Gisma University of Applied Sciences

Language Requirements in Berlin's Job Market: A Comparison of International Image and Labor Market Practice

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B124 Academic Writing and Research Methods

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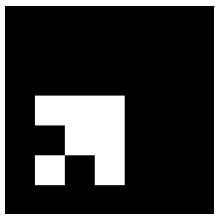

Gisma University of Applied Sciences

Paper Title

Language Requirements in Berlin's Job Market: A Comparison of International Image and Labor Market Practice

Research Question

To what extent does Berlin's international and English-friendly reputation reflect the linguistic requirements of its labor market for non-German speaking professionals?

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SS0325

We confirm that this collaborative report is our own work and that we have documented all sources and materials used.

Berlin, 24 June 2025

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Abstract

This is the abstract...

Contents

1 Introduction **1**

2 Literature Review **2**
2.1 Berlin's International Image . . . 2
2.2 Language and Employment in Globalized Cities . . . 3
2.3 Previous Research on Language Requirements . . . 3
2.4 Perception vs. Reality in Germany's Job Market . . . 4

3 Methodology **5**
3.1 Primary Research Methods . . . 5
3.1.a Limitations of Primary Research . . . 5
3.2 Secondary Research Methods . . . 6
3.2.a Limitations of Secondary Research . . . 6
3.3 Applications of Previous Research . . . 6

4 Results and Discussion **7**
4.1 Job Listing Analysis . . . 7
4.1.a Information Technology . . . 7
4.1.b Finance . . . 7
4.1.c Healthcare . . . 8
4.1.d Education . . . 8
4.1.e Public Services . . . 8
4.1.f Manufacturing . . . 8
4.1.g Marketing . . . 8
4.2 Survey Findings . . . 9
4.2.a Demographics Language Proficiency, and Perceptions of Respondents 9
4.2.b Impact of German Language Skills on Job Searches . . . 9

5 Conclusion **11**

6 References **12**

7 Appendices **15**
7.1 Appendix A: Online Survey . . . 15
Privacy Protection Notice / Datenschutzhinweis . . . 15
Questionnaire . . . 15
Segmentation & Collection . . . 20
Pie Charts . . . 21
7.2 Appendix B: Job Listing Analysis . . . 29
7.2.a Questionnaire . . . 29

1. Introduction

Once divided by two disparate ideologies, the German capital city of Berlin has earned a reputation for internationalism and globalization. With its thriving technology sector, growing business opportunities, and a large community of English speakers, Berlin has become an attraction for expatriates and international students looking to start a new life or career in Germany. This is primarily due to the city's branding as the ideal multicultural, English-friendly city requiring minimal German language skills. The ease with which one can navigate Berlin's historical sites, university systems, and social life without fluency in German has only reinforced the city's attractive reputation.

However, despite this welcoming image, anecdotal reports and firsthand experiences suggest significant obstacles for non-German speakers when applying for positions outside the narrow subset of expat-based tech startups. This creates a misalignment between Berlin's international image and the standard labor market's linguistic requirements. While many may assume that English is sufficient to secure a job, the reality of finding employment often tells a different story. Job listings in the Berlin Metropolitan Area continue to require fluency in German across multiple job sectors, particularly in more traditional industries such as finance, healthcare, and public administration. However, this demand is also evident in international fields like software development and marketing. This linguistic requirement creates a significant barrier to entering the German labor market, thereby challenging the perception of Berlin as a truly English-friendly city beyond a tourist scope.

This paper aims to explore the question "**To what extent does Berlin's international and English-friendly reputation reflect the linguistic requirements of its labor market for non-German speaking professionals?**" Specifically, this will be done by *examining the gap between Berlin's image and the language demands of its job market*, *investigating how English-speaking professionals fare in the job market*, and *identifying which sectors or industries are more accessible to non-German speakers.* Additionally, the study argues that **a majority of full-time job**

listings in Berlin require German-language proficiency, **non-German-speaking professionals are underrepresented in Berlin's non-startup employment sectors**, **the perception of Berlin as an English-speaking job market exceeds the actual availability of English-only roles**, and **students and early-career professionals experience greater language-related employment barriers than those in technical or international business roles**.

Furthermore, this paper will compare the relationship between Berlin's online reputation and online job boards, career advisors, and first-hand job-search testimonials. The use of primary research will provide contemporary insight into the topic at hand as well as represent the diversity of Berlin's human talent. Additionally, secondary research into this question will furthermore support this paper's analysis of Berlin's job market. However, it is essential to note the limitations of each method. These limitations will be further elaborated upon in the methodology section of this paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Berlin's International Image

Berlin has meticulously crafted a portrait of vibrancy and multicultural friendliness. As "Germany's multicultural capital, [Berlin] is home to people from over 190 countries, creating a unique environment where many languages are spoken, and English is often understood" (Kummuni, 2025). Streamlined visa policies tailored for highly skilled workers, the proliferation of numerous start-up incubators offering many English-language networking opportunities, and a dynamically expanding tech ecosystem actively recruit a diverse international workforce. Berlin "even has an area called 'Silicon Allee'" (Palacios, 2025), further reinforcing the city's global image. Bertelsmann Stiftung (n.d.) also notes that this multifaceted effort has been successful in attracting a diverse range of international talent, thereby contributing to the city's cosmopolitan character.

However, despite the city's immense efforts to appear English-friendly, language remains a significant barrier to employment. According to Berbée and Stuhler (2024), proficiency in the local language has a direct and robust correlation to improved market

outcomes, such as better wage levels and enhanced occupational attainment. "Improved German language skills effectively reduce the employment gap and the initial wage gap" for immigrants (Berbée and Stuhler, 2024). This means that while English may unlock certain paths, a strong command of the German language is an indispensable qualification for a more entangled economic integration.

2.2. Language and Employment in Globalized Cities

One of the most consistent findings across multiple studies is the significant role that German language proficiency plays in influencing labor market outcomes for immigrants in Germany. German language proficiency is among the most crucial factors influencing employment and earnings among immigrants, especially for those outside the startup or academic sectors (Berbée and Stuhler, 2024). The increasingly persuasive interconnectedness of a globalized world has immensely reshaped labor markets, labeling proficiency in the local language as a critical determinant for employment, especially for expatriates seeking employment (Shohamy, 2006). The demand for multilingual employees has risen with the rise of globalization. This is because multinational corporations expand their reach to engage with a global clientele, thus creating a need for a widely accepted lingua franca (Mufwene, 2012). Consequently, the English language has indisputably emerged as the dominant "global language of business" (Neeley, 2012), serving as the primary medium for international communication.

2.3. Previous Research on Language Requirements

Gogolin (2002) argues that European nations underestimate the actual linguistic diversity within their borders, thus neglecting the languages brought through immigrant integration. There is an "expectation that immigrants adapt to their new place of residence, also in the sense that they give up their inherited languages and 'convert' to the majority language" (Gogolin, 2002). This can further support Berbée's and Stuhler's claim that immigrants must learn the local language to integrate into the workforce. Gogolin highlights a hierarchy of language status in diverse contexts where German is the "dominant language." To complement, Extra (2010) highlights the importance of

"[the] widely spoken home language" as an indicator of linguistic diversity. He argues that such linguistic diversity can often challenge monolingual mindsets and function as "agents of change" (Extra, 2010).

2.4. Perception vs. Reality in Germany's Job Market

Even in companies where English is the official corporate language, German frequently remains the primary language used for communication between German colleagues (Erling and Walton, 2007). This creates a gap between the expectation of an English-only environment and the reality where German language skills are an absolute must-have characteristic. "In the past, companies conducted most of their business in German, and employed [few English-specialists] where they were most needed," write Erling and Walton (2007), noting that nowadays, "knowledge of English is necessary for communication with people from all over the world."

Similarly, Extra (2010) further suggests that while cities may be linguistically rich and informal in social settings, public institutions continue to operate in a monolingual manner. Formal and official communication from government entities, such as the Foreigners' Office, Federal Employment Agency, and Tax Office, remains primarily conducted in German (Kummuni, 2025). Significant obstacles also exist for entry into non-tech or non-startup sectors outside of the comparatively sheltered and very English-friendly tech and startup bubble. A strong and frequently validated command of the German language is required by practically all traditional sectors, such as public services and regulated professions like human resources, accounting, law, and medicine (Palacios, 2025). "Jobs that require you to know or work with German laws are the least likely for you to get without speaking German" (Palacios, 2025). On the other hand, Damelang and Haas (2012) highlight that "young foreigners and Germans face significantly lower barriers for employment entry in culturally more diverse German regions." This perspective argues that international and diverse areas, such as Berlin,

have "lower barriers for employment entry" (Damelang and Haas, 2012).

3. Methodology

To address the study's research question, this paper employs a *mixed-methods approach*, combining primary and secondary research strategies. This will provide a comprehensive perspective on how language impacts employability in Berlin, especially for individuals who are not fluent in German. Additionally, this mixed approach will enable a comparative analysis of secondary works and contemporary testimonials as of the summer of 2025.

3.1. Primary Research Methods

Primary data was collected via an online survey distributed through university mailing lists, online forums, and social media platforms. The survey was created using Microsoft Office Forms (see Appendix A). It targeted expatriates and international students and was conducted anonymously with informed consent provided through a data protection disclaimer (datenschutzhinweis) written in both German and English. Additionally, the survey includes sections on demographics, academic background, employment preferences, language skills, and job search experience. Thus, the survey enables the collection of both statistical trends and subjective perceptions regarding the role of language in Berlin's job market.

3.1.a Limitations of Primary Research

Primary research aids and benefits this paper by ensuring contemporary data is included. The survey used in this paper allows this research to "avoid unreliable information from outside sources" (Indeed, 2025). However, primary research comes with its respective challenges (Karunarathna et al., 2024). The survey conducted in this study was particularly time-consuming and difficult to distribute. Issues arose when trying to convince individuals to take a few minutes to complete the survey, as many had refused to participate in such a study without an incentive. Also, the sample size was limited due to the difficulty in distributing the survey to the substantial number of Berlin residents. Some respondents may also downplay the issue of language requirements if they receive

help from within their company, or, conversely, exaggerate the problem due to negative experiences during the hiring process.

3.2. Secondary Research Methods

Secondary data were collected through a content analysis of job listings on platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed, StepStone, and businesses' direct hiring portals. The listed jobs span various industries, including technology, marketing, education, healthcare, customer service, government, and finance. Each job listing was analyzed to determine the language in which it was posted, the language requirements listed, the industry, and the industry level. This data helps evaluate how frequently English-friendly positions are advertised, which industries offer such positions, and whether German language skills are a formal prerequisite or an implicit expectation. Notably, this paper does not aim to explore the differences in salaries and job benefits between positions that require proficiency in the German language and those that require little or no knowledge of the German language.

3.2.a Limitations of Secondary Research

Secondary research is a crucial component of any study, providing valuable insights into the discoveries made by other institutions on a particular topic. It is an easy, cost-effective, and fast method of data collection that does not require "[involvement] in developing complicated data collection methods" (Nasrudin, 2025). Especially with the rise of generative AI tools like ChatGPT, secondary research has become increasingly straightforward; it simply requires a quick prompt instructing an AI tool to search the internet for sources on any given topic. Moreover, secondary research is more diverse, allowing a wealth of data to be utilized for comparison. However, secondary research also has its drawbacks. For instance, the data may be inaccurate, as no piece can ever be fully verified as authentic. It may also be outdated, offering information that no longer aligns with current industry norms and requirements (Nasrudin, 2025).

3.3. Applications of Previous Research

This study combines quantitative job listing analysis with qualitative surveys, informed by research on language in employment. It highlights German language

requirements in job postings and their impact on job seekers, considering Germany's multilingual environment, where English is viewed as a corporate lingua franca alongside German. The survey explores language proficiency, job search strategies, and perceptions of Berlin's English friendliness, based on theories of linguistic integration by Shohamy (2006), Mufwene (2012), and Neeley (2012). Gogolin's (2002) insights on immigrants adopting the majority language also inform how this impacts Berlin's labor market.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Job Listing Analysis

An analysis of 191 Berlin job listings (see Appendix B) revealed that 75.4% specified listings required at least conversational German (19.9% conversational, 55.5% fluent), while 24.6% required none. Fifty-two percent of listings were posted in English, 47.1% in German, and 0.5% in both. This contrasts with national data indicating that 97% of jobs require German (Jones, 2025). While the sample shows a greater presence of English, a significant German barrier persists, challenging Berlin's perceived friendliness to English speakers.

4.1.a Information Technology

Of 44 IT listings, 34.1% needed no German, 25% required conversational German, and 40.9% needed fluent German. Sixty-five postings were in English. This sector is English-friendly, with many platforms listing English-speaking roles. Many tech companies foster "English-speaking environments," creating an English-speaking "bubble".

4.1.b Finance

Of 37 finance listings, 62.2% required fluent German, 13.5% conversational German, and 24.3% no German, with 48.6% being listed in German. This indicates that finance roles, particularly those involving German regulations, often require German fluency.

4.1.c Healthcare

Core medical professions require German exams (B2-C2). Primary data shows that roles like 'Medizinische Fachangestellte' require fluent German. Bureaucratic tasks are primarily in German. This represents a life-critical language barrier.

4.1.d Education

The English teaching market is peculiarly saturated. Certified teachers in public schools require proficiency in fluent German. Primary data shows mixed requirements (33.3% none, 16.7% conversational, 50% fluent), with 70.8% of listings posted in English.

4.1.e Public Services

Of 24 public service listings, 58.3% required fluent German, 12.5% conversational German, and 29.1% required none, with 50% listed in English. Public service roles almost universally require proficiency in German due to the state administration and bureaucracy.

4.1.f Manufacturing

Of 23 manufacturing listings, 65.2% required fluent German, 21.7% required conversational German, and 13% required no German proficiency. With 39.1% of being listed in English and 4.3% being listed in both languages, this suggests that blue-collar work, such as manufacturing, tends to require proficiency in German for ease of communication.

4.1.g Marketing

Of 29 listings for marketing, 48.3% required fluent German, 34.5% required conversational German, and 17.2% required none. Forty-eight percent of listings were in English. This suggests that German businesses tend to market primarily to German-speaking consumers, rather than international customers, given that the majority of positions require proficiency in the language.

4.2. Survey Findings

4.2.a Demographics Language Proficiency, and Perceptions of Respondents

The survey gathered responses from young professionals and students, primarily aged 18-25 (69%) and 26-35 (23%). Most respondents held or were pursuing a bachelor's degree (54%), while the remainder held or were working towards a master's degree (46%). Many respondents were from Gisma University of Applied Sciences, reflecting the demographics of international students and expatriates. A significant majority (69%) of participants reported Beginner (A1-A2) proficiency in German, with 15% having no German skills. Additionally, 73% were fluent in English, while the remaining 27% possessed intermediate (B1-B2) English skills.

This linguistic profile, which indicates a highly educated group with strong English but limited German, supports the argument that Berlin attracts English-speaking professionals who are underprepared for the broader German-speaking labor market. Respondents indicated that only a tiny number of job listings did not require German language skills. Sixty-two percent reported that only 0-25% of job listings in their desired field were posted in English, with 19% reporting 26-60%. In further support of the assertion that German is almost always required in the workplace, 42% stated that German was always required in their field, while 38% said it was often necessary. This inconsistency between Berlin's English-friendly reputation and its actual job market outlines the widespread reality for job seekers, creating an imminent employment challenge.

4.2.b Impact of German Language Skills on Job Searches

Sixty-nine percent of participants reported job application rejections due to insufficient German skills. Only 12% were able to secure employment without fluency in German, primarily in the hospitality and information technology sectors. Additionally, 31% were not invited to any interviews, suggesting that language barriers hinder initial screening and indicating limited English-only opportunities. This empirical evidence supports the claim that language proficiency has a significant impact on employment.

Before relocating to Berlin, 50% of participants believed they could find a job there

without speaking German, which aligns with the city's image. However, when asked if Berlin's English-friendly reputation accurately reflects the job market, 50% stated that this was not true at all, while an additional 23% expressed that it was only slightly true. This stark contrast reveals a significant gap between reputation and reality. Berlin's marketing creates unrealistic expectations that lead to frustration and dissatisfaction for expatriates and international students.

4.3. Analysis

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5. Conclusion

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Appendices

Appendix A: Online Survey

Survey Title: Working in Berlin without (fluent) German language skills

Privacy Protection Notice / Datenschutzhinweis

A comprehensive privacy protection notice was provided in both English and German. The notice outlined that the survey "is part of a university research project on language requirements in Berlin's job market. Participation is voluntary, and all responses will be anonymous and treated confidentially, in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)." Respondents were also informed that we will collect "demographic information (e.g. age, education level, field of study) and your experiences with job searching in Berlin," and that the results will be used "for academic purposes only and will not be shared with third parties. No personally identifying information (such as names, emails, or IP addresses) will be collected or stored." Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time and that proceeding with the survey confirmed they were at least 18 years old and gave informed consent for the use of their responses in this academic study.

Questionnaire

1. Privacy Protection Notice acceptance (Required)

   Note: Those who disagreed with the notice were unable to continue with the rest of the survey's questions

2. Gender (Required)

   (a) Man

   (b) Woman

   (c) Non-binary

   (d) Prefer not to say

3. Age (Required)

(a) < 18

(b) 18-25

(c) 26 – 35

(d) 36 – 45

(e) > 55

(f) Prefer not to say

4. Living district (Required)

(a) Mitte, Berlin (incl. Wedding)

(b) Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Berlin

(c) Pankow, Berlin

(d) Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Berlin

(e) Spandau, Berlin

(f) Steglitz-Zehlendorf, Berlin

(g) Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Berlin

(h) Neukölln, Berlin

(i) Treptow-Köpenick, Berlin

(j) Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Berlin

(k) Lichtenberg, Berlin

(l) Reinickendorf, Berlin

(m) Potsdam

(n) Brandenburg

– Other (open-ended)

5. “Which educational degree are you working towards, or have completed?” (Required)
    (a) Bachelor’s Degree
    (b) Master’s Degree
    (c) Doctorate Degree
    – Other (open-ended)
6. “What degree are you studying?” (Required)
    – (open-ended response)
7. “What university are you currently / have most recently studied at?” (Required)
    – (open-ended response)
8. “What industries are you looking to work for?” (Required, multi-selection)
    (a) Education
    (b) Government
    (c) Public Service
    (d) IT (Information Technology)
    (e) Financial
    (f) Marketing
    (g) Manufacturing
    – Other (open-ended)
9. “What is your German language proficiency?” (Required)
    (a) None
    (b) Beginner (A1-A2)
    (c) Intermediate (B1-B2)

(d) Expert (C1-C2)

10. "What is your English language proficiency?" (Required)

    (a) None

    (b) Beginner (A1-A2)

    (c) Intermediate (B1-B2)

    (d) Expert (C1-C2)

11. "What types of employment have you been looking for?" (Required, multi-selection)

    (a) Working Student (Werkstudent)

    (b) Internship (Praktikum)

    (c) Part-Time (Teilzeit)

    (d) Full-Time (Vollzeit)

    – Other (open-ended response)

12. "Have you actively searched for a job in Berlin within the last 12 months?" (Required)

    (a) Yes

    (b) No

13. "On average, what percentage of job listings in your field are written in English only?" (Required)

    (a) 0–25%

    (b) 26–50%

    (c) 51–75%

    (d) 76–100%

14. "How often do job listings in your field require fluent German?" (Required)

(a) Always

(b) Often

(c) Sometimes

(d) Rarely

(e) Never

15. "Have any of your job applications been rejected because of insufficient German language skills?" (Required)

    (a) Yes

    (b) No

16. "Have you successfully (or previously) secured employment in Berlin without fluent German skills?" (Required)

    (a) Yes

    (b) No

17. "In what sector?" (Required only if "Yes" selection in question 16)

    – (open-ended response)

18. "Have you ever attended a job interview in Berlin conducted entirely in English?" (Required)

    (a) Yes

    (b) No

    (c) I have not been invited to any interviews

19. "Before moving to Berlin, did you believe you could find a job without speaking German?" (Required)

    (a) Strongly agree

(b) Agree

(c) Neutral

(d) Disagree

(e) Strongly disagree

20. "How accurate do you think this statement is: *"Berlin's reputation as an English-speaking city matches the actual job market."*" (Required)

    (a) Extremely true

    (b) Somewhat true

    (c) Slightly true

    (d) Not true at all

21. "Do you have any other comments on your experience navigating Berlin's job market?" (Required)

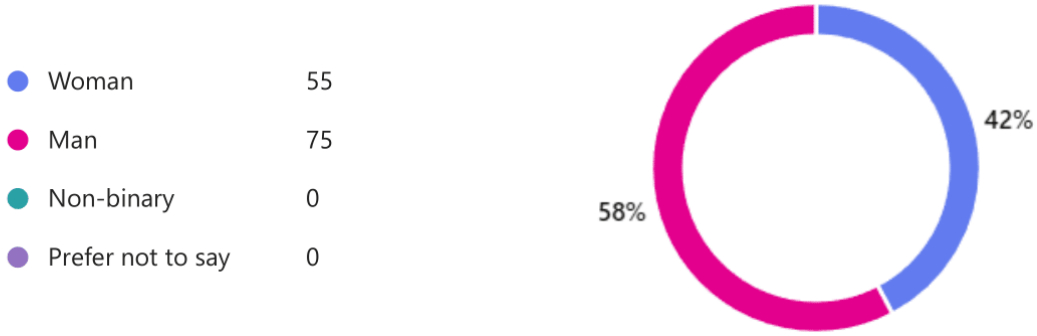
    – (open-ended response)

Segmentation & Collection

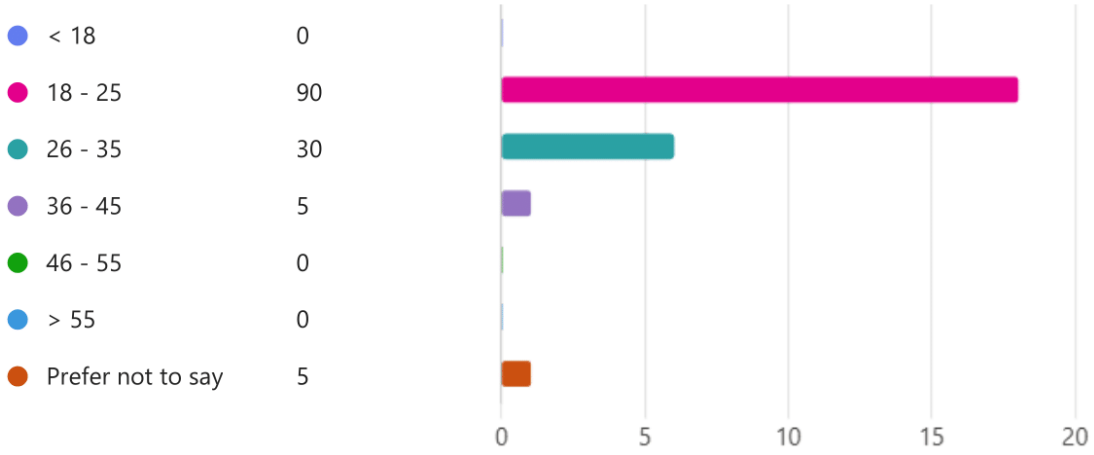
- The survey link and a brief explanation were sent by email or WhatsApp group message to expatriates/migrants who live or study in the Berlin Metropolitan Area.
- Respondents were required to sign in to a valid Microsoft account to submit the form. This was to prevent more than one response per respondent. No Microsoft account details, email addresses, or other personal information were collected except for those specifically mentioned in the questionnaire.

Pie Charts

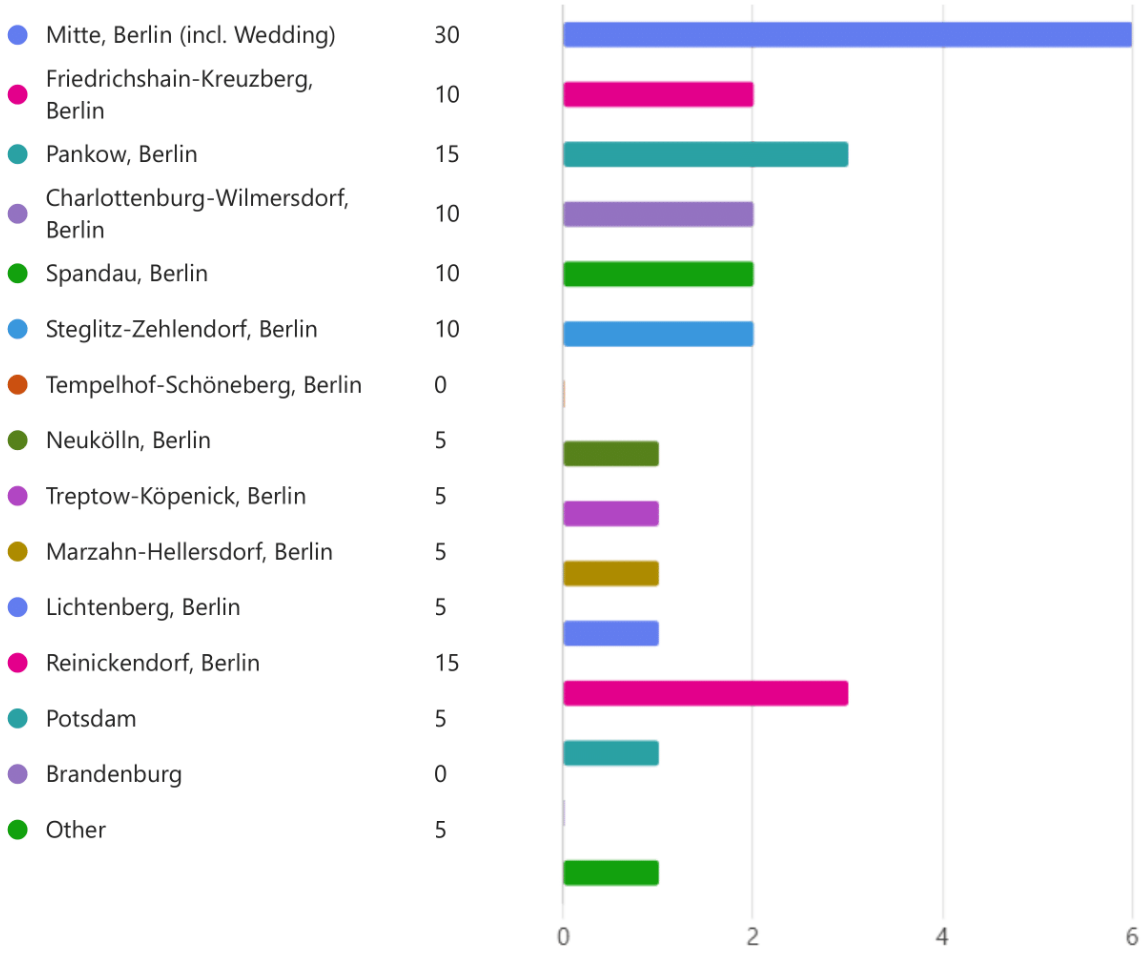
2. What is your gender?



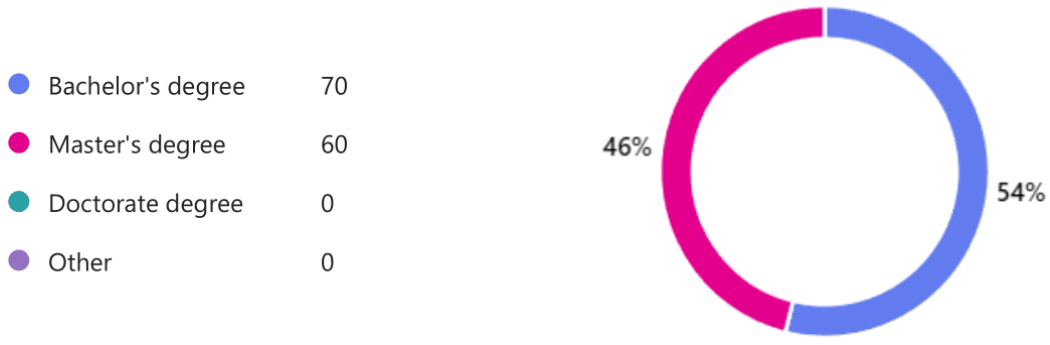
3. How old are you?



4. Where do you live?



5. Which educational degree are you working towards, or have completed?



6. What degree are you studying?

130
Responses

Latest Responses
"Computer Science"
"Computer science"
"Computer Science"
• • •

50 respondents (38%) answered Business for this question.

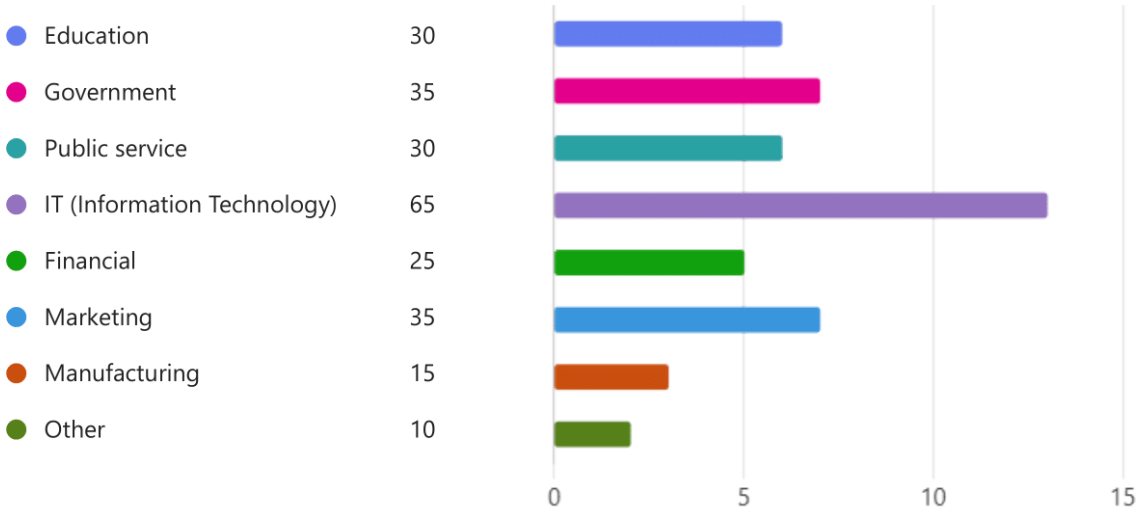
7. What university are you currently / have most recently studied at?

98
Responses

Latest Responses
"GISMA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES"
"Gisma University of Applied Sciences"
"FU"
• • •

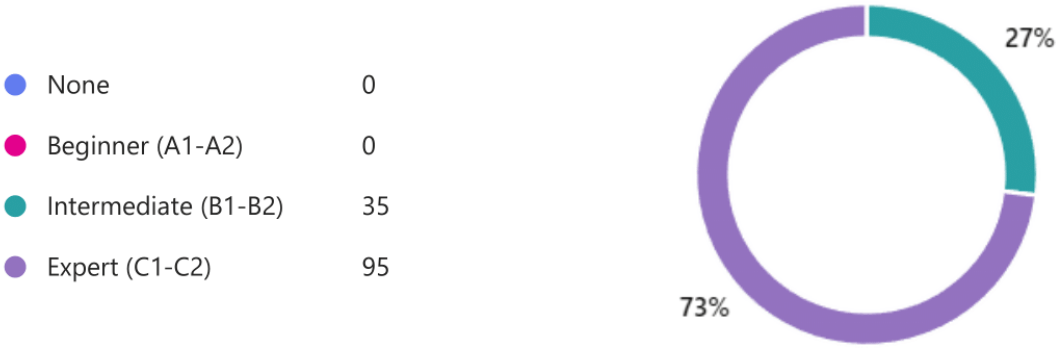
56 respondents (57%) answered Gisma University for this question.

8. Which industries are you looking to working for?



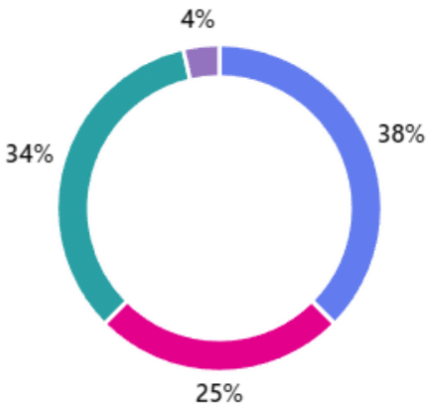
9. What is your **German** language proficiency?

10. What is your **English** language proficiency?



11. What types of employment have you been looking for?

Working Student (Werkstudent)	105
Internship (Praktikum)	70
Part-Time (Teilzeit)	95
Full-Time (Vollzeit)	10
Other	0

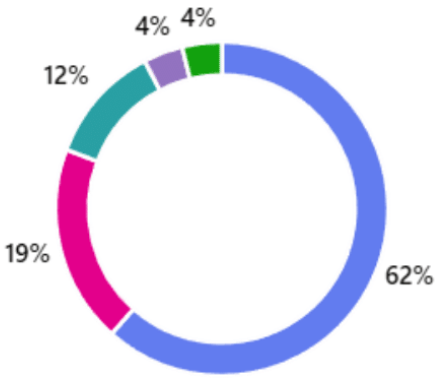


12. Have you actively searched for a job in Berlin within the last 12 months?

Yes	115
No	15

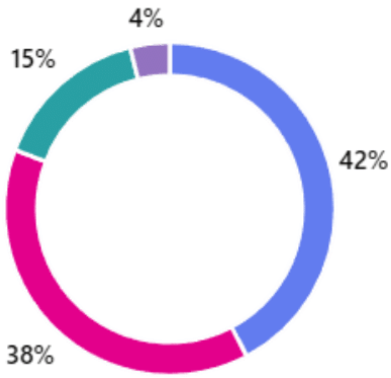
13. On average, what percentage of job listings in your field are **written** in English only?

0-25%	80
26-50%	25
51-75%	15
76-100%	5
I don't know	5



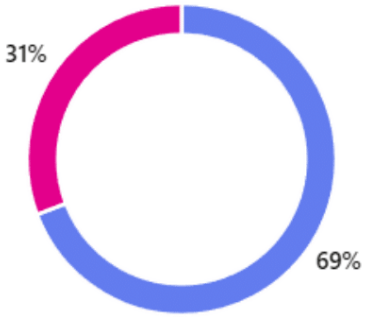
14. How often do job listings in your field require fluent German?

Always	55
Often	50
Sometimes	20
Rarely	5
Never	0



15. Have any of your job applications been rejected because of insufficient German language skills?

Yes	90
No	40



16. Have you successfully (or previously) secured employment in Berlin without fluent German skills?

Yes	15
No	115

17. In what sector?

15

Responses

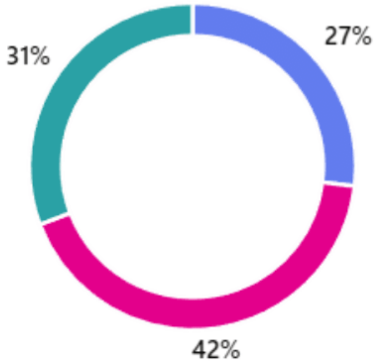
Latest Responses

"IT"

• • •

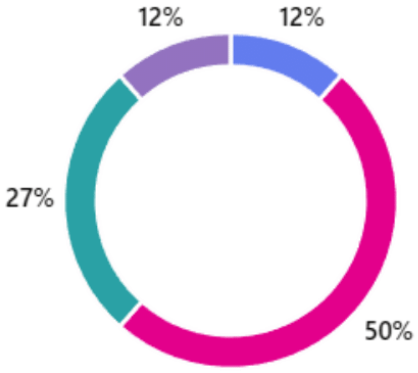
18. Have you ever attended a job interview in Berlin conducted **entirely** in English?

Yes	35
No	55
I have not been invited to any interviews	40



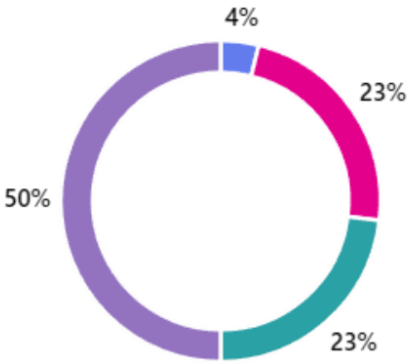
19. Before moving to Berlin, did you believe you could find a job without speaking German?

Strongly Agree	15
Agree	65
Neutral	35
Disagree	15
Strongly disagree	0



20. How accurate do you think this statement is: "Berlin's reputation as an English-speaking city matches the actual job market."

Extremely true	5
Somewhat true	30
Slightly true	30
Not true at all	65



21. Do you have any other comments on your experience navigating Berlin's job market?

8

Responses

Latest Responses

"I do get securing a job whilst knowing the german langua..."

"NA"

• • •

2 respondents (25%) answered No for this question.

Appendix B: Job Listing Analysis

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Questionnaire

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