Researcher signature

17/05/2022
Date

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the focus group report, and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Tania Schembri
Participant name

P. Schembri
Participant signature

17/05/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher signature

17/05/2022
Date

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)
MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the focus group report, and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Ray Schembri
Participant name

[Signature]
Participant signature

17/05/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

[Signature]
Researcher signature

17/05/2022
Date

Consent Form for Post-Graduate Research Study

Title of Research - Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.

Researcher - Matthew Luke Schembri (0036492M)

MBA - Emirates MBA in International Hospitality Management

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Matthew Luke Schembri, a student at the Institute of Tourism Studies am currently in the final year of my MBA in International Hospitality Management. I am carrying out research on the perceptions of Maltese clientele towards the internationalization of the workforce in the Maltese restaurant industry. I would like to explore your views on this matter by asking you to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher.

There are no known risks related with this research project other than possible discomfort with the following:

- You will be asked to be honest when answering questions.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to those individuals conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your identity will not be revealed in any publications that result from this study.

You can terminate your participation at any time without prejudice. You also do not have to answer individual questions you don't want to answer. Your name will not be attached to the focus group report, and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential.

Participant's declaration

I have read this consent form and am giving the opportunity to the researcher to ask questions. I hereby grant permission to use the information I provide as data in the above mentioned research project, knowing that it will be kept confidential and without use of my name.

Daniel Farugia Schembri
Participant name

DS
Participant signature

11/05/2022
Date

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher name

Matthew Luke Schembri
Researcher signature

17/05/2022
Date

INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

Aviation Park, Aviation Avenue
Hal Luqa LQA 9023, Malta

T: +356 2379 3100 | E: info@its.edu.mt

www.its.edu.mt

 [instituteoftourismstudies](https://www.facebook.com/instituteoftourismstudies)

Appendix G – Ethics Application Form



Undergraduate and Post-Graduate
Research Ethics Application Form

**For research proposals submitted in
Academic Year 2020-2021**

Version November 2020

Please open this form in Adobe Acrobat Reader

Information for applicants

Students submitting a proposal to the Academic Research and Publications Board for approval need to submit a proposal for ethical clearance. The following checklist must be submitted to the ARPB with the necessary documentation on arpb@its.edu.mt within eight (8) weeks of the approval of the research proposal. The ARPB will seek to process the application within four (4) weeks excluding the recesses and national/ public holidays as per ITS Academic Calendar.

Please make sure to tick **ALL** the items. Incomplete forms will not be accepted.

		YES	NOT NEEDED
1a.	Recruitment letter/ information sheet for subjects, in English	✓	
1b.	Recruitment letter/ information sheet for subjects, in Maltese	✓	
2a.	Consent form, in English, signed by supervisor, and including your contact details	✓	
2b.	Consent form, in Maltese, signed by supervisor and including your contact details	✓	
3a.	In the case of children or other vulnerable groups, consent forms for parents/ guardians, in English		✓
3b.	In the case of children or other vulnerable groups, consent forms for parents/ guardians, in Maltese		✓
4a.	Tests, questionnaires, interview or focus group questions, etc in English	✓	
4b.	Tests, questionnaires, interview or focus group questions, etc in Maltese	✓	
5a.	Other institutional approval for access to subjects: Health Division, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Department of Public Health, Curia...		✓
5d.	Other institutional approval for access of data: Registrar, Data Protection Officer Health Division/ Hospital, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Department of Public Health...		✓
5c.	Approval from Person Directly responsible for subjects: Medical Consultants, Nursing Officers, Head of School		✓

For ARPB Use Only:

Received by ARPB	18/06/2021
Discussed by ARPB Research Ethics Committee on	22/06/2021
Approved by ARPB Research Ethics Committee on	23/06/2021

Request for Approval of Human Subjects Research

Please type. Handwritten forms will not be accepted.

FROM: (name, address for correspondence) Matthew Luke Schembri 49, Shamrock, Triq San Pietru, Kirkop	DISSERTATION/THESIS TITLE: Perceptions of the Maltese clientele towards the internationalisation of the workforce in the Maltese Restaurant Industry.
MOBILE NO. 79,286,393	
EMAIL: matthew.schembri001@its.edu.mt	
COURSE AND YEAR: Emirates MBA in Hospitality Management	
DURATION OF RESEARCH: From: 05/2021 To: 02/2022	TUTOR'S NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS: Dr. Carlos Grima - pravo117@yahoo.co.uk

1. Please give a brief summary of the research methodology and why it includes human subjects. A triangulation method of research will be carried out. These data collection methods involve gathering people's opinion and perceptions on the subject matter by means of interviews and questionnaires. The researcher will also be conducting a focus group among selected regular restaurant clients to obtain insightful qualitative data to strengthen the research.
2. Give details of procedures that relate to subjects' participation: (a) How are subjects recruited? What inducement is offered? (<i>Append copy of letter or advertisement or poster, if any.</i>) In the case of questionnaires, Maltese adults are all eligible to participate in this research by filling out an online questionnaire. With regards to the interview, subjects will be randomly chosen while dining at a restaurant in which the researcher works at, and asked if they are willing to participate in this research. The third data collection method of hosting a focus group by the researcher will involve selecting a few people which are regular restaurant clients and a bottle of wine may be given to the participants to entice participation.
(b) Salient characteristics of subjects – number who will participate, age range, sex, institutional affiliation, other special criteria: In this research, the subjects who will be eligible in taking part of this research are Maltese adults who visit restaurants in Malta. The objective of this research is to determine the perceptions of Maltese clientele, hence foreigners and tourists will not be part of the research. The research requires the input of 350 participants for the questionnaire, 15 participants for the interview, and 8 people for the focus group. The questionnaire participants will be characterised by a number of variables such as age group, educational level and other demographic characteristics.
(c) Describe how permission has been obtained from cooperating institution(s) – company, school, hospital, non-profit organisation, and other relevant organization (<i>append letters</i>).

The observations and interviews will be conducted at the place of employment of the researcher, where the researcher himself is employed as a restaurant manager. Permission from the director has been granted prior to the thesis proposal submission; as well as a consent form which will be distributed to all participants willing to take part in the study.

(d) What do subjects do, or what is done to them, or what information is gathered? (*Append copies of instructions or tests or questionnaires*) How many times will observations, test, etc., be conducted? How long will their participation take?

The questionnaire itself requires a duration of 5 to 10 minutes to be completed. The interview should consume approximately 15 minutes, depending on the participant's willingness to evolve his argument on the questions being asked by the interviewer. The focus group discussion may take an hour, however, based on the depth of discussion at hand, the duration might take longer. The research aims to extrapolate the perceptions of Maltese restaurant goers; thus the information gathered is based on the participant's views on the matter. There are no known harm or risk towards the participants engaging in this research.

(e) Which of the following data categories are collected? Please tick where appropriate.

Data that reveals:

Race and ethnic origin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Political opinions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Religious and philosophical beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade union memberships	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex life	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biological information	<input type="checkbox"/>

<p>3. How do you explain the research to subjects and obtain their informed consent to participate? (<i>If in writing, append a copy of consent form.</i>) If subjects are minors, mentally infirm, or otherwise not legally competent to consent to participation, how is their assent obtained and from whom is proxy consent obtained? How is it made clear to subjects that they can quit the study at any time?</p> <p>An introduction about the researcher himself and the study is provided to potential participants in both oral and written form. A consent form will be presented to the participants where the objective of this study is clearly outlined. The recruitment letter will inform the participants that they are participating out of their own free will and they have every right to withdraw their participation at any time of the interview, focus group or questionnaire. The participants are also informed that their input will be completely confidential and that their identity will not be revealed at any stage of the study.</p>
<p>4. Do subjects risk <i>any</i> harm – physical/ psychological/ legal/ social – by participating in the research? Are the risks necessary? What safeguards do you take to minimize the risks?</p> <p>The participants may feel that the questions might extract their racial profiling behaviour or political views, if any. Other than that, there is no known risk or harm to the participants from this study. The researcher / interviewer emphasises the right to withdraw their participation if the interviewee feels uncomfortable in any part of the interview.</p>
<p>5. Are subjects deliberately deceived in <i>any</i> way? If so, what is the nature of the deception? Is it likely to be significant to subjects? Is there any other way to conduct the research that would not involve deception, and, if so, why have you not chosen that alternative? What explanation for the deception do you give to subjects following their participation?</p> <p>There will be no deception to subjects in this participation. However, if the researcher finds difficulties in recruiting participants for the interview and focus group, a gift such as a bottle of wine will be given to entice participation. The questions asked by the researcher are clear, with fair options for close ended questions to ease any frustration or difficulties faced by the participants while completing the questionnaire.</p>
<p>6. How will participation in this research benefit subjects? If subjects will be 'debriefed' or receive information about the research project following its conclusion, how do you ensure the educational value of the process? (<i>Include copies of any debriefing or educational materials</i>)</p> <p>The participants in this study will be aiding the researcher in gaining insightful data which may lead to interesting findings concerning an industry where numerous Maltese people contribute to. The participants who will participate in the interview will be given the option to receive a copy of the findings. The aim of this research is to identify particular details which may improve the restaurant industry in Malta and ultimately the quality of service they may encounter in the future.</p>

TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR APPROVAL IN TERMS OF THE DATA PROTECTION ACT

- Personal data shall only be collected and processed for the specific research purpose.
- The data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the processing purpose.
- All reasonable measures shall be taken to ensure the correctness of personal data
- Personal data shall not be disclosed to third parties and may only be required by the University or the Supervisor for verification purposes. All necessary measures shall be implemented to ensure confidentiality and where possible, data shall be anonymized.
- Unless otherwise authorized by the ITS Research Ethics Committee, the researcher shall obtain the consent from the data subject (respondent) and provide him with the following information: The researcher's identity and habitual residence, the purpose of processing and the recipients to whom personal data may be disclosed. The data subject shall also be informed about his rights to access, rectify, and where applicable erase the data concerning him.

I, the undersigned hereby undertake to abide by the terms and conditions for approval as attached to this application.

I, the undersigned, also give my consent to the ITS ARPB Research Ethics Committee to process my personal data for the purpose of evaluating my request and other matters related to this application. I also understand that I can request in writing a copy of my personal information. I shall also request rectification, blocking or erasure of such personal data that has not been processed in accordance with the Act.

APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE:

I hereby declare that I will not start my research on human subjects before approval



DATE 12/06/2021

TUTOR'S SIGNATURE

I have reviewed this completed application and I am satisfied with the adequacy of the proposal

**Carlos
Grima**

Digitally signed
by Carlos Grima
Date:
2021.06.17
11:28:52
+02'00'

DATE

To be completed by the ARPB Research Ethics Committee

We have examined the above proposal and advise



Acceptance



Refusal



Conditional Acceptance

For the following reason/s:

Name/s and Surname/s of ARPB Research Ethics Committee Representative/s:

Signature/s

:



Prof Glen Farrugia
Chair
Research Ethics Committee

Date: 23/06/2021