


2014

The Impact of Culture on Students' Motivation to Acquire a Second Language

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Recommended Citation

Pidberejna, Irina (2014) "The Impact of Culture on Students' Motivation to Acquire a Second Language," *The Pegasus Review: UCF Undergraduate Research Journal (URJ)*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/urj/vol7/iss2/3>



The Impact of Culture on Students' Motivation to Acquire a Second Language

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ABSTRACT: In accordance with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, goals for foreign language learning include *communities, communication, comparisons, connections, and cultures*. Each teaching goal is interlinked and serves an essential component in language development. However, culture has been largely limited by stereotypical biases, which misrepresent the culture studied, and the native culture's sociological roles and perceptions of that target culture. The experiments and theories of Vygotsky (1934; 1956), and Leontyev (1978) indicate that second language learning can reconstruct self-identity and redevelop behaviors appropriate to the second language's respective culture. Personal investment and openness to a foreign language encourage learning beyond classroom objectives while xenophobia limits it. To encourage meaningful culture and content application, cross-cultural programs such as *Connecting Classrooms* and study abroad opportunities deepen students' investment in language learning. With these cultural theories as a critical perspective, this study analyzes a group of 67 student Canvas Web posting responses from Beginning Russian Language classes in the Fall 2011 and 2012 semesters, which asked students why they chose to learn Russian. Responses were then analyzed to determine how often culture/history, degree requirements, and other factors played a role in language choice. Students' study abroad journals from Summer 2013 were also analyzed. Together, these cultural tools were evaluated to determine how they enhanced language learning and the pedagogical field.

KEYWORDS: foreign language learning, Russian, socio-cultural theory

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INTRODUCTION

As humans, our minds reflect our perceptions and experiences. A core principle of socio-cultural theory is that the human mind is self-regulated and mediated. Tools, images, and other social artifacts play an important role in how we interact with the world. Art, history, language, mathematics, and other cultural products change and influence relationships both on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. Cultural products, tools, and artifacts can be physically constructed or psychologically determined. Furthermore, these artifacts are then passed on through generations and may be subsequently modified to fit the needs of the current society utilizing them (Lantolf, 2000).

In a global society, it has become increasingly important to understand these symbols and artifacts to create a richer dialogue among cultures. The more understanding and exposure others receive to the various artifacts situated in their respective cultures, the greater one can comprehend and even empathize with another's world view. For example, the French meaning of *liberal* has the opposite meaning of its English counterpart. When the French refer to liberalism they are referring to individuals who support free markets and limited state regulation. By contrast, *liberal* in the American or British understanding denotes more support for the state and public social welfare (Gopnik, 2014).

Language is a by-product of culture and is often used to describe both the physical and psychological artifacts of a particular society. Just as cultures without a writing system lack the concept of a "word," other cultures that create a society based on the tools available to them may not have the same resources as another culture (Illich & Sanders, 1988). Being aware of such differences, irregularities, and peculiarities is the first step in intercultural awareness and competence. We are no longer isolated, and with increasing technology, transportation, and connectivity, it is possible to communicate with individuals all around the world (Kourova, 2013). However, just because someone is "speaking the same language" does not mean that person is being understood.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For the purpose of explaining methodologies, the phrase a "method to one's madness" indicates that every method has a motive. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory lists four genetic domains of facilitation: *phylogenetic domain*,

sociocultural domain, *ontogenetic domain*, and *microgenetic domain*. Lantolf (2000) elaborates on these domains:

Phylogenetic domain, concerned with how human mentation came to be distinguished from mental processes in other life forms through the integration of meditational means over the course of evolution; *sociocultural domain*, concerned with how the different types of symbolic tools developed by human cultures throughout the course of their respective histories affected by the kinds of [popular] mediation favored, and with it the kind of thinking valued by these cultures; *ontogenetic domain*, where the focus is how children appropriate and integrate meditational means, primarily language, into their thinking as they mature; *microgenetic domain*, where interest is in the reorganization and development of meditational over a relatively short span of time. (p. 3)

These four domains are complemented by the activity theory (Lantolf, 2000), which "addresses the implications of [Vygotsky's] claim that human behavior results from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity" (p. 8). The functional system results in the combination of the physical, social, and psychological processing in regard to culturally relevant objects and artifacts, particularly language.

Vygotsky favored an involved approach for studying the functional system, and his theories were later solidified by Leontyev (1978) in the Activity Theory. Leontyev asserted that all action is motivated either through biological or psychological needs, including culturally constructed needs, such as being well versed in a particular culture. This need establishes an object-oriented goal that is intentional, specific, and functional (Leontyev, 1978). Lantolf (2000) states that each activity can be observed on three tiers consisting of "the level of motivation, level of action and the level of conditions," of which only the level of conditions can be peer observed (p.8).

Motivations are either instrumental or integrative in nature (Yule, 2014). Thus, the topics presented in this study, such as learning Russian for the sake of fulfilling a major requirement, are examples of instrumental motivation or motives related to tasks or skills. Conversely,

learning Russian to communicate more effectively with Russian immigrants emphasizes integrative motivation to better assimilate within a culture. Activities cannot be without motives, but often the motive is hidden.

Subsequently, as activities correspond with motives, actions correspond with goals. The data analyzed here present a specific, measurable action: to take a Russian language class at the University of Central Florida. This action is inherently the same across all populations; however, the goal varies from individual to individual (Leontyev, 1978). Some activities, initially unrelated, achieve the final goal. Goal-oriented activities are a chain of actions leading to a final task. Furthermore, activities and therefore motives are subject to constant change based on the perceptions, goals, and actions of a society or individual (Leontyev, 1978).

Utilizing Vygotsky's, Leontyev's, and Lantolf's sociocultural and activity theories, the premise of this paper is to document and demonstrate the research gathered on how culture affects students' motivation in acquiring a second language, in this case, Russian. This study analyzes how culture affects a desire to learn a second language. Data are represented in the classroom through student responses, textbook analyses of cultural information, and the implications of culturally enriching classroom projects, including cross-cultural communication and study abroad data.

In addition to analyzing student motivation, this paper assesses the impact of cross cultural communication programs and exchanges such as *Connecting Classrooms* (Kourova, 2013), a project that incorporates academic classroom language learning with live cultural and language interaction of native speakers of English and Russian. Analysis of the intercultural project is viewed through two formats: as a participant involved in the project and as a researcher evaluating the merits of the project as a pedagogical tool to enhance foreign language learning. The goals of *Connecting Classrooms* include:

1. To improve language proficiency and communication
2. To encourage tolerance toward cultural diversity, differing ideas and perspectives
3. To analyze student motivation and interest in language skill improvement (Kourova, 2013)

Connecting Classrooms partners UCF students in the Intermediate Russian Language and Civilization classes with high school students learning English at Lyceum #7 in Novocherkassk, Russia.

The greater the level of language proficiency, the stronger the ability to mediate one's psychological and social activities within the context of that respected language (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985). *Connecting Classrooms* provides the next level of cognitive language control as mentioned in the sociocultural theory. Students are able to move past the object and task-orientated sections of classroom learning, such as textbooks, assignments, and exercises. Direct contact with native Russian language speakers moves students into the other-regulation level (modification of language because native representatives of the target language influence language development) through dialogue and conversation, which subsequently controls and modifies the student's cognitive language patterns. Language patterns effectively utilized in the other-regulation stage is modeled by the representatives of that target culture and allows speakers to obtain enough fluency and language proficiency to self-regulate (Lantolf, 2000).

Through such authentic interactions with the environment, students assimilate into a target language and cultural activity, and by "entering into direct contact with objective reality and submitting to it, [the] activity is modified and enriched" (Leontyev, 1978, p. 11). Individual consciousness and perceptions on sociolinguistic and sociocultural interactions contribute to the relationships and connections student engage in with individuals of the target language and culture. Speech communicates these actions as individuals become aware of their roles in relation to others. An individual's social standing, life view, and ideologies influence his/her consciousness and perceptions of the world.

Self-regulation, the last stage in the sociocultural theory, moves an intermediate level, other-regulated foreign language learner into an advanced, self-regulated language learner capable of maintaining the psychological and physiological means to mediate interaction in the target language (Lantolf, 2000). Culture, including language, allows individuals to mediate their interactions for both social interaction and cognitive reflection. Levels of cultural awareness can reformulate one's mental system and influence interaction in the self, family, community, and the world at large (Renaud & Tannenbaum, 2013). Cross-cultural programs such as *Connecting Classrooms*

touch upon each platform to achieve the highest level of intercultural competence.

Other Cross-Cultural Studies

Previous research shows that cross-cultural communications studies are not a new development in second language learning, but their scope and depth among cultures is increasing. Cultural Studies, such as the “Sister School Project” conducted in 1991 between elementary Japanese and Egyptian students learning English over the course of four months, analyzed the impact of cross-cultural communication activities and student motivation (Youssef, 2009). Results showed that students were more motivated by 53% to 100% on various topics, including information on culture and lifestyle, improving English, and speaking to foreigners. Furthermore, students realized that Japanese and Egyptian cultures share many similarities. Stereotypes such as “Do students go to school on camels?” changed to “There are many international car brands in Egypt” (Youssef, 2009, p. 33).

As a heritage speaker, I focus on the motivations toward learning Russian in my research both professionally and personally. A study by Geisherik (2004) analyzed motives for both heritage and non-heritage speakers of Russian. The study showed that non-heritage speakers reported general goals and did not focus on specific skills in grammar, fluency, or otherwise. Geisherik’s data strongly correspond with data obtained in this study. Students mentioned environments, relationships, and a general interest in culture. Heritage students focused more on skills associated with clearer communication, including improving their writing and reading skills. In terms of motivation, heritage learners had the highest integrative motivation while non-heritage learners had the lowest.

Analysis of Connecting Classrooms

As an active participant and heritage speaker in *Connecting Classrooms* during the 2012–2013 academic year at the University of Central Florida, the researcher experienced self-regulation in language learning. Through increased language response, thought formation, and sentence articulation, the researcher established control over self-mediation. Tasks presented in the *Connecting Classrooms* project were completed by the researcher with greater competence and responsiveness without the breakdown of performance (Lantolf, 2000).

However, before formal schooling in Russian, a culturally specified activity (Lantolf, 2000), the researcher’s ability to perform in Russian as the target language was severely limited to object regulation and other regulation. Object regulation focused on cinema, music, and television in the target language, including the cartoon adaptation of traditional Russian fairytales and classic literature by writers such as Aleksander Pushkin. Other-regulation included limited exposure to target language focused on a listening oriented approach with less feedback and language response toward speakers in the native language.

Beyond personal analysis, cross cultural communication programs such as *Connecting Classrooms* allow the most direct and immersive methods for foreign language learning. As stated in the *Standards for Foreign Language in the 21st century* (Lawrence, 1999), the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Languages has established the 5 C’s of Foreign Language Learning: Communities, Communication, Cultures, Connections, and Comparisons. While *Connecting Classrooms* addresses these goal areas and standards, this paper focuses on areas that are more difficult to reach in the academic setting, which are communities and culture.

The Communities standards cited by Lawrence (1999) are as follows:

Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the classroom setting.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Connecting Classrooms is employed locally at the University of Central Florida, in the Orlando community, and in other cities in Florida. There is a significant impact on the global community, particularly in Novocherkassk and the Rostov-on-Don region of Russia. *Connecting Classrooms* impacts the local communities of Lyceum #7 and the familial communities of both the Russian and American student parties. Through various projects, cultural exchanges, and visits, students are able to collaborate within the community and internationally. The project bases collaboration on both virtual conferences through the use of Skype, as well as visits to community areas

(Kourova, 2013). Project features included visits to historical sites of the two countries, interaction with community members outside the classroom, and collaborations with multiple departments both at the University of Central Florida and Lyceum #7.

There is greater motivation to learn a language through pen pal interaction in *Connecting Classrooms* as opposed to learning a language without communicating with a native speaker of the language. Each American student is assigned one or two Russian students who are participating in the project. Through various class topics, students on both sides present and share information about their pen pal to learn more about each other's culture, lifestyle, and community. Evaluating the students' personal differences and similarities, students learn about their identity and reshape it based on the artifacts, products, and perspectives presented while acquiring a second language (Lantolf, 2000).

This method of learning and understanding about a member of a specific culture provides the most direct route of cultural understanding. Our learning is measured by our human achievements, so all comparisons of the advancement of humanity are ultimately compared in relation to people themselves. Learning experiences are no exception, where humanistic concerns reflect the success and failures in learning. To achieve cultural learning, one must interact and communicate with individuals who speak the native language and are immersed in the target culture. When evaluating intercultural competence, the following standards must be addressed:

Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied. (Lawrence, 1999)

Connecting Classrooms and other cross-cultural exchange programs benefit students through direct learning and immediate interaction in the target language. The Atlas Complex, in which there is a one way channel of student received information from the teacher, is eliminated.

Instead of only IRE sessions in which the instructor initiates, students respond, and the instructor evaluates, there is an increase of IRF sessions (initiate, respond, and feedback). Students can formulate and self evaluate in addition to instructor evaluation utilizing cultural context. Such dynamic sessions reduce classroom anxiety, lower the affective filter, and promote higher level thinking. Authentic cultural and language materials are brought into the classroom, as turn taking in conversation and interaction are encouraged (Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

SURVEY STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

To quantify collected data on student motivation and provide a perspective for analyzing motives for language learning, the following research questions were established:

1. Based on A.N. Leontyev's Activity Theory, what motivates students to acquire a second language?
2. Of their stated motives, which are culturally relevant?
3. Does previous language knowledge or lack thereof influence student motives?

A sample size of sixty-seven student responses was collected and analyzed from the UCF Webcourses Canvas web postings. The responses were open-ended, but the length requested was a paragraph explaining why students chose to study Russian. Responses varied in formatting and syntax due to the often informal nature of web posting responses. Students surveyed were enrolled in the Elementary Russian Language and Civilization (RUS 1120) and were just beginning their formal Russian language learning at the University of Central Florida. Data was collected from the Fall 2011 and Fall 2012 semesters.

Responses were reviewed, analyzed, and cross-referenced to determine how often culture/history interests, degree requirements, and other factors played a role in language choice. With each entry, patterns were noted and documented first informally on notebook paper, then formally through an excel spreadsheet. Student names were kept anonymous to maintain the confidentiality of the students and to avoid repetitive responses between classes or across sample sizes.

After finding a recognizable pattern in student reasoning, the student responses were categorized into three themes. These themes applied to the variety of student responses and were categorized under the following topics: educational, personal, cultural. Combinations of the themes were also used to account for respondents who expressed multiple reasons. Theme combinations were as follows: educational and cultural; personal and cultural; personal and educational; multiple (educational, personal and cultural). Themes and their combinations were later used to construct a survey.

Contingent on the length and depth of the student responses, when applicable, it was noted whether they had studied another language(s) and the extent of language study. Reasons for learning Russian and the respected categories were individually graphed. The sample size from Fall 2011 had thirty-three participants, and the sample size from Fall 2012 had thirty-four participants. Languages known and studied were graphed together from both the Fall 2011 and Fall 2012 sample sizes in a pie graph. (See Figure 1)

RESULTS

Fall 2011 Sample Size

In regard to the Russian Fall 2011 Webcourse Canvas web postings, the graph (See Figure 2) shows an equal emphasis on student reasons in educational and personal concepts with culture accounting for seventeen replies in both single and combination choices. Sixteen students stated learning or knowing another language, with nine having studied more than one language. Nine years of Spanish was the longest recorded length of a language studied. Four students mentioned visiting Ukraine, three on volunteer or mission trips. Two students visited Russia and one student visited Uzbekistan. Four students stated that they were not interested in learning a romance language. These statements reflect student attitudes on the lack of language variation, at least at the University of Central Florida, where five out of the nine languages offered are romance languages. Only one non-romance language, Russian, is offered as a minor.

Other languages, such as Chinese, Arabic, or German, were perceived as less interesting in terms of culture. One student originally wanted to study Chinese but stated that it is very difficult to get a space in the Chinese class and, of the critical languages offered, Russian was perceived as more interesting due to its cultural and

historical background. Students also mentioned enjoying the etymology and sound of the language. Russian and Eastern European history is rarely covered in primary and secondary school. Students enter the university environment with little background knowledge or awareness of Russian and Eastern European culture. Lack of understanding and ignorance further promote stereotypes, biases, and false assumptions. This evidence suggests that there is an unmet need to educate students about Russian culture, history, and language. Russian teachers face the added tasks of not only teaching language, grammar, and phonetics, but also culture, customs, and history. In this case, language learning develops intercultural competence.

Students perceive learning Russian as a window of opportunity to professional and career development. Of the future careers mentioned, government/military and computer science/programming dominated with three respondents each. Other fields, including digital media, engineering, and elementary/education work, each had one response. Figure 2 shows a complete breakdown of student reasons in the established categories.

The following are excerpts from the Fall 2011 Sample Size in Webcourses Canvas Student Responses. Students were asked to answer the question “Why are you studying Russian?”

Example 1: “I decided to take Russian because I’m a political science major and Russian is one of the critical languages right now. I’ve always been fascinated with the history of Russia, US-Soviet relations, and the Cold War. I’ve studied Marxist theory in depth and I just figured it’s the next step. I also want to work in the diplomatic arena, State Dept, UN, something like that and I figured knowing a language like this would be extremely beneficial.”

Example 2: “First off, one of my best friends is Russian and he always tells me to go learn and that he would help me along the way. Secondly, I’ve been dating someone who is Russian for a while and I’ve wanted to learn so that I could speak with her family who moved here from Russia. Lastly, I’m majoring in Computer Science and some of the best programmers are from Russia, so if I was to compete or get a job offer in Russia, I would like to know the language.”

Example 3: “I chose to take Russian because I want to try and reacquaint myself with my native language. When I was younger, I used to live in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. I then moved to the United States in 1994. Prior to this, I spoke both Russian and Uzbek, but since learning English, I have lost all of my Uzbek, and a good portion of my Russian. My hope is that this class will help me learn some of my former language, and will inspire me to continue learning it throughout my studies. I am very proud of my heritage, and embrace it whenever I can, and I feel very much at home in this class.”

Fall 2012 Sample Size

The Fall 2012 courses consisted of thirty-four students with a broader variety of responses due to a stronger cultural influence and interest. Of the 34 respondents, 28 chose categories that dealt with culture only (8), in conjunction to personal reasons (8) or in conjunction to education (12). Five respondents stated that they either wanted to read Russian literary classics in the native language or to be able to read scientific research that has been delayed in the translation process. Similar to the Fall 2012 respondents, students stated that they saw the language as a challenge to undertake and wanted to learn a non-romance language.

Russian is considered to be a critical language (Powell, 2006). Even though the Fall 2012 group included only two students who had traveled to Russia, a larger percentage of students reported studying another language(s). Eighteen students reported learning another language, with six students reporting that they have studied or have been exposed to two or more languages. The longest length of language study reported was Japanese for seven years.

Similar to the Fall 2011 sample size, students on average perceive Russian to be more important than other languages. Fall 2012 respondents expressed more interest in culturally relevant subjects such as Russian hospitality, reestablishments of self-identity, history, and popular Russian entertainment. One student mentioned a specific cultural example, the Russian Martial Art System founded by Mikhail Ryabko. Other examples mentioned were economic examples, such as the relations between Russia and Brazil in raw material distribution since the formation of the BRIC countries (economies of

Brazil, Russia, India, and China) in 2001. Six respondents stated that their future career plans included working for the government in intelligence positions. Career opportunities in business, physics, education, computer science, and NASA followed with one response each. Figure 3 shows a complete breakdown of student reasons in the established categories.

The following are excerpts from the Fall 2012 Sample Size in Webcourses Canvas Student Responses. Students were asked to answer the question, “Why are you studying Russian?”

Example 1: “I actually intend to minor in Russian. As an avid reader, writer, and English major, it seemed an obvious choice. You see, among my favorite authors are Nabakov, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov. However close I feel to the stories they forged, I couldn't get over the blatant disconnect between languages. Reading anything always left me wanting to read it in its original, Russian context. Ideally for me it's studying and teaching in Russia for the future.”

Example 2: “Over the summer, I work at a language camp called The Language Academy. Kids from different countries come to learn English and get the ‘American experience.’ Most of the students are from Italy. But the second country is Russia. I tend to like the Russians more. They're more down-to-earth and they're a little bit more devious.”

Example 3: “The two great superpowers that once dominated the political and economic landscape are slowly fading, one unfortunately faster than the other. Russia is still such a giant, if only a sleeping one. The culture is so broad and links so many different peoples yet there is a pride in being ‘Russian’ that seems to mirror our feelings, but in a different way. My experience with the language, the people, and the culture has been an interesting one and as such I wanted to continue it in college. It seems to serve as both a pragmatic answer as well as one of personal choice. In the end, I just want to.”

Based on the results and categories obtained from the Webcourse Canvas web postings, a survey was distributed to the 2014 student organization Russian Club at UCF. Of those individuals surveyed, 13 respondent replies were recorded based on the following questions. Names have been kept anonymous and were only used to track individuals responding order to avoid double surveys.

Survey Questions:

Why did you choose to take Russian? (Circle all that apply)

Educational: Explain

Personal: Explain

Cultural (i.e.: interested in Russian

culture): Explain

Are you a native speaker?

Did you take Russian classes at UCF or plan to? If so, state which classes you have taken.

Given the informal nature of the extracurricular organization where the survey was distributed, the respondents emphasized personal reasons in both single and combined answers (nine responses). No responses were only in the educational category. Out of the thirteen students sampled, only two were native speakers and ten were currently enrolled or have taken a Russian class at UCF. Figure 4 provides a further breakdown of student responses.

Conclusion of Survey

After analyzing both Webcourses Canvas web postings and the distributed survey responses, it was found that culture accounts for a large majority of the reasons why students chose to take a particular language and is prevalent across all sample sizes. Furthermore, cultural aspects such as food, literature, history, and heritage were frequently mentioned. Topics included the Bolsheviks, Romanovs, ballet (Vagonova style), literature (Nabokov, Dostoevsky, and Chekov), circus, and tea. Stereotypical perspectives on the Cold War and Russian spy thrillers triggered curiosity.

Observing the class samples, at least three or more students were interested in learning Russian due to individual heritage or contact with other Russian speakers. Out of the three sample groups, Fall 2011 dominated with over six respondents stating reasons

for personal interaction with Russian speakers and five stating Russian/European Heritage. In reference with James P. Lantolf's summary of motives, students who had previous negative experiences with a language were not deterred completely from language learning (2000).

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT STUDY ABROAD JOURNALS

In addition to the student responses analyzed in this paper, nine study abroad journals were reviewed to extract relevant information on how culture might impact language learning. During the course of the study abroad program in Summer 2013, students were required to write a journal entry of 300 words or more every Tuesday and Friday for four weeks, documenting their learning during the previous day. The focus was to describe objects and events that students would not be exposed to within the normal classroom setting. In addition to this assignment, students were required to write in Russian at least one Russian word or cultural expression that would not come up in a Russian Language class taught in the United States.

Apart from these guidelines, students wrote journal entries in complete free association. Key highlights collected from student responses included students being able to visit on-site locations with authentic cultural materials. Students actively used the Moscow Metro as opposed to memorizing the metro map in the classroom. Likewise, the grandeur of the Bolshoi Theater can be introduced in class, but its gargantuan dimensions are only fully comprehended on location.

The journals addressed experiences with social and cultural norms including the affinity for haggling at Russian markets or bazaars. Regardless of their language proficiency, students who expressed confidence and ease toward informal transactions were pleased to receive great bargains. Some students mentioned both positive and negative social interactions. On a smaller scale of social interaction, students noticed less of an affinity for native Russians to smile or make casual small talk. However, this lack of social interaction was countered by prolonged eye-contact atypical of Americans. Conversely, during recreational and social events, cases of social friendliness increased in a comfortable and relaxed environment.

Public transportation often lacked clearly marked disability spots although announcements did inform passengers to give up their seats for the elderly and expecting. Social cues and passenger body language

indicated that it was appropriate to give up one's seat. This example presents information on cultural and societal behavior which could not have been duplicated in the classroom setting

It was observed that students who had pen pals through the *Connecting Classrooms* program gained a sense of empathy and compassion for being abroad and experiencing homesickness. Furthermore, students who previously traveled related their experiences to other locations visited. Within the classroom environment, Russian classes were offered in a full immersive language environment. However, despite mental exhaustion and communicative frustration, students showed an improved rate of speech and understanding. Some beginner students with no prior language exposure learned phrases the first night in Moscow and after three weeks stated that they felt confident enough to get through daily life in Russia without problems. Students learned daily vocabulary including numbers, food items, and days of the week. Through informal social gatherings, as well as through aphorisms and superstitious beliefs, students also incorporated slang into their newly acquired vocabulary. Within a month, students with no previous experience in the target language went from the pre-production language stage, silent period, to the early production. On average, the pre-production stage takes about six months to formulate (Yule, 2014). Within a week's learning time, students articulated whole phrases. Most students quickly adapted to a classroom environment that often was entirely in Russian. An outlier was one student, who had a high affective filter. The affective filter is a hypothesis that states that student anxiety inhibits language learning and students often have issues articulating their thoughts or competently showing their knowledge on a subject.

Certain cultural sites such as Yasnaya Polyana (Home of Leo Tolstoy) and the Pushkin Café were not ever exposed during traditional class interactions and knowledge of said locations was gained only during study abroad. During classroom sessions students learned words dealing with nature and geography and how they related to Tolstoy's estate. Traditional Russian dances such as the Kadril and other social games created communication bonds that broke down language barriers. Students perceived the historical and geographical significance of such natural landmarks as the Volga River. Based on journal entries, students placed strong cultural attention on the Orthodox churches and their presence in the landscape of both Moscow and St. Petersburg despite

75 years of Soviet rule. Students mentioned that there was a significant cultural pressure to abide by religious customs. Women were required to wear headscarves and skirts, and to cover their knees.

In terms of other cultural or social behaviors, consumption of water in public was very low. Restaurants do not offer large chilled glasses of water so many students adjusted and monitored their thirst. Students also experienced Russian social life during their visit to Sparrow Hills, a popular meeting location in Moscow showcasing a panoramic view of the city. Their impressions of the Russian mentality softened as they enjoyed the relaxed nature of social gatherings. Wedding celebrations are often a public affair and celebrated around the city during the day. Students learned the traditional wedding shout "gorka" (bitter), which is shouted toward the bride and groom so with a kiss they can sweeten things up. This is a real-life application of culture and language. The positive realization came quickly; in many ways, Russians are not so different from Americans. "Everyday Russian stereotypes are disproved," asserted one student.

Social expectations on school and education are generally stricter than in the United States. Students reported a greater emphasis on manners, respect, and professionalism between the teacher and student. The dress code is formal, and students are expected to dress business casual on their first day of class. The line between student and teacher is clearly drawn and teachers must be called by their first and patronymic name, for example "Anna Ivanova," the equivalent of "Ms. Brown." While in St. Petersburg, students experienced the option of having different instructors each day, giving them exposure to multiple teaching techniques and practices.

The students experienced a culture shock after seeing poorly leveled and unmaintained sidewalks, dill in most culinary dishes, and a significant display of military presence yet less civic patriotism, particularly on Russia Day. Russians perceive military and police presence as the physical admiration of power, as opposed to the patriotic reverence many American citizens have of their armed forces. In Russia, military presence personifies order and control, not necessarily freedom. Other surprises included the punctuality and efficiency of public transportation despite the perceived lack of traffic laws and aggressive driving, a frequent response being a disregard for the formal law. Conversely, there is an urgency by the Russian government to restore the cathedrals and historical landmarks to no longer

represent the old communist traditions. In particular, visiting the Mausoleum, seeing Lenin's tomb and his cadaver, is a culture shock to almost anyone, communist or not.

Some students quickly adjusted to the food while others took longer to adapt. Documentation and the importance of internal passport identification was a top priority no matter what the location was. The fast-pace of Moscow mirrors the metropolitan "always in a hurry" tempo that characterizes major U.S. cities. Upon returning to the United States, students also experienced reverse culture shock. Students reported being surprised by the frequent smiling in America.

On average, it took students two to three weeks to adjust and recover from any culture shock. There was a positive correlation between students who had traveled previously and their ability to adapt more easily to the culture. Some students, those who possibly had not traveled outside the country before, were distressed about adapting to the food, climate, and transportation. The fast and steep escalator in the Moscow metro was particularly a cause for concern and was labeled as a "uniquely Russian experience." Smaller shops or "hole in the wall" kiosks are more prominent in Russia, complicating the language barrier and forcing more interaction between the sales clerk and the buyer, in this case, an American student with limited knowledge of Russian.

Perceptions and distances of personal space are narrower. There were some distinct body odor issues due to the lack of air conditioning or proper hygiene in public transportation systems. Most buildings lacked heavy air conditioning. Western conveniences such as recycling and consistent trash collection were not prominent, showing that there is less emphasis on social responsibility in public cleanliness. Overall, routine maintenance of roads and streets and their quality is contingent upon the location in the city. Rural areas generally receive less maintenance and public resources. All of the mentioned study abroad observations are critical in vocabulary acquisition, sentence articulation, and thought formation. Full language immersion strongly relates to student experiences, enhancing their desired cultural, educational, and social goals.

CONCLUSION

While this study does not offer a conclusive answer to the question of how student motivation impacts the

acquisition of a second language, it offers a concrete analysis utilizing a real life foundational example of student foreign language learning. This research highlights and exemplifies the importance of cross-cultural communication, supplemental programs such as study abroad, and language learning based on the socio-cultural theory. The findings that have been presented suggest a diverse language approach stemming from primal motives. The activity theory asserts that every activity has a motive. Educators must be conscious of student motives to adapt their pedagogical methods toward them. Additionally, culture accounts for a large portion of language learning, and intercultural competence is essential for the full utilization of a language. When teaching a foreign language, instructors must be conscious of student motives and of the target language's culture. Without these two components, language learning is reduced to a one-sided, incomplete skill. Understanding these two factors is crucial for the pedagogical field to train educators, reach students, and make language learning go beyond the textbook so that students genuinely interact with and understand the cultural differences of the world.

APPENDIX

Figure 1. Other Languages Students Mentioned Having Knowledge of (Fall 2011 and Fall 2012)

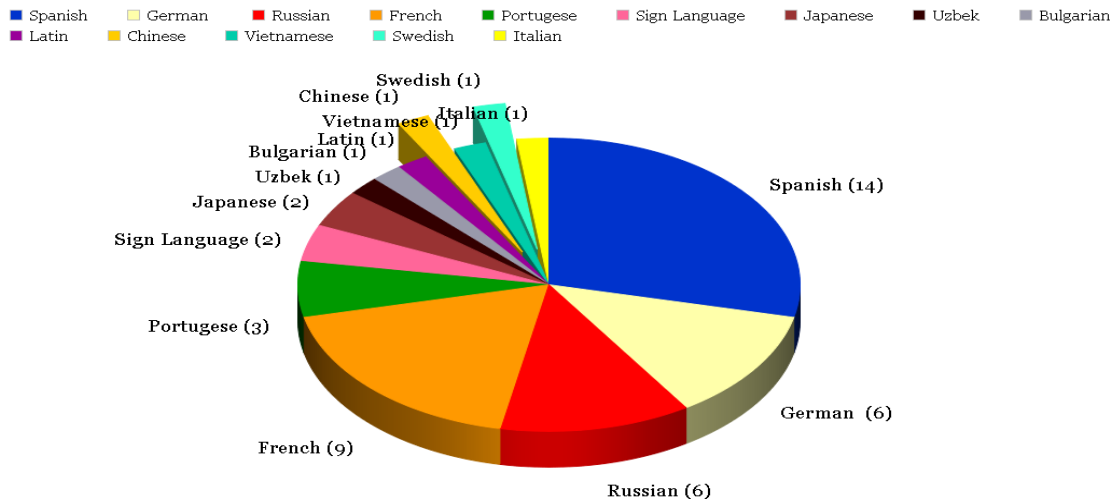


Figure 2. Why Students Chose to Study Russian Fall 2011

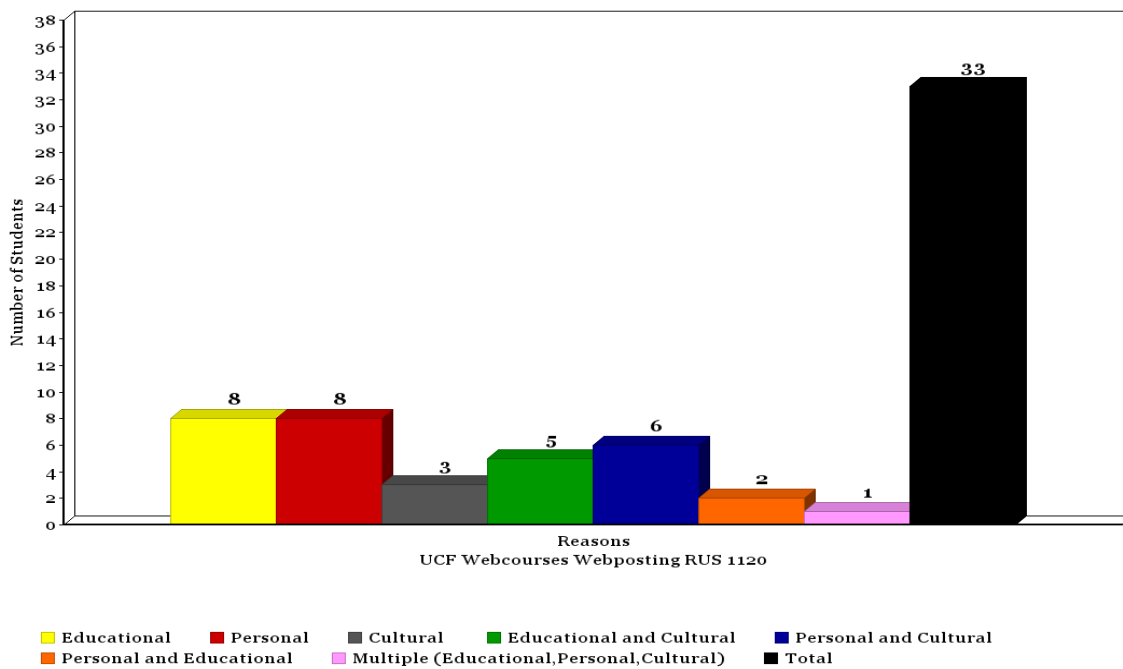


Figure 3. Why Students Chose to Study Russian Fall 2012

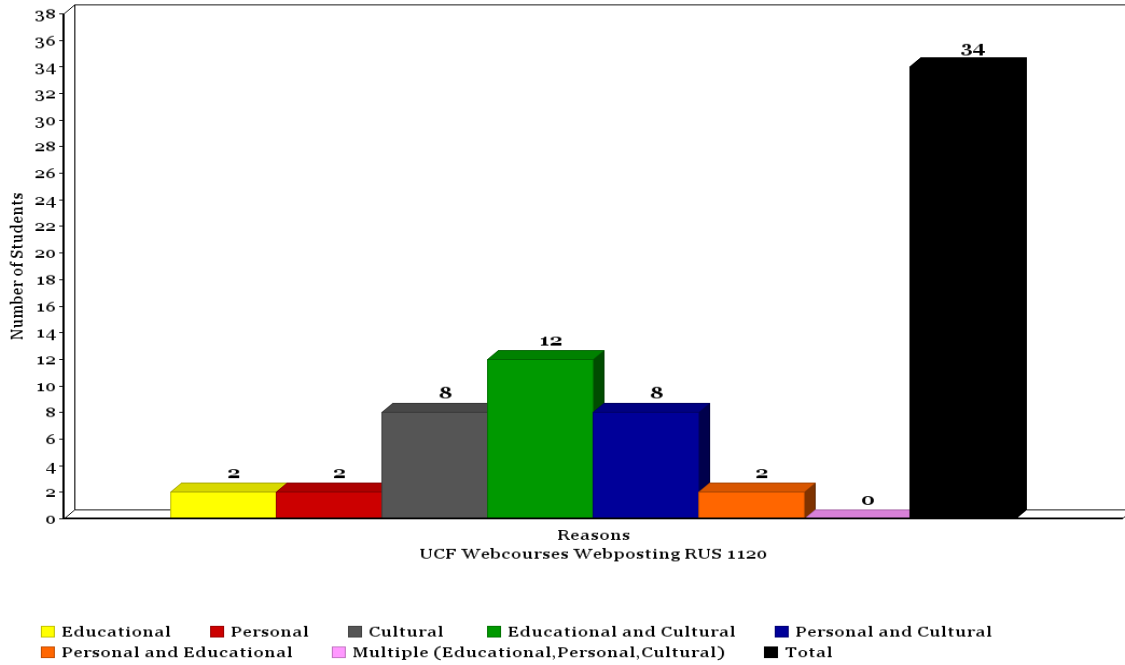
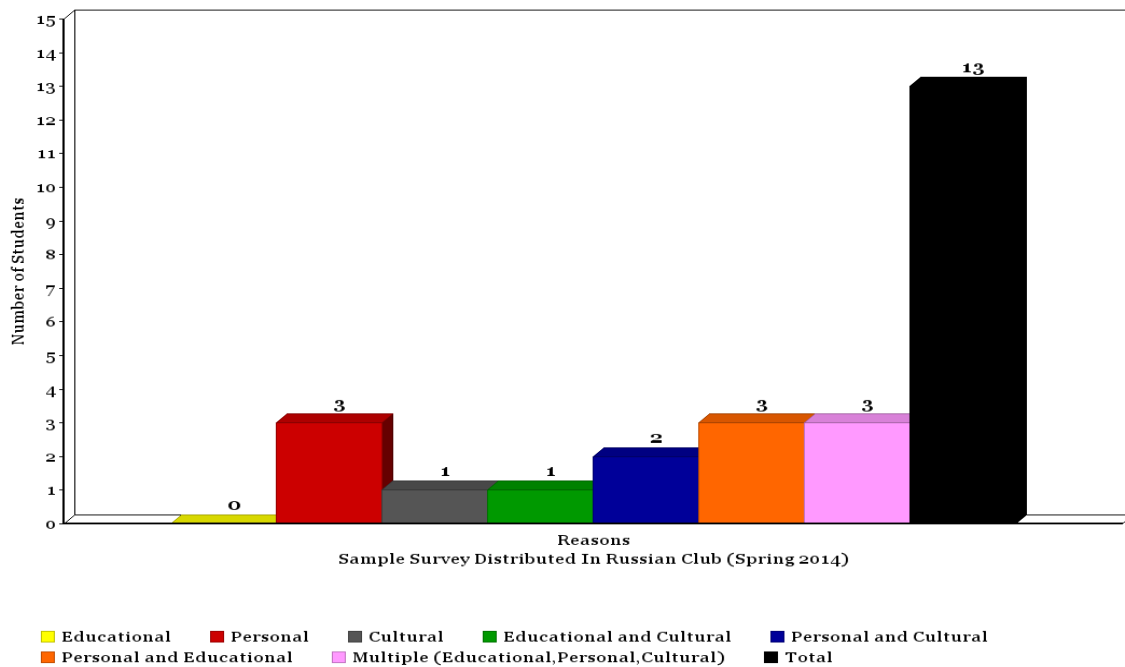


Figure 4. Why Are You Interested in Russian?



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