A Language Curriculum for a Spanish Immersion Program in Guatemala

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the grade of Master of Leadership in Teaching (M. Ed.)

Carthage College

Kenosha, Wisconsin

Spring 2016
ABSTRACT

This project aimed to develop a curriculum for the 2016 Guatemala J-Term program offered by Carthage College. This program consisted of an almost one-month experience in which students were immersed in the culture and language of Nuevo Horizonte, a rural Guatemalan community. The curriculum included seven activities that intended to enhance the students’ oral proficiency in Spanish. Other skills such as reading, writing and listening were also included so as to help students to improve their overall language competency. Seventeen Spanish students participated and completed the intended curriculum, which was conducted entirely in Spanish. Students’ language gains were measured through pre- and post-stay interviews. The data showed that virtually all students improved to some extent, fluidity of speech being the variable that presented the greatest gains. Other areas such as grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition presented substantial gains as well. In addition, questionnaires and journals were utilized to track both the students’ use of Spanish and their language development. These accounts provided important information in terms of the linguistic challenges that students at more advanced levels experience as they work towards attaining a proficient command of Spanish. In sum, the present project provides a reference model for future short-term study abroad programs, and suggests clear linguistic benefits that may be relevant for future students and instructors alike.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Emilio and Conchita, and my sister, Rebeca, for their unconditional love and support. No podría haber llegado hasta aquí sin vosotros. Gracias por creer en mí y por animarme a perseguir mis sueños. Este trabajo os lo dedico a vosotros.

I would like to thank the panel of experts as well as committee members Maribel Morales and Dennis Munk for their feedback and help in conducting this project. I appreciate all your comments and suggestions, they made this project richer. A special thanks goes to the chair of the committee, Edward Montanaro. Thank you for being there from the start, for helping me throughout this project, and for giving me the opportunity to discover Guatemala. This is an experience I will never forget.

I would also like to thank all those people who have supported, guided and comforted me throughout these two years. Friends back home and those spread across the globe, thank you for staying by my side despite the distance. To my dear TLE friends, thank you for all our moments together and for the life-long friendships we have built together. You have certainly made it all worth it.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all the people who took part in the 2016 Guatemala study tour. To the students, thank you for the happy moments and adventures we shared together. To the people of Nuevo Horizonte, thank you for showing us the value and beauty of life.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This project aims to develop a curriculum for a short-term study abroad program for Carthage College that will consist of an almost one-month experience in which students will be immersed in the culture and language of a rural Guatemalan community. Secondly, the researcher will assess whether the immersion experience in Guatemala leads to noticeable language gains, particularly in oral production. The program will take place in January during the J-term.

J-term Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad programs have become increasingly common in higher education. Not only do they provide students with important life experience, but they also enable them to develop their linguistic and cultural knowledge. Learning about a new culture and its people, discovering new interests and developing language proficiency are some of the reasons why students decide to engage in a study abroad program. Study abroad is an especially powerful tool for students seeking to improve their language skills. Being in a context where the target language is spoken, along with the numerous interactions this facilitates, promotes the development of the students’ level of proficiency and enhances their confidence and motivation in using the language.

Carthage College is well aware of the benefits study abroad programs entail, and thus offers a vast array of opportunities for students to travel abroad, especially during the so-called “J-Term”, which usually takes place during the month of January. These programs seek to foster intercultural and global awareness that is to open the horizons and broaden the minds of the students who participate in the study tours. In addition,
language learning and development is encouraged and becomes the main goal of many J-term trips. The present project “A Language Curriculum for a Spanish Immersion Program in Guatemala” offered students the opportunity to spend a month immersed in the culture and language of a small community located in the province of Petén, in northern Guatemala. The authenticity of the setting and the constant contact with native speakers of Spanish enabled students to improve their competences in ways that would not have been otherwise available in the sometimes-constrained classroom setting.

In regard to language development, study abroad programs have been widely contrasted and compared to traditional language instruction classrooms. The findings have suggested that the amount of time spent speaking or hearing the target language as well as the opportunities to practice it tend to be limited in the classroom setting of countries where the target language is not spoken. In this context, students studying a second or foreign language often lack opportunities to practice communicative skills with speakers outside of the classroom. Further, the amount of direct input received is virtually nonexistent outside of the classroom setting. Language becomes a compendium of abstract communicative situations that cannot be tried out outside of the classroom since opportunities to speak the target language are nonexistent or not sufficient.

In contrast, immersion programs help to provide students linguistic knowledge and proficiency achievement, and to expand their cultural horizons. Immersion programs aim to give opportunities for students to grow at all levels. Authenticity, immediacy and amount of communicative interchanges are some of the advantages at hand for students embarking in such experiences.
In this sense, Guatemala provides a perfect environment to further improve both language skills and cultural awareness. Spanish is the main language spoken in the country, which increments the chances of students’ engaging in conversations with native speakers, thus emitting and receiving output and input respectively. Living and working together with native speakers will make the experience more authentic in terms of language use, and will enable the students to test, assess and maybe reconsider and change their assumptions regarding the correct use of the target language. The fact that the program will take place in a small remote community somewhat guarantees that Spanish will be widely used as the only means of communication.

**Project Goals**

The Spanish Language Immersion J-Term Program established goals to be achieved upon completion of the study tour. These goals dealt with students’ improving their overall oral language competency. The development of other skills such as listening, reading, writing, and cultural awareness was also underscored. Hence the researcher set the following goals:

- **Improvement of oral competence**

  One of the main goals is the improvement of oral skills. Students will use Spanish as the only means of communication from day one. They will engage in constant interactions with both native speakers and peers, which is expected to enhance the students’ oral skills. In addition, their participation in academic as well as cultural activities, which also involve interaction, are intended to favor a deeper and more complex usage of the oral language. The researcher seeks to create a rich setting for acquisition that will lay the ground for and foster students’ acquisition.
• Vocabulary acquisition
In working and living together with community members, students will learn words that refer to daily objects, activities and realities that are typical to the target culture. For instance, vocabulary related to kitchen utensils, tools, or animals. Furthermore, students will also learn vocabulary from the readings assigned throughout the study tour.

• Improvement of grammatical accuracy
Students will also improve their grammatical accuracy in the oral medium. The study abroad context is to provide students with authentic grammar practice and input. Even at advanced levels, students tend to be hesitant when using grammatical forms that are not so commonly used within the language classroom. That is the case of the future tense or some forms of the subjunctive. As a consequence, students tend to avoid the use of these forms. The study abroad intends to provide students with a context where they can try and test their language hypotheses insofar as grammar is concerned, and work towards improving the use of these forms.

• Development of cultural awareness
Not only does the program center on the enhancement of the students’ language skills, but also on their cultural development. Even though culture is a concept too broad and complex to be generalized, the study abroad intends to give the students an insight into a different culture and the life experiences of its members. In other words, it is to deepen their understanding of the complexity lying behind the word culture.
• Reflection on learning / Learning awareness

Students will learn to reflect on their language development. Their interlanguage will be undergoing several cognitive processes that will raise the curiosity of many a student. It is important to reflect on these changes so that they can maximize the outcome of such changes. Also, learning to reflect on language may become a useful tool in their future learning.

• Increase students’ self-confidence when using the target language

It is intended that after a month immersed in the target language students will increase their self-confidence in using the language. In the foreign language setting, the interactions in the target language tend to be limited to the interchanges with professors or other peers. The fact that they know both groups eases the anxiety that arises when speaking in the target language. Many students may not be used to speaking Spanish with native speakers, and it is an important goal for them to develop sufficient confidence to engage in interchanges with both native and non-native speakers alike as this is to enhance their overall oral proficiency and comprehension.

Statement of the problem

College students studying languages often lack opportunities to be immersed in the target culture and language. Spanish majors at Carthage are required to spend at least one semester abroad, which increases their chances of developing a higher level of proficiency in the target language. However, Spanish minors at Carthage are not required to study abroad and are not always able to arrange even a short-term study abroad. Finances and the competing demands of their other majors or minors are the most
common reasons why Spanish minors do not study abroad, either for a semester or for a shorter period. As a result, Spanish minors often lack an appropriate command of Spanish even after completing the minor. The dearth of authentic learning settings coupled with an often-limited language practice leads to lack of confidence in speaking the language, thus diminishing the likelihood that the student will achieve higher levels of proficiency. In other words, interaction with speakers of the language is a crucial component insofar as language development is concerned. Thus not having been part of a community where the target language was spoken is likely to affect the students’ communicative skills and overall language command.

Hence there exists a need to provide Spanish students with a feasible study abroad that does not interfere with their other majors and minors. In this context, a short-term study abroad offers a plausible solution. The project “A Language Curriculum for a Spanish Immersion Program in Guatemala” is to facilitate the accessibility of a short-term study abroad for Spanish students, especially Spanish minors. In so doing, immersion in the target culture, constant reception of authentic input as well as oral and written practice are to help students to move towards the proficiency skills that ought to be characteristic of speakers of Spanish as a second language.

Purpose of the project

This project has two purposes. The first is to design a curriculum that will be implemented during the 2016 Guatemala J-term program. The curriculum, addressed to Spanish students above the 2020 level who participate in the study tour, will allow students to improve their language competences, gain more fluency and confidence when using the language, and appreciate and get immersed in the target culture. The researcher
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intends to enhance the learning potential of the students to the fullest by means of culturally authentic language interchanges and carefully designed activities. The second goal is to assess the language gains yielded during the short-term study abroad.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presents the project “A Language Curriculum for a Spanish Immersion Program in Guatemala”, and discusses the goals and objectives set for its fulfillment.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the present project is to design a curriculum to be implemented on the 2016 J-term program, “A Language Curriculum for a Spanish Immersion Program in Guatemala” and that will serve as a model for future language study tours. The curriculum, addressed to Spanish students above the 2020 level who participate in the program, will allow students to improve their language skills, gain more fluency and confidence in using Spanish, and learn about the target culture. This chapter will provide the theoretical underpinnings that support this project as well as a review of the research literature available regarding immersion and study abroad programs.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Krashen’s (1983) so-called Input Hypothesis laid the foundation for many of the theories of second language acquisition existent today. According to the hypothesis, “We acquire (not learn) language by understanding input that is a little beyond our current level of (acquired) competence” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 32). These authors argue that the acquirer, as they put it, acquires the language by receiving comprehensible input that is a little beyond their current level of acquisition. This concept was referred to as the i+1 stage, the i representing the current level of acquisition and the 1 being the “Stage immediately following i along some natural order” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 32). In order to understand this idea, it should be noted that, according to Krashen and Terrell, language acquisition works gradually, that is, the features of a language are acquired gradually following a logical and natural order. This is also known as the Natural Order Hypothesis. This applies both to the acquisition of the first language as it does for foreign
languages. Similarly, this input also needs to be accompanied by contextual cues that, together with the comprehensible input, are to facilitate language acquisition. In this vein, study abroad contexts become suitable environments for acquisition as they afford massive amounts of uninterrupted contact with the language.

One might wonder what characteristics input ought to consist of to promote language acquisition. Krashen and Terrell distinguish two different types of input: finely tuned input and roughly tuned input. The former is defined as input that has been carefully crafted in accordance to the acquirer’s level of acquisition and that only addresses a specific number of linguistic structures. It is a type of input that namely focuses on the formal aspects of language. On the contrary, the latter aims at having the acquirer understand a message rather than having him or her focus on just specific linguistic features or structures. In taking into account this distinction, it could be argued that roughly tuned is somewhat more authentic in nature since it offers a more clear-cut representation of the real usage of the language, and it is not artificially tailored to include a particular structure or set of words. These features characterize the type of input that has been said to lead to acquisition.

Another aspect worth highlighting regarding the input hypothesis is that of caretaker speech, or, in the case of second language acquisition, foreigner talk. These terms designate the “Modifications native speakers make when talking to non-native speakers” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 34). This phenomenon had been observed in child language acquisition and it was believed to be equally applicable to conversations among native and non-native speakers. Native speakers tend to talk in a much simpler manner when addressing non-native speakers so as to facilitate communication among the parties.
This type of speech encompasses the idea of the i+1 stage mentioned above: language is simplified to ensure comprehension of the non-native speaker, but it may still go beyond the learners’ level of acquisition. In relation to the distinction of the different types of input, the input received by the non-native speakers comes in the form of *roughly tuned input*, which, as mentioned above, leads to acquisition.

It could be argued that this approach to acquisition is unidirectional in the sense that it accounts for acquisition as the result of input reception, while it seems to overlook the importance of the learner’s output in the acquisition process. This gap in the theory was revised by the interactionists, who acknowledged the twofold nature of learning and the importance of both input and output (Gass 1997; Myles, 2013). The proponents of this theory centered on interaction, which refers to that exchange of input and output, as an indicator of language acquisition (Chapelle, 2009). They still believed input to be a crucial component for acquisition, but contended that input on its own was not sufficient to attain language proficiency (see: Gass 1997). Therefore, they examined “The role of any output produced by the learner, as well as the interactional patterns between learners and other conversational partners” (Myles, 2013).

As stated in Mackey, Abduhl, and Gass’s (2012) discussion of Swain’s (1985) output hypothesis, “Producing output plays a crucial role in the development of the L2, as it (a) gives learners the opportunity to practice and thus to automatize the production of language; (b) allows learners to test hypotheses concerning the L2; (c) forces learners to focus on structure of the language; (d) and draws learners attention to gaps in their interlanguage” (p. 8). In this sense, study abroad programs favor situations where interactions are unavoidable. Hence it is believed that they are beneficial for the learners
in that they allow for numerous opportunities to receive and produce input and output respectively.

A third way of conceiving second language acquisition is offered by sociocultural theorists. The Sociocultural Theory (SCT) was based on the theories of Vygotsky and his contemporaries, and was elaborated by linguists such as Lantolf and Thorne (2007). The SCT sought to gain a better understanding not only of the interactions themselves, but also of their nature and the factors surrounding them (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). This theory proposed a holistic approach to SLA, which advocated for a deeper understanding of sociocultural relations and how they affect the development and improvement of the learner’s second language (L2). This approach also placed a greater emphasis on the relationship between language, culture, and the social context where interactions occur. Language cannot be understood without taking into account the elements that make it alive and thus should not be studied in isolation, but in conjunction with social and cultural cues/factors.

The SCT argues that “Human mental functioning is fundamentally a mediated process that is organized by cultural artifacts, activities and concepts” (Cited in Lantolf by Ratner 2002 p. 201). In this sense, the learning outcome results from a mediated process derived from cultural artifacts, language being their main component. Language is thus perceived as a crucial means for learning. It should be noted that language is not limited to the linguistic forms that comprise it, but rather it is perceived from a broader perspective, which not only encompasses linguistic elements, but also cultural and historical cues.
In this regard, the culture and beliefs with which an individual lives shape his or her ways of thinking and therefore model language. The SCT acknowledges this relationship and potentiates the interconnection of the influence culture and language exert on each other. In this context, language, understood as the binominal language and culture, is to “Mediate the relationship between the individual and the social material world” (Ratner 2002 as cited in Lantolf & Thorne 2007, p. 203). Hence insofar as language acquisition is concerned, it becomes necessary to understand the culture in order to comprehend how the language relates to the social setting.

This connects with the idea of internalization, which is defined in the theory as “The process through which cultural artifacts, such as language, take on a psychological function” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 207). In other words, it is after individuals have been exposed to language in a social setting that they internalize it. As a result of this internalization, language forms are acquired and learned. This implies that learning starts at a social level.

In conclusion, the SCT helps provide an explanation of why interaction might contribute to the acquisition process. By adding the sociocultural component to the theory previously proposed by the interactionists, this new approach provides a better understanding of the acquisition process. In relation to study abroad programs, this theory suggests that non-touristic types of study abroad that are rich in unavoidable interactions that feature authentic communicative purposes are likely to contribute substantially to acquisition. Given the abundant number of interactions that a study abroad affords, the SCT foresees some of the benefits study abroad programs may offer to language students.
Studies on Study Abroad Programs:

As the theoretical background presented suggests, input reception and output production within interactional interchanges that take place in an authentic social setting become a suitable premise for learning. If language acquisition is to be effective, it has to occur in a culturally authentic environment where both linguistic forms and cultural cues are underscored. In this sense, stays abroad provide a perfect mode for learning since learners become imbued with the language and the culture that surround the speakers from the target language.

The number of students participating in study abroad programs have burgeoned in the past few years and as a result, a considerable number of studies have centered their research on investigating whether these programs are effective means for learning and if so, what aspects are improved and what variables affect the extent to which these are developed. There exist many assumptions regarding the effectiveness of studies abroad. The starting point towards determining the validity of these assumptions has been to compare abroad programs with regular classroom instruction in places where the target language is not spoken in the social context.

Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004) investigated whether the context of learning influenced the extent to which oral fluidity was improved. In their study, they compared and measured the differences in terms of level of language acquisition in three different contexts: at home, immersion, and study abroad. Twenty-eight students of French participated in the study. The data were collected through interviews, which were conducted before and after the completion of the respective programs.
Results indicated that the group of students who had participated in the immersion program presented greater linguistic gains and a better overall oral proficiency. One of the underlying reasons seemed to be the time students spent writing in and speaking the target language outside of the class. Time speaking the target language in the abroad context has long been highlighted as an important predictor for language development. However, Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004) here also discussed the impact of writing in the learner’s oral skills. As they noted, students in the immersion program devoted a considerable amount of time to out-of-class writing activities, which resulted in increased fluency in the post-stay interviews. Students in the immersion program also reported using little English, as opposed to the other two contexts where the use of English became more recurrent. Students were assigned to complete written assignments that required them to search for information from different sources in the target language. This fostered language use as well as language improvement. It also suggests the importance of having students engage in as many activities as possible.

In the same way, Hernández (2010) examined the role of motivation and interaction in the improvement of language skills in the two contexts aforementioned: abroad and traditional classroom. For this purpose, the researcher interviewed 44 Spanish students who pertained to two groups: those studying in their home country and those participating in SA programs. The subjects were interviewed before and after their respective language programs in order to gauge the level of language improvement. The findings revealed that motivation was a central factor in both groups. However, in regard to interaction, students participating in the stay abroad demonstrated greater significant gains possibly owing to the fact that the opportunities to interact with other speakers of
the language were considerably more abundant in the abroad context. In light of this results, Hernández (2010) concluded that study abroad programs seem to fulfill some of the learning gaps of the traditional language classroom.

In another comparative study, Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) investigated the impact of a short-term study abroad on listening comprehension skills, and compared the results to the language gains of another group of students enrolled in a similar course conducted in the home country. The participants were divided into two groups: 48 students in the study abroad; and 92 students in the course in the home country. The participants’ listening abilities were measured before and after the completion of the program. Contrary to the researchers’ assumptions, the stay abroad group did not seem to demonstrate greater gains than the home-country group. Virtually all students progressed to a similar extent with the exception of the more advanced students, for whom the study abroad yielded far more significant linguistic gains. This may suggest that short-term studies abroad might be more beneficial for students at the advanced level.

Some differences, however, were identified between the two groups. First, the strategies students utilized when tackling listening tasks seemed to be divergent between the two groups. In this sense, the abroad group made use of more complex and sophisticated metacognitive strategies such as “Self-management, self-evaluation, and intentional focus” (Cubillos et al. 2008, p. 174). In contrast, the on-campus group used bottom-up strategies, which Cubillos et al. discussed as “Strategies which manifest themselves in less successful learners” (p. 173). Furthermore, the abroad context provided students with far more opportunities to socialize with native speakers. Not only
did this promote interaction, but also an increase in the student’s self-confidence when using the language orally.

Anderson and Lawton (2011) examined the development of cultural awareness in study abroad and the language classroom. For this purpose, they conducted two tests: The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), and The Global Perspective Inventory (GPI). These measured the development of cultural competence, and the impact of life experiences such as a study abroad. The tests were administered before and after the completion of each program to examine whether students enhanced their cultural awareness, and, if so, to what extent. Subjects were divided into three different groups depending on the context of their learning: a group of students studying abroad, and two groups of students in their home country, one of them consisted of business students and the other one of humanities and arts students. The respective sample size of the groups was 39, 41, and 39.

Results showed that even though all participants started off with a similar level of intercultural awareness, the students who participated in the study abroad demonstrated richer cultural knowledge. Their scores in the two tests were considerably higher than those of their home counterparts. Given the importance of cultural awareness in language acquisition, these findings, too, suggest important advantages of the abroad experience.

Together, these studies suggest that study abroad is superior to the traditional language classroom in that it fosters a greater improvement of oral skills and cultural awareness. The next step towards understanding this conclusion is to determine the factors that promote language gains during the study abroad. In this sense, understanding the factors that favor language acquisition appears vital for the planning of study abroad.
programs. The sections below will review the two main predictors highlighted in the existing literature: interaction with native speakers and a structured curriculum. In addition, a brief section will be dedicated to the discussion of the development of cultural competency and other linguistic skills. It should be noted that the following studies may refer to either long or short-term study abroad programs. The literature on short-term study abroad programs is limited, and since the purpose of this review is to obtain a better understanding on language gains abroad, both types of studies will be discussed. This will enable the researcher to draw some general conclusions on language development in the abroad context.

**Interaction with Native Speakers**

Magnan and Back (2007) investigated the relationship between social interaction and language gains in a study abroad program in France. Twenty-four students participated in the study. Their linguistic improvement was measured by three different devices: the so-called Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), a revised version of the Language Contact Profile (LCP), and pre- and post-departure questionnaires. The findings showed that approximately 60% of students improved one level in the OPI, while the remaining 40% scored at the same level. Language contact seemed to enhance language gain, however the nature of this contact remained elusive. In relation to language contact, the researchers noted the detrimental effect interaction with other American peers seemed to have on language development. This contrasts with other pieces of research that support the benefits of peer-to-peer interaction (Hardison, 2014). Some students commented on this as well and regretted having not interacted as much with native speakers of French. This highlights the importance of promoting linguistic
exchanges between students and native speakers. Language contact also seemed to foster an increase in the students’ self-confidence and ultimately fluidity of speech. Self-confidence was discussed as an important predictor for language gain. Another predictor was prior coursework. According to Magnan and Back, advanced French coursework enhanced the students’ language development. This suggests that having students take advanced language courses before participating in a program might maximize the potential linguistic advantages of a study abroad.

In his study, Yager (1998) studied the impact of informal interactive and non-interactive out-of-class contact on students’ language gains in a summer program in Mexico. Thirty students, whose level ranged from beginning to advanced, participated in the study. They were interviewed before and after the program so as to measure the impact of the program in their overall oral skills. As an assessment method, the researcher had native speakers evaluate and grade the students’ performance. The researcher argued that this assessment method would account for subtler improvements that other assessment tools such as the OPI are not able to perceive. The findings demonstrated that greater interactive contact led to significant overall language gains. This was true for beginner and advanced students. In turn, non-interactive contact such as newspaper reading or TV watching did not seem to influence the participants’ oral skills. These did seem to affect positively, however, their grammatical knowledge. One might thus deduce that a combination of both interactive and non-interactive contact during the study abroad may yield broader and more far-reaching language gains.

Another important predictor regarding interaction has been the learner’s participation and identity as a member of a social network. As defined by Dewey, Bown,
and Eggett (2012), “A social network is a structure comprised of individuals who are connected with others by one or more specific types of interdependency such as friendship, kinship or common interests” (p. 114). It is believed that when learners feel they belong to a community of speakers, their motivation and attachment to the language grows. As a result, they are more likely to use the language more actively, which ultimately fosters language acquisition.

In their study, Dewey, Bown, and Eggett (2012) studied the connection between social networks, language use, and oral skills development in a study abroad program in Japan. The participants in the study were 204 undergraduate students who spent one academic year in Japan. In order to gauge the relationship between the variables mentioned above, the participants completed three different tests: A then-now survey of their oral skills; a revised version of the language contact profile (LCP), which measured self-reported language use; and the Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (SASIQ), which accounted for the students’ participation in social networks. Through the examination of students’ responses to the three different questionnaires, the researchers aimed to gain a better understanding of how the three elements aforementioned intertwined in the study abroad context.

Results showed that students accounted for improvements in fluidity of speech and vocabulary use. They also reported language gains in tasks pertaining to the intermediate and advanced levels according to the standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). However, students did not perceive substantial linguistic gains in tasks of a superior level. In response to this finding, Dewey et al. suggest that “It is possible that learners’ level of exposure to superior-level
exchanges outside of class will be limited, in particular if they are relying strictly on informal conversations with native interlocutors” (p. 124). Hence they suggested that course instructors require students to complete assignments that deal with superior-level tasks so as to provide them with more complex tasks that may yield greater language gains. Another important finding had to do with the role participation in social networks played on students’ learning. In this line, the researchers contended that “The more social groups a person reported belonging to, the greater gains he or she tended to indicate in speaking proficiency” (Dewey et al., p. 126). This study thus concludes that the students’ completion of superior-level tasks as well as their participation in various social networks are two central predictors for language gain during the stay abroad.

In the same vein, Isabelli-García (2006) examined the role of motivation, culture and the building of social networks in the learning process of four students while studying abroad. Her research was based on the assumption that increased motivation and openness towards the target culture fostered the learners’ participation in social networks, which is ultimately believed to enhance language acquisition. In regard to the three variables evaluated, the researcher asserted that there was great interconnection among them and that changes in any of them affected the outcome of the other variables. In line with interactionist approaches to language acquisition, the researcher contended that the learner’s participation in social networks “Provides opportunities to notice gaps and engage in scaffolding that promotes restructuring of the interlanguage” (Isabelli-García, 2006, p. 236).

The findings underscored the relationship between the three factors aforementioned. The findings also suggested that learners who had higher motivation
and, as a result, engaged in more social networks, were more apt to develop greater language gains. It should also be noted that the students’ openness to the target culture was central, as their cultural awareness enabled them to eliminate prejudices and embrace the customs of the host country. This reinforced the importance of emphasizing cultural awareness in study abroad contexts.

In another study, Rob A. Martinsen (2008) investigated the impact of students’ interactions with native speakers, their degree of motivation, their command of the language as well as their cultural awareness as potential predictors of language gains in a six-week study abroad program. The sample size was 45 students. The participants had to complete two tasks before and after the study abroad. The data were revised and studied by native Spanish-speakers, who assessed the participants’ pronunciation, fluidity of speech, grammatical and lexical accuracy, and overall comprehensibility. The results signaled significant gains insofar as oral skills were concerned. More specifically, motivation and cultural awareness were key when quantifying linguistic gains.

One of Martinsen’s findings conflicts with the findings of earlier study abroad research. According to the study, students’ interactions with native speakers did not lead to significant linguistic gains. Martinsen explains that “The interactions students have during study abroad can be repetitive or simple enough that they do not push the students to improve” (p. 516). This may be due to the fact that during the study abroad, learners tend to engage in quotidian or basic interactions. Those interchanges do not require complex linguistic processes on the part of the learner, which comes down to the dichotomy of quantity versus quality. Martinsen’s conclusion suggests the importance of designing study abroad programs in a manner that offers some structure in terms of
contents and interactions. This would facilitate the students’ participation in interactions that require more complex cognitive processes. A similar study by Badstübner and Ecke (2009) arrived at the same conclusion. As the authors put it, “A great amount of contact with native speakers alone does not suffice but […] there is a complex interplay of different factors leading to proficiency gains, one of them being quality and depth of the interaction with native speakers” (p. 47).

**Importance of Program Design**

Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, and Eggett (2014), investigated the factors that influenced the students’ language use during study abroad. The researchers argued that merely being in a context where the target language is spoken is not sufficient for the learner to improve his or her oral competence because there is no guarantee that the learner will participate in interactions with native speakers. Therefore, they were interested in what predicts foreign language use and acquisition. Seven factors were considered: Intercultural sensitivity, personality, initial second language proficiency, social networks, gender, age, and program variables. These variables were measured through five different tests: The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; intercultural sensitivity), the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI; oral proficiency), the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFII; personality), Language Log (language use), and the Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (SASIQ; social networks). The sample size was 118 participants who completed all the tests aforementioned.

Results showed that program design, which included language used in course work and context of academic work, was the strongest predictor of language use. As the researchers put it, the structure of language programs influences the extent to which
learners use the target language. It could be thus surmised that in designing programs that foster language use (in academic settings), the learner may experience greater language gains.

Hardison (2014) examined the development of oral skills of 24 German learners participating in a short-term study abroad in Germany. The researcher wanted to determine to what extent the amount and type of second language contact while abroad influenced the change in oral skills and the socio-affective profile of the learner. In order to do so, the researcher analyzed students’ pre and post-stay speech samples and responses to a cross-cultural interest and adaptability survey.

Results showed a significant improvement in oral skills. As Hardison suggested, this seemed to result from the student’s openness to the target culture and desire to improve their oral skills, which was referred to as affect. Affect foreshadowed the participation of students in interactions with native speakers. In this sense, the greater the affect, the more meaningful the interactions were, and, as a result, the more language development occurred. Lastly, the researcher noted the importance of the quality and depth of interactions. She, too, suggested that in order for interactions to yield language gains, they need to be meaningful, challenging, and of a negotiated nature. In relation to this, exchanges with other peers proved to be beneficial as they “Pushed their oral-skill development” further (p. 435). The rationale behind this was that learners, when interacting with one another, tended to incorporate negotiation as an essential component of the interchange. This is consistent with some interactionist approaches that regard negotiation as a tool to enhance language acquisition (Gass, 1997).
Brecht and Robinson (1993) conducted a qualitative study in which they analyzed language gain predictors and language-learning behaviors both from the students’ point of view. The participants were 658 students of Russian completing a one-semester study abroad in Russia. The researchers utilized field notes, fieldwork journals, interviews, and audiotapes as their data sources. Data were gathered over five consecutive semesters. The findings regarding language predictors showed that students “Who spoke more ‘Russian only’ gained more language competence than the students who used more English” (Brecht & Robinson, 1993, p. 13). Thus, there seemed to be a correlation between language use and language gains. However, the researchers noted that this was only true for the students who started the program with a higher level of proficiency, since they were more likely to stay in the target language. An interesting finding was that high-gainers, as they call them, reported spending a great part of their time interacting with a single Russian friend. This suggests the importance of promoting language tandems in fostering language acquisition.

In relation to students’ language-learning behavior, Brecht and Robinson discussed the role of classroom instruction during the study abroad. A large number of their students believed that the classroom instruction was “An important if not essential part in managing their out-of-class learning” (Brecht & Robinson, 1993p. 18). There were also some contrasting views on this as some students argued “That classes contributed little to their overall acquisition of Russian” (Brecht and Robinson, 1993, p. 19). These opposing views lend support to the idea of considering individual learner differences in designing study abroad programs.
Freed (1990) investigated the impact of interactive and non-interactive contact on grammatical achievement and oral proficiency during a six-week study abroad program in France. She was particularly interested in examining the reasons that led students to participate in out-of-class interchanges and whether these interactive or non-interactive activities yielded significant language gains. Thirty-eight students participated in the study. All students were enrolled in French courses that ranged from literature to language, depending on the learner’s level of proficiency. Various assessment tools were utilized, including achievement and proficiency tests, language contact profile, diaries, observations, and interviews. Participants had to complete all tests and interviews twice: pre- and post-stay. The findings showed that there was no relationship between students’ personal traits such as motivation and aptitude, and the likelihood of their engaging in out-of-class interactions.

In relation to language use, Freed concluded that “The amount of out-of-class contact in general does not seem to influence measurable class progress” (p. 472). Moreover, the learner’s level of proficiency was pivotal when gauging these gains. Students at lower levels of proficiency did seem to benefit from these out-of-class interactions. However, “Higher level students who have more or less mastered the language of daily activities profit less in a general way from oral/social interaction” (Freed, 2008, p. 473). As Freed noted, these out-of-class interactions tended to deal with everyday topics and conversations, which fail to challenge the student’s knowledge of the language, and to promote its further acquisition and improvement. In light of this finding, the researcher asserts that in order for more advanced students to experience significant language gains abroad, they need to engage in activities of a more literate and complex
nature. Hence, it can be concluded that different activities might benefit students in various manners depending on their proficiency level.

In another study, Barker-Smemoe, Dewey, Brown and Martinsen (2014) investigated the variables that affect linguistic gains during study abroad. More than 100 native speakers of English who were studying a second language abroad were interviewed before and after the stay abroad to determine the learners’ level of improvement. Length of the program ranged from short-term to semester-long. The researchers then divided the learners into “gainers” and “non-gainers” and compared their language gains to the following possible predictors: personality traits, participation in social networks, cultural sensitivity, amount of language use, gender, and age.

Results showed that more than 50% of the participants presented linguistic gains. Some factors that contributed to this finding were the construction of social networks, together with pre-program degree of cultural awareness and preprogram proficiency. In line with the studies mentioned above, the learner’s participation in social networks was highlighted as the strongest predictor of language gains. As Baker-Smemoe et al. put it, “The greater the number of native-speaking social groups that learners engage in, the more likely it is that learners’ L2 proficiency will develop over time” (p. 479). With regards to the other two predictors, it is significant that they both had to do with pre-program characteristics. This suggests that the success of the program does not only depend on what happens in the program, but also on external factors relates to the learners preprogram preparation. Lastly, language use did not seem to predict language gains in this study. This is consistent with previous studies that argue that quantity of interactions does not involve comparable quality.
Culture

Watson, Siska, and Wolfel (2013), proposed a three-tiered model for assessing the impact of study abroad programs on students’ language proficiency, cross-cultural awareness, and regional awareness. Their goal was to provide a more holistic view on the study abroad experience. The participants were 498 third and fourth-year students at the Military US Academy who participated in one-semester long SA programs in 14 different countries around the world. Their improvement in the three variables mentioned was measured through five formal assessment devices, which were administered before and after the stay abroad.

The findings showed an improvement in all of the three areas under analysis. In terms of language gains, the participants presented medium-to-large improvement between their pre and post linguistic performance. This signals significant benefits of the abroad experience. The enhancement of cross-cultural and regional awareness was also high, which may suggest a correlation between the three variables. Bearing this in mind, the researchers argued that it is central to gain cultural and regional knowledge so as to function in the foreign context. They believed that these variables ought to be considered holistically to maximize the benefits of study abroad programs. Moreover, they suggested the use of journals or portfolios to assess the learners’ improvement while abroad. These tools, they noted, may provide feedback, and may help students reflect on the success of their encounters both in terms of cultural and linguistic elements. Ultimately this may enable them to function more appropriately and in a native-like manner in the target context.
Other studies have discussed the benefits of stays abroad in terms of cultural and pragmatic development. In her study, Reynolds-Case (2013) investigated the impact of a short-term study abroad in Spain on the students’ recognition and appropriate use of the form *vosotros* (you plural). This form is particular to peninsular Spanish and as a consequence tends not to be widely used or taught in Spanish classes across the United States. The researcher was thus interested in first determining the students’ previous exposure to the form, and second analyzing whether a four-week study tour in Spain would be sufficient for students to use this form appropriately in different pragmatic situations. Ten students participated in the study. They completed pre and post-departure surveys as well as answered some short questions that were used to gauge their knowledge on this linguistic form.

Results showed that upon completion of the program students had increased their recognition and use of the pronoun *vosotros*. This was significant as it signaled the students’ improvement of their cultural competence. The *vosotros* form is an important trait of peninsular Spanish as well as a common informal form of address. Knowing how to address individuals in the target language involves being aware of what is socially acceptable, that is, being aware of cultural conventions. The present study evidences the usefulness of short-term study abroad programs in this regard. Moreover, another important finding was that “Students are indeed able to recognize and produce regional-specific linguistic variations even if they have not received previous exposure to, or direct instruction on, these variations in class” (Reynolds-Case, 2013, p. 319). This suggests the potential of study abroad programs in the acquisition of regional linguistic forms, which ultimately can make the learner’s speech more authentic.
Other Predictors

Golonka (2006) investigated the predictors of oral proficiency improvement during a one-semester study abroad program in Russia. Twenty-two undergraduate students participated in the study. The researcher aimed to determine what factors contributed to the students’ improvement from the intermediate to the advanced level in the so-called Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). In order to do so, the researcher compared the pre-stay interview scores of those who had improved one level (gainers) to those that had remained in the intermediate level (nullgainers). The interviews were analyzed in terms of five possible determinants or predictors: grammar, vocabulary, and accuracy (linguistic predictors) on the one hand, and self-corrected errors and sentence repair (metacognitive predictors) on the other.

Results suggest that students who had a higher knowledge of grammar were more prone to developing their speaking proficiency to a greater extent. Furthermore, self-corrections and repairs were also found to be an important language gain predictor. In this sense, students who tended to utilize self-corrections and repairs more frequently presented greater language gains. As Golonka (2006) put it, “Students who were attentive to form and made more corrections on the pre-immersion OPI gained more on the post-immersion OPI than did students who were less attentive to form” (p. 503). In light of this finding, the researcher suggests the potential benefits of enhancing the students’ metacognition skills so as to promote language gain not only abroad, but also in the traditional language classroom.
Summary of the Chapter

This chapter summarizes the literature pertinent to the design and implementation of study abroad experiences. It also highlights two main predictors of language acquisition during study abroad programs: interaction with native speakers, and importance of a structured program design. These were considered when designing and implementing the present project.
CHAPTER III

PROJECT CRITERIA

The purpose of the present project was to design and implement a language curriculum for the 2016 Guatemala J-term study tour. The program consisted of a twenty-seven-day stay in a rural community in Guatemala where Spanish was the only means of communication. This chapter defines the criteria that were present in the development and application of this project. There were two criteria: content and approach. With regard to the content criteria, they incorporated the areas of language that students were to develop and improve during the study abroad: grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, fluency, and confidence speaking Spanish. In addition, it was also intended that students developed a deeper understanding of Guatemalan culture, and would consequently raise their cultural awareness. The approach criteria were holistic in nature since they targeted different areas of language. As for the activities, they were hands-on and multidisciplinary. The activities involved students directly and entailed an active use of language. Further, they also involved cultural content, which accounted for the interdisciplinary nature of the activities.

The elements for inclusion in this project were as follows:

**Content Criteria:**

1. Grammatical accuracy: It was intended that students’ use of grammar would become more accurate after the study abroad. As discussed in the literature review, the reception of input enabled learners to test their hypotheses regarding grammar use. This similarly helped them to reflect on their language use and to improve the accuracy of their interlanguage. In turn, their output production enabled them to try out these hypotheses
and to further practice their correct usage. Some of the targeted grammatical forms in
which the researcher sought to observe improvement were the use of ser and estar, and
the correct use of the two main past tenses: preterit and imperfect.

2. Vocabulary: Students were to expand their vocabulary owing to the constant contact
with the language. Students received input from different sources: day-to-day
interactions, talks and workshops, and written sources such as a novel and some history
readings. The variety of these sources was to enable students to improve their vocabulary
both in formal and informal contexts.

3. Fluency: The program intended to help students to improve their fluency in the target
language. The immersive nature of the program aimed to provide students with numerous
opportunities to practice and develop their oral skills.

4. Confidence speaking the target language: The study tour intended to promote an
increase of the students’ self-confidence speaking Spanish. Confidence has been
highlighted across the literature as an important determinant for language use. Thus by
increasing the students’ confidence in using the language, it is likely that they will
similarly increase their use of the target language. Together with fluency, students were
to enhance their ability to communicate and interact in the target language in a confident
and natural manner.

5. Cultural awareness: Language should not be learned in isolation, but together with the
culture where it is used. Generalizing about cultural traits and characteristics is neither
easy nor desirable. Therefore, given that culture is such a complex concept, the program
aimed at raising the students’ cultural awareness as well as developing an understanding
of its complexity.
A CURRICULUM FOR A SPANISH IMMERSION PROGRAM

Approach Criteria:

1. Hands-on: Students worked with the language hands-on. Their improvement depended on their use of the target language. Further, the activities that constituted the curriculum were expected to promote learning through the active use of language.

2. Communicative: Oral skills were a main target in this project. Activities promoted communication and oral practice for their completion.

3. Content-based: Apart from linguistic goals, the program also provided students with historical knowledge about both the community and the country. Past and present sociocultural issues and events were intended to raise de students’ cultural awareness.

4. Multidisciplinary: Activities targeted both linguistic improvement and cultural awareness. Thus language converged with historical, social and cultural content.

METHODOLOGY

It was the first year that the Guatemala J-term study-tour was language immersive, thus there was great interest in determining whether such a program yielded substantial language gains or not in the students’ oral skills. By measuring the students’ language development during the study abroad, the researcher sought to assess the usefulness of the curriculum insofar as language acquisition and improvement were concerned. A thorough explanation of the design, role of the researcher, description of the data sources and participants, data collection and analysis, and measures to address issues related to validity and reliability follows.
Design

The researcher adopted a case study approach in designing the present study. As explained by Merriam (2009), “A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). This bounded system is referred to as the case, which in the present study would be the immersive Guatemalan context. The researcher thus sought to obtain a better understanding of the immersive context as well as of the language development the study abroad may have promoted.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher undertaking the current study was one of the instructors of the 2016 Guatemala J-term study tour. The researcher had two different roles: as an instructor, and as a researcher. As an instructor, her role was to coordinate the study abroad together with the other two instructors: Professor Edward Montanaro and Arnulfo Figueroa. In addition, she monitored the implementation of the curriculum and was in charge of guiding students throughout its completion. As a researcher, her role was to determine the usefulness of the curriculum in terms of language acquisition.

Description of Data Sources and Participants

Twenty-two students participated in the study tour, however, only 17 took part in the study. Out of the five students who were not considered for the present project, 3 were heritage speakers. Prior to the program, their contact with Spanish was not exclusive to the language classroom, but it was also present in their family environment. In this context, the immersive nature of the program might not have had that much of an impact in their interlanguage. In addition, one of these students had Spanish as her first language and actively spoke it in the home. It should be noted that despite their not taking
part in the study, these students completed all the activities from the curriculum. On the 
other hand, two other participants were not assessed because they did not participate in 
the language curriculum as their taking part in the study tour had to do with their personal 
research interests. The type of sampling was purposeful. The selection criteria were two: 
to be a learner of Spanish as a second language, and to participate and complete all the 
activities designed in the curriculum.

Description of Data Collection Methods

Data was gathered using three different sources: pre and post-stay interviews, 
questionnaires, and interlanguage journals. As the study involved human participants, an 
Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversaw and approved the present project.

Pre and Post-Stay Interviews

All seventeen participants were interviewed before and after the study tour. The 
interviews were semi-structured and consisted of mainly 4 open-ended questions which 
dealt with topics familiar to the students. The researcher also used probes to help students 
to elaborate their answers. Both interviews (pre and post) included similar questions 
dealing with events in the present, past and future. The purpose was to elicit language use 
in the past, present and future so as to obtain a clearer picture of the students’ overall 
language skills. The interviews were 5-10 minutes long.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher in a one-on-one basis. Students 
were asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. The researcher contacted 
the participants by email and explained the project and the purpose of the interview. It 
was explained to the students that grades would be based on the extent to which they 
stayed in language during the entire month and not on the amount of progress they made
in language development. The researcher was not involved in grading and did not share
the interview data with the professor who assigned the grades. The researcher also
explained the procedure to the students in person before conducting the interviews. The
interviews were tape recorded.

The pre-stay interviews were conducted before the beginning of the study tour.
The researcher contacted the students and scheduled individual appointments with those
that agreed to participate in the project. Interviews’ time and place were agreed between
the researcher and the interviewees. The researcher met with each student and conducted
each interview in a private room. Before beginning the interview, participants were
reminded that they could cease their participation at any point during the interview. They
were also reminded of the purpose and procedures of the study, and were informed of the
duration the interviews might have. In addition, the researcher asked for consent to tape
record the interviews. For the post-stay interviews the same procedure was repeated.
These interviews were conducted during the last days of the study tour.

**Questionnaires**

Students completed two questionnaires in which they were asked to express their
perceptions regarding their language use and improvement, and to assess the helpfulness
of the activities included in the language curriculum as well as the talks and workshops
that were organized by community members. All the students that participated in the
activities from the curriculum were asked to complete the questionnaires since the
researcher was interested in examining the aspects mentioned above in the group as a
whole. The surveys consisted of 8 questions that were close-ended and quantitative in
nature. The questions addressed the following topics: amount of time speaking Spanish
and/or English, overall comprehension of interactions with native speakers, perceptions on the usefulness of the activities designed for the curriculum, degree of confidence speaking the target language, and view on their learning process. With the exception of questions number 7 and 8, which were measured using a different scale (see appendix C), all questions were to be answered on a 0-100% scale.

The surveys were distributed twice during the study tour: one after the first week, and the second one during the third week. The aim was to examine whether students’ views changed throughout the study abroad. The researcher was also interested in observing whether a change in perception of the usefulness of the activities occurred as students grew more confident in using the target language. The questionnaires were anonymous in order to encourage the students to answer them honestly.

**Interlanguage Journals**

All students had to keep a journal as part of the curriculum (activity 7). In this journal students were to reflect on the development of their interlanguage as well as identify and discuss areas of struggle during the stay abroad. There were no strict directions for the completion of this task. Students were only required to discuss the contents mentioned above. They had to complete this assignment daily. They were also informed of the assignment during the first days of the trip and were told that data coming from their journals would be used and analyzed in the present project. The journals were collected twice during the study tour: half-way through the study tour and towards its end.

**Data Analysis**

As Merriam (2009) suggests, the data analysis started simultaneously with the
data collection process so as to obtain more illuminating results. The data analysis varied depending on the source of data at hand.

The language samples were analyzed by using a rubric (appendix D) that focused on four main areas: grammatical accuracy (present, past, ser-estar, and future), vocabulary use and range, fluidity of speech, and relevance of responses to the questions. Each area was given a maximum score of 20. The researcher analyzed each language sample separately, and took notes to assess and qualify the participants’ oral production as well as the type of errors they committed during the interviews. Ultimately errors were grouped into different subcategories. After this procedure had been completed, the researcher listened to each language sample again to double-check the information previously obtained. Some language samples were listened to multiple times. The researcher then scored each of the categories assessed in the samples. The same procedure was followed during both pre and post-stay interviews. Lastly, the score obtained in each of the areas in the pre and post-stay interviews was compared so as to gauge the participants’ language improvement.

The responses to each of the questions in the questionnaires were quantified separately. The researcher analyzed each question separately and noted the number of participants that had selected each of the responses. The researcher double-checked this information several times to ensure the data had been organized accurately. Once the data had been organized and measured, the researcher compared the results of each of the questions in the first and second surveys. This comparison served to provide an insight on the variables that might have affected language development.
With respect to the interlanguage journals, the researcher analyzed each of the journals separately. In the first reading, the researcher took notes on the different themes discussed by each of the participants. The researcher identified themes that were recurrent throughout the journals and came up with a list of categories. The researcher then conducted a second reading of the data and coded each of the journals separately according to the previously established categories. As was mentioned above, journals were collected twice during the study tour. In the same manner, they were analyzed twice following the procedure here described. Lastly, it should be noted that the coding process was conducted in an open manner, that is, the researcher was open to any type of information that may arise (Merriam, 2009).

**Issues of Validity**

The researcher used triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. The data from the pre and post- interviews aimed to determine whether language development occurred after the completion of the program. In turn, the questionnaires intended to assess some of the variables that might have affected language improvements. These variables included amount of language use, use of the L1, and level of comprehension of the interactions with speakers of Spanish. Additionally, the interlanguage journals provided valuable information on language development from the students’ point of view. The combination of these sources of data afforded a clearer picture of the experience abroad, and enabled the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the language gains acquired as a result of both the study abroad and the implementation of the curriculum.
With respect to the validity of the interview data, interviews were recorded so that they could be listened to more than once. Each language sample was scored with a rubric (Appendix D). As was discussed above, the researcher listened to each of the samples at least twice while conducting the analysis process. In regard to the questionnaire data, the responses to the questions were in fixed categories which aimed to maximize the validity of students’ responses. The surveys were administered in paper copies. This enabled the researcher to review students’ responses anytime that was needed. Lastly, with respect to the validity of the data from the interlanguage journals, each journal was coded and categorized separately. The researcher collected a hardcopy of all the journals. This facilitated the analysis and accessibility of the data.

**Issues of Subjectivity**

Different strategies were utilized to minimize subjectivity in the present study. First, the researcher kept a log where she documented the dates, times, and places where she conducted the interviews, administered the questionnaires, and collected the journals. The researcher also used this log to document the data analysis process. Secondly, she wrote a journal where her thoughts, impressions, and reflections during the study abroad were expressed. To add onto that, issues during the study tour as well as the measures taken were also stated in the journal. Not only did this device help the researcher to capture the experience abroad, but also to trace potential biases.

Peer reviewing was used as another strategy to address subjectivity. Peer reviewing refers to “an examination or review […] conducted by a colleague either familiar with the research or one new to the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). In the current study, one peer debriefing was conducted. The peer debriefing took place while the
analysis and coding of data was ongoing. The peer was the main instructor of the study tour. The researcher chose an insider peer debriefer because she believed she could best benefit from the comments and critics of an individual who was familiar with not only the topic, but also the purpose of the study. This peer reviewer offered assistance and guidance throughout the data analysis process.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter discussed the content and the approach criteria that were utilized in designing the curriculum. Furthermore, it provided a thorough description of the methodology used in the study. This included a description of the design of the study and its participants, the data collection methods, and the data analysis. Lastly, the measures taken to address issues of validity, reliability, and subjectivity were also discussed.
CHAPTER IV

PROJECT

The purpose of this project was twofold: to design a curriculum for the 2016 Guatemala J-Term Spanish immersion program, and to gauge whether the study abroad together with the activities comprising the curriculum yielded language gains in the students’ communicative skills. Accuracy and fluidity of speech were examined when determining the latter. The activities intended to maximize the usage of the target language in a context that went beyond the daily communicative exchanges and conversations.

Expert Review Feedback

This project was reviewed by a panel of experts who provided feedback on the content and activities proposed. This panel comprised Dr. Stephanie Mitchell, Associate Professor of History at Carthage College; Alejandra Jiménez, an environmental educator who designed an environmental curriculum for the 2012 Guatemala J-Term program; and Matthew Borden, Associate Professor of Spanish at Carthage College. After having received copies of the curriculum, each member reviewed and commented on each of the activities separately.

Dr. Stephanie Mitchell was the first member to provide feedback on the project. She had visited the community herself and was familiar with the history as well as with the members of the community. In fact, she taught a class together with Professor Edward Montanaro during three J-term semesters. She also knew the environment where the curriculum is to be implemented, which proved to be useful to enhance the practicality of the present curriculum. One of her suggestions was directed to the first activity (Interview
A CURRICULUM FOR A SPANISH IMMERSION PROGRAM

a Person from the Community), and, more specifically, it had to do with the treatment of cultural awareness. One of the initial objectives for this activity was to develop the students’ cultural awareness through interviews that would touch on historical and social issues in Guatemala. As Dr. Mitchell noted, when discussing sensitive issues, “People may report what they know is an acceptable value statement for their community, which may or may not reflect much on real practice”. In other words, when inquiring about historical or social topics, community members may provide an answer that may be biased by beliefs on what is socially acceptable to the interviewer, thereby making it difficult to learn their true opinions. For this reason, Dr. Mitchell noted that it was vital to explain this notion to the students so that they could grasp the complexity behind the word culture. This issue was discussed with the students, who were encouraged to think critically when considering the information received from the interviews.

Activity 3 (Literature Circles) initially intended to cover both the analysis of the literary work and a focus on culture. However, the second objective was discarded as a main component of the activity, and was given a secondary or anecdotal role after the experts’ review. Dr. Mitchell once again stressed the complexity of culture: “Culture is too multi-faceted, not to mention fluid to be nailed down.” As she further argued, by having students focus on identifying cultural cues, culture inevitably becomes a concrete set of traits. In other words, it reduces culture to a simplicity that is anything but reliable nor desirable.

Culture was to be approached from an anecdotal perspective in which cultural elements shown in the novel become true for the reality of the novel, but may not be generalizable to the totality of the Guatemalan society. Culture was part of one of the
roles of the literature circle, but students were told to keep an open mind and avoid generalizations.

Dr. Mitchell also had some suggestions regarding the layout of activity 4 (“Show me what you know!”). The idea behind this activity was to have students conduct a mini lesson to expand their usage of Spanish in a more formal context, and also to show gratitude to the community. In relation to the latter, Dr. Mitchell suggested that the activity should be carefully laid out so as to avoid falling back into what might be termed, as she put it, the missionary complex, in which there is an us and a them. Originally the mini lessons were to be conducted in sequence. However, to make them more inclusive, they became part of the schedule of the school where teachers and students were giving mini lessons at the same time.

Alejandra Jiménez had also visited the community so her comments were crucial. In 2012 she conducted an environmental project as a partial requirement for her Master’s of Education at Carthage College. Even though the 2012 Guatemala J-term study tour was not a language immersion program, she became familiar with the context were the present project was to be carried out. She made an important contribution to the curriculum as she suggested the inclusion of a seventh activity: The writing of a journal. Initially, the idea was to encourage students to keep a diary during their stay in Guatemala. Mrs. Jiménez noted that the writing of a journal seemed to be an enriching exercise for the students who participated in the 2012 J-term study tour, thus the journal became a requirement for the course. Given the linguistic nature of the program, the journal served a linguistic purpose: raising students’ awareness on language
development. It was also surmised that this could help students to improve their writing skills.

Lastly, Professor Matthew Borden suggested the rephrasing of some parts of the description of the project so as to offer a better explanation of what the objectives and delivery of the project would look like. Professor Borden deemed the activities as engaging, interesting and relevant to the objectives proposed. He had led an earlier J-Term study tour that was also designed to provide Spanish immersion, so his positive comments were reassuring of the feasibility and potential of the curriculum.

Overall, the panel of experts’ review contributed to enhancing the effectiveness of the curriculum. They all agreed that the activities were dynamic and interesting. More importantly, they regarded them as appropriate to improve the students’ oral skills in Spanish. The cultural component of the curriculum was regarded as central to fostering a better understanding of the communicative interchanges that would take place on the context of the study tour.

**Description of the project**

The present curriculum seeks to provide a description of the criteria and activities that were developed in this project.

The activities addressed the four basic skills involved in language acquisition: written comprehension and production, and oral comprehension and production. Some activities also emphasized creativity in the target language as well as organizational and problem-solving skills. The purpose was to engage students in activities that would enhance their language competence at all levels. The activities proposed in the present curriculum aimed to provide more structured and guided hands-on opportunities to
further practice and develop the target language. It should be noted that this J-term program included activities that were not directly devoted to bettering the language command of the students, but rather to broadening their global heritage knowledge. These activities had to do with the students’ participation in daily community activities such as working in the kitchen or helping clean natural areas. Students worked together with community young adults and families in these activities which provided an informal use of the target language. This informal use of the language was to help students to build confidence in the use of the spoken language as well as to provide frequent opportunities for oral production. However, given that these activities were not exclusively designed to enhance language development, but rather to integrating students into the life of the cooperative, they will not be discussed in this project.

Prior to the beginning of the program, students received a detailed outline of the assignments and activities that they would have to complete during their study abroad. In addition, they were provided with some background information regarding the history of Guatemala and that of the community, which was to pave the way for the cultural-linguistic activities involved in the curriculum. As part of the background information, students had to read the book *Cooperativa Nuevo Horizonte ‘...La Estrella de la Esperanza Continuará Siendo Nuestra’*, which relates the story of the community from the armed conflict until the present.

Students were required to bring their laptop computer to facilitate the completion of some tasks. Before the initiation of each activity, the instructor gathered the students and explained the activities in detail so as to ensure the students’ comprehension of the structure, guidelines and objective of the tasks. The instructor carefully explained the
goals and parts of each activity, and was available at all times to respond and guide
students throughout the completion of the assignments.

The curriculum included 7 activities:

**Activity 1. Interview a Person from the Community**

Throughout the course of the study tour, students attended talks and workshops
destined to raise cultural and historical awareness involving current issues and struggles
of the Cooperative Nuevo Horizonte and of the Guatemalan society. The war and its
aftermath, education, the role of women, poverty, and daily work and duties were topics
covered in these activities. These talks were conducted by community members who
were able to provide first-hand accounts of the topics mentioned above. After the first
two weeks, students were asked to interview a person from the community about a topic
that might have especially interested them or that they may have wished to delve into.
Students were free to choose who they wanted to interview. However, they had to consult
and discuss their intended questions with the instructor/researcher before conducting the
interview. After conducting the interview, students had to write a short paper (two pages
minimum) in which they briefly discussed their interview, reflected on what they had
learned from the activity and/or commented on issues that appeared interesting or
surprising. Students also met with the instructor/researcher to go over the paper.

In short, this activity had a dual objective: for students to get a better
understanding of the society in which they lived for a month, and to provide them with an
opportunity to use the target language in a more formal setting.
1 Content Theme:
Understanding the making, and present situation and struggles of a society marked by a sanguine history.

2 Approach:

3 Objectives: Students will:
- Develop their cultural awareness and gain understanding of the history of Guatemala.
- Use language at a more complex level.
- Improve their oral skills and acquire language through meaningful interactions.
- Improve their writing skills.
- Build a connection with the members of the community.
- Grow more confident when using the language in various contexts.

4 Time:
History readings: Depending on the group of students.
Talks and workshops: 90-120min (depending on the topic).
Interview: 30-45 min.
Essay writing: Depending on the student.

5 Material:
History reading packets to contextualize the talks and workshops so that students be prepared to participate and engage in discussions.
Interviews: a phone or a recorder may be used.
Paper: Laptop computer.
6 Procedure:

a) Introduction: In groups, students read a set of texts (history reading packets) prior to attending the talks and workshops.

b) Presentation: Each activity was presented twice. First at the beginning of the trip and then before the beginning of each activity. Reading and talks were explained before they occurred, and the final interview and paper were introduced on the second week. Students also had a weekly schedule where they could consult the activities assigned for each day.

c) Practice: Students attended the talks and workshops. Then they discussed the topic and questions of their intended interview with the instructor/researcher. Once this had been approved by the instructor/researcher, students conducted the interviews.

d) Reflection: Final paper on what they learned from the interview. Students were also encouraged to reflect on the information and knowledge acquired.

e) Conclusion: They gained knowledge and understanding of the history and social situation of Guatemala. This was a central element to understand the target culture, people, and overall language. What is more, they improved their oral and written skills.

Activity 2: Cultural Interchanges

Students met with younger members of the community five times a week for at least an hour. The purpose was not only to enable further oral practice, but also for students to become familiar with the speech of speakers close to their own age for purposes of fostering the learners’ inclusion into social networks. It is believed that
belonging to one or more social networks raises the learner’s attachment and motivation towards the language. In having them interact with individuals of similar age, it was intended that students would bond with the local students and thus develop a sense of belonging to that social group. In addition, this was also intended to enhance their self-confidence speaking the language since talking to other young speakers reduces the pressure that talking to native speakers tends to generate on the part of the learners.

1 Content theme:
Communication with native speakers from a similar age. Furthermore, to familiarize students with the sociolect used by young adults.

2 Approach:
Communicative.

3 Objectives: Students will:

- Improve their oral skills.
- Familiarize with the jargon utilized by young speakers of Spanish.
- Create a sense of belonging to a group of speakers / social network.
- Improve their confidence in speaking Spanish.
- Improve their fluency.

4 Time:
Five times a week for a minimum of an hour. It varied depending on the student.

5 Material:
No materials were needed for this activity.

6 Procedure:

   a) Introduction: No previous introduction was required.
b) Presentation: The activity was first presented at the beginning of the study tour and then before the first set of cultural interchanges started. These started after the first week so the activity was presented over the first weekend.

c) Practice: Students met up with young members from the community every weekday after dinner.

d) Reflection: The interchanges were to foster a connection between the students and the targeted group of speakers. This bond was to raise motivation and self-confidence in speaking Spanish, and ultimately to help them to increase their overall fluency.

e) Conclusion: Students became acquainted with members of the community of a similar age and created bonds with them, thus enhancing their belonging to a social network or community of speakers. As a result, students increased their motivation and overall oral skills.

**Activity 3: Movie Watching with Community Members**

Students watched three movies with individuals from the community. The suggested movies were *El Silencio de Neto* (directed by Luis Argueta, and released in 1994), *La Hija del Puma* (directed by Åsa Faringer and Ulf Hultberg, and released in 1994), and *Voces Inocentes* (directed by Luis Mandoki, and released in 2004). These movies touch on issues that affect or have affected the society in which the students were immersed. Also, they offer a visual representation of some of the topics covered in the talks and workshops aforementioned, such as life during the civil war and the country’s Mayan heritage. This intended to bring further sociocultural understanding to the students.
1 Content Theme:

*El Silencio de Neto*: The movie shows the changes Guatemala underwent in the aftermath of the 1954 American-led coup d’état. This is an important event in Guatemalan history as it helps explain the influence the United States has in Guatemala.

*La Hija del Puma*: It addresses the conflictual situation the Mayan population underwent during the armed conflict. In addition to this, it provides an insight on some cultural aspects surrounding the Mayans. Students thus learned both about the culture and history of this important group in Guatemala.

*Voces Inocentes*: This movie is set in El Salvador during the country’s Civil War (1972-1992). The conflict broke out under circumstances similar to those of Guatemala. The purpose for showing this movie was to offer a broader view of the conflicts existing in Central America during the second half of the twentieth century, as the causes coincided in many respects.

2 Approach:

Content-based. Multidisciplinary.

3 Objectives: Students will:

- Improve their listening skills (input).
- Learn about sociocultural issues through the visual arts.

4 Time:

Movie viewing:

*El Silencio de Neto*: 108 minutes.

*La Hija del Puma*: 101 minutes

*Voces Inocentes*: 96 minutes.
5 Material:

Projector from the college, laptop, DVD and speakers.

6 Procedure:

a) Introduction: a brief introduction was conducted by one of the instructors before
the viewing of the movie so as to set the context for the movie and for the issues
that would be shown.

b) Presentation: The activity was first presented at the beginning of the trip and then
before the watching of the movie.

c) Practice: Students gathered to watch the movie with community members.

d) Reflection: The movies were to arise reflections on the part of the students.

History becomes more vivid when visually perceived, which is to contribute to
the enhancement of cultural awareness.

e) Conclusion: Students gained historical, social and cultural perspectives from a
different target language source, and practiced authentic oral comprehension.

Activity 4: Literature Circles

Students read the novel *Colibri* written by Ann Cameron (2005). They were
expected to complete the reading by the end of the program. The usage of a written text
intended to enhance the students’ skills beyond the oral level. Reading skills and
vocabulary acquisition were a main focus in the present activity. However, it was also
intended that students approached a literary work critically and used the target language
to express their opinions, ideas, and comments regarding the novel.

The idea behind a literature circle was that students be assigned different roles
each week so they could discuss the novel from different angles. Depending on the role,
students had to focus their reading on analyzing the points covered by their role. The proposed roles were: group discussion leader, summarizer, character analysis, cultural content and vocabulary acquisition (see: Appendix E). Students rotated and each role was commented by a different person each time.

In terms of the discussion, the novel was divided into four sections and two days were dedicated to work on each section. Students were divided into groups of 5. On the first day assigned, students met to read the chapters aloud. Then on the following day, they started the discussion based on the roles assigned. The goal of this activity was for students to work on the novel more in-depth, thus promoting deeper understanding. Also, the practice of reading aloud was intended to give the students an opportunity to improve their pronunciation in the target language.

1 **Content Theme:**
Understanding a literary work set in Guatemala. The novel also showed some cultural cues that were to help students to better understand the diversity of the Guatemalan population. Some linguistic content areas that were targeted were: Reading skills, vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation improvement.

2 **Approach:**
Hands-on. Communicative.

3 **Objectives:** Students will:

- improve their reading skills.
- expand their vocabulary knowledge.
- be provided with further input (through a different medium).
- improve their oral competence through literature group discussions.
• improve their pronunciation.

4 Time:

Students were given up to 3 hours to read each section. However, the time dedicated to reading the novel may have varied depending on the group. They were required to read 7-12 chapters per session.

In regard to the novel discussion, students met for an hour on the day following the reading of each section.

5 Material:


All students were required to buy a copy of the book prior to the beginning of the study tour.

6 Procedure:

a) Introduction: Students bought a copy of the novel before traveling to Guatemala.

b) Presentation: Students were presented the assignment several times: during the first days in Guatemala and before they had to complete each section.

c) Practice: Students read the novel aloud in their groups and participated in the literature circles on the following day.

d) Reflection: Students learned to appreciate a literary work in the target language in a holistic manner. They were also able to improve several aspects of their interlanguage such as their vocabulary range or pronunciation.

e) Conclusion: Students gained linguistic knowledge from a written source. Reading helped them to retain and further acquire the knowledge and linguistic forms to which they were exposed in the oral medium.
Activity 5: “Show me what you know!”

Students prepared and conducted a mini lesson or workshop (taller) dealing with either their field of study or one of their interests or hobbies. Students prepared this mini lesson individually or in groups, and conducted it in one of the schools in the community (Escuela Básica). The idea behind this activity was that students shared some of their knowledge with the students of the community. In addition, it was to enable students to use the target language to talk about activities or fields of study that they are passionate about, which was to increase their motivation and connectedness to the language. Students were given sufficient time to prepare engaging activities for the children to participate in.

An underlying idea of this activity was that all students, foreign and local, understood that they could all learn from one another, which was to bond them further.

1 Content theme:
Depending on the students’ field of study or interests.

2 Approach:

3 Objectives: Students will:

- Be prepared to use the target language to talk about topics with which they are familiar in their first language.
- Improve their oral skills.
- Improve their vocabulary on the field of their choice (instructors will be available to help students in this regard).
• Be given the opportunity to engage local students in an activity organized by them.

4 Time:

Preparation time: up to the student or group. Three sessions of two hours each were allotted for students to prepare their mini lesson.

Class time: 30-40 minutes.

5 Material:

Computer, internet, the students’ own knowledge, dictionary, and instructors’ assistance.

6 Procedure:

a) Introduction: No prior preparation was required.

b) Presentation: Students were presented the activity twice: first at the beginning of the study tour and a week before the activity was due.

c) Practice: Students prepared a short class regarding their field of study or interests, and engaged local students and teachers in an active manner.

d) Reflection: Community members asked them questions to further understand and appreciate their interests. The class was to foster communication between Carthage and Guatemalan students.

e) Conclusion: Throughout the study tour students gained a deeper understanding of the language and culture of the community and of Guatemala as a whole. With this activity they were able to share part of their knowledge with the community.

Activity 6: Final Project

Upon the end of the study abroad, students completed a final project that was to compile the most valuable and enriching experiences or lessons they learned throughout
their stay in Nuevo Horizonte. This final project consisted of the painting of a mural, although other suggested projects were the writing and performance of a song or a dance. The final project should be based on the skills of the group. This project was to show gratitude to the community and to leave them with an enduring memory.

The execution of the project was carried out in three steps. First students got together in groups of 5 (the groups from the literature circles were used) and came up with a proposal for the design of the final mural. Once each group had their proposed design, all groups met to decide on the final design. This final draft could be one of the proposed murals or a combination of some or all of them. Students were to use problem solving and organizational skills to make their final decision, which was to enhance their language competence.

1 **Content Theme:**

Creativity in Spanish. Students had to do/build something creative out of their language and cultural knowledge and skills. Also, they needed to organize and distribute the different tasks needed to complete the project.

2 **Approach:**

Hands-on.

3 **Objectives:** Students will:

- Improve their organizational and problem-solving skills using the target language.
- Improve their oral skills through communication with other peers.
- Build a deeper connection with the members of the community.
4 Time:
Students were given a week to think, organize and conduct the project. During this week there was some time allotted for the groups to gather and design their proposal for the mural, and ultimately for the groups to meet and decide on the final design.
Completion of the project: Once they agreed on the final design, students had 3 hours and 2 complete days to conduct and finalize the mural.

5 Material:
Paint (several colors), brushes, pencils, a ladder, and any other materials students needed and requested.

6 Procedure:

a) Introduction: Their stay in the community served as the introduction for this project.

b) Presentation: Students were presented the activity at the beginning of the study tour. During the last week of the program, the instructors met with the students to re-discuss the project and to suggest some ideas for its completion. This being done, students had to get together in small groups to jot down their ideas, and to come up with a draft of their proposal for the mural. Then they all got together and decided on the final design.

c) Practice: Students carried out the final project. They had to collaborate with one another to complete the assignment. For this purpose, they needed to get organized and distribute the tasks necessary to finish the project.

d) Reflection: Presentation of the project to the community. Students explained their reasons for choosing and designing the project.
e) Conclusion: Creating a sense of belonging. Feeling part of a community is crucial to enhance motivation and connection to the target language. Thus, this activity intended to create a lifelong connection between the students and the community. Ultimately this was to foster a deeper interest in the language as well as in its people and culture.

**Activity 7: Interlanguage Journal**

Students were asked to keep a journal where they had to reflect on their interlanguage development. They wrote a journal entry every day. In these journal entries they had to address the following subjects: 1) what they were improving; 2) what they were struggling with; 3) what they thought they needed to improve; 4) what they would like to learn to express in the target language. The first three goals were designed to raise the students’ awareness insofar as their skills in Spanish were concerned. It was believed that by acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses in the target language, students would be able to identify more easily areas where they needed to practice further. In contrast, the fourth goal was of a practical nature. It was to provide the instructors with content areas or concepts that could be added to the in-class curriculum at Carthage College. The classroom environment is limited in terms of time and thus the amount of contents covered becomes also limited. By having students realize gaps in their learning, common issues may be identified and applied to future in-class instruction. Students were also encouraged to write vocabulary lists in this journal. The journal was written by hand.

Instructors collected the journals regularly and provided comments and pose questions so as to guide the students’ reflection process. Instructors were also interested in the evolution of the students’ interlanguage. Therefore, the composition of the diaries
started at the beginning of the study tour and continued until the last day of the stay in Nuevo Horizonte. Ultimately, it was to offer an insight of the processes taking place in the students’ minds.

1 **Content Theme:**

Language development and metalinguistic awareness. Students reflected on their interlanguage development as well as practiced their writing skills.

2 **Approach:**

Hands-on.

3 **Objectives:** Students will:

- Reflect on their language development.
- Become aware of the areas of their interlanguage that need improvement.
- Improve their writing skills.
- Write a glossary with new acquired vocabulary.

4 **Time:**

It was a daily activity, but the time dedicated to the composition of each entry may have varied depending on the student.

5 **Material:**

A notebook: students were required to bring a notebook, and a writing utensil. As was mentioned above, the journals were written by hand.

6 **Procedure:**

   a) Introduction: There was no previous introduction for this task.

   b) Presentation: The activity was presented to the students on the first days of the program so that they would start writing their diary as soon as possible.
c) Practice: Students dedicated some time to the composition of their diary every day. They decided when and for how long they would write their journal.

d) Reflection: Students learned to look at their second language from a different perspective, which was to help them improve their overall competency. They received comments and suggestions from the instructors as they wrote their journals. Instructors also answered questions or assisted the students concerning linguistic matters.

e) Conclusion: Bring linguistic awareness to the students’ learning. This linguistic awareness was to guide them through the process of identifying their weaknesses in language, and to set the starting point towards the correction or improvement of these issues. Also the written medium was to provide them another means to improve their skills in the target language.

**Summary of the chapter:**

In conclusion, the curriculum presented above intended to enrich the learning experience of the students, and to provide them with language practice that was more formal and complex in nature. The activities focused on the different modes where language is utilized. Oral skills were targeted in activities 1, 3, 4 and 5. These set contexts where students could use Spanish at a more complex level. Listening skills were emphasized in activity 2, and reading and writing skills in activities 3 and 6 respectively. Lastly, activity 7 centered on raising language development awareness. This enabled students to reflect on their own interlanguage and to enhance their overall competency. It being a writing task, helped students to improve their writing skills. All in all, these
activities were to open the students’ minds to new cultures, and to provide a context that yielded greater language gains.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The present project involved the design of a curriculum for the immersion Spanish program organized for the 2016 Guatemala J-term study tour at Carthage College that could serve as a curriculum for future classes.

The purpose of this curriculum was to promote language acquisition. The students’ improvement in terms of language skills was assessed by means of pre and post-stay interviews. The purpose was to compare the language competence before and after the implementation of the curriculum. Further, students’ views on language development and use were also examined through the analysis of the interlanguage journals and data coming from a questionnaire that was administered twice during the program. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the students’ linguistic development as well as to assess their opinions towards both the program and the curriculum.

A discussion of the findings gathered in the three sources of data aforementioned (pre and post interviews, questionnaire, and interlanguage journals) follows below.

Interview Analysis

Findings suggest that all students improved their language competency in Spanish. However, the improvement of the students varied depending on the student’s initial level of proficiency, which ranged from intermediate to advanced. The graph below shows the participants’ scores in the pre and post-stay interviews. Participants who obtained a lower score in the pre-stay interview presented the greatest linguistic gains.
For initial more advanced students, their gains were not as noticeable. In this sense, their scores did not vary substantially.

Graph 1. Students’ performance in the pre and post-stay interviews.

Regardless of the differences in amount of proficiency some common trends were identified. The grammatical accuracy score was the lowest for nearly all of the students. As mentioned above, grammatical accuracy was measured by the correct use of the present and past tenses. The future tense was also evaluated, although it was used by the students to a lesser extent. *Ser* and *estar* were also assessed, as well as other verb tenses such as the conditional and other modes such as the subjunctive. However, errors dealing with the latter were considered secondary for evaluation purposes.

In the pre-stay interviews, many students seemed to have difficulty using the past tense. In many instances, students could not conjugate the past forms of verbs correctly, which impaired communication. In others, students did conjugate the verbs correctly but failed to choose the appropriate verb tense. These errors had to do with the distinction
between the preterit and the imperfect. In contrast, the post-test interviews showed substantial improvement in this respect. Errors were still made, but the frequency was considerably reduced. In this vein, less advanced students still committed frequent errors in their use of the past tense, though with lower frequency. For more advanced students the problem was to stay in the past when narrating a past event. In these instances, students began to use the tense correctly, but failed to extend its use throughout the narration. This can be observed in the following example:

“Yo saqué la foto y después quieren tomar una foto conmigo y estaba enfrente de todas las mujeres y inesperadamente todos ponen sus manos en mi pelo, porque mi pelo es rubio y no saben si es real natural, todos están agarrándolo y fue muy chistoso y todas están riendo mucho”

(I took a picture and then they want to take a photo with me and I was facing all the women and suddenly they all put their hands in my hair because I am blonde and they don’t know if it’s real. They are all holding it and it was very funny and everyone is laughing).

With regard to the use of the present tense, virtually all students used it appropriately, although some mistakes were committed, especially with stem-changing verbs. In the post-test interviews students rarely made mistakes when using the present tense. Only those whose grammar was less developed at the beginning of the trip presented some errors in this tense frame.
Some common errors that were identified were the use of reflexive pronouns (“mi madre y yo se intercambiamos recetas”), and the conjugation of the verb *gustar* (“También nos gustamos cocinar”). These errors persisted in the post-stay interviews, which signals an area that might need to be worked on in future language classes.

As for the use of the future, whenever future actions or events were discussed, students opted for the use of verbal periphrasis such as *querer* + *infinitive* or *ir* + *infinitive*. If compared to the use of these periphrasis, the future tense is utilized much less frequently. This might explain why this tense was not used by the students when expressing future actions and events.

Lastly, errors with the distinction between *ser* and *estar* (to be) were also observed in some of the students’ pre-stay interviews, although it was not a high-frequency error. Less than half of the students misused the verbs, and most of those who did made less than 2 mistakes. In the post-stay interviews this type of error was even less frequent. It should also be noted that in the post-stay interviews students seemed to be more aware of their mistakes as they tended to do self-correction. This tendency was also observed in relation to other grammatical errors, which demonstrates the development of the learners’ metalinguistic skills. The development of the latter is closely related to the concept of noticing and, more specifically, to the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1995). As suggested in Loewen’s (2012) discussion on the noticing hypothesis, learners must first notice errors in order to benefit from any type of correction. Noticing also entails that the errors are sufficiently salient to the learner. In relation to the present study, this noticing is significant in that it demonstrates the learners’ awareness and move towards correcting errors that were present in their interlanguage.
The assessment of vocabulary was based on two main criteria: the appropriate use of lexicon, and the variety of the vocabulary that was utilized. The latter was introduced as an evaluation criterion to assess the students’ ability to use much more specific and precise terms, as opposed to other broader and more generic terms. This is especially observable in students’ descriptions. In this task, students with a more limited vocabulary range tended to repeat the same attributes (for example: Divertido, funny) and similar verbs (for example: ir a…, to go to…). Students tended to be appropriate in their use of vocabulary. However, in some occasions more precise words would have been needed, which consequently lowered their overall score.

In line with these examples, the pre-stay interview showed that there was a tendency for students to be less specific in their use of vocabulary. The post-test interviews, in turn, suggested a substantial improvement in the students’ lexical accuracy and range. Also it should be noted that many students shared experiences from the trip during the interviews. In these accounts they utilized not only words specific to the environment and lifestyle, but also Guatemalan words such as patojo (kid). This signals vocabulary improvement as well as the acquisition of vocabulary particular to this community of speakers.

One student also commented on the learning of daily use words:

“He aprendido muchas palabras pequeñas … yo aprendí muchas palabras sobre mi pelo porque no son palabras que aprendimos en una clase porque no necesitas enseñar sobre esas palabras, pero… como trenzar, pelo suelto … y cosas como
esto que uso con frecuencia en inglés y me di cuenta que no sabia nada de esas palabras”

(I have learned lots of small words ... I learned lots of words about my hair because we didn’t learn them in class because you don’t need to teach those words, but... like braid, hair down ... and things like this that I use frequently in English and I realized I didn’t know any of these words).

Another main goal of the curriculum was that of helping students to improve their fluidity of speech in the target language. Here a clear distinction could be observed between students with a more advanced level of initial proficiency and those with lower initial proficiency. In the pre-stay interviews, advanced students spoke confidently and naturally, which contributed to the flow of the conversation. Overall, pauses were natural and the speech was fluid. They expressed their ideas clearly and there were no major hesitancies that would disrupt the flow of the conversation. By the end of the program, their fluidity of speech improved, although the changes were less noticeable than those of initially less proficient students. Less advanced students, too, demonstrated an increase in their ease of speech in the target language. Not only did their speech become more fluid, but also they seemed to speak more confidently. In the pre-stay interviews their speech was marked by hesitancy and pauses that were awkward at times. On the contrary, the post-stay interviews showed a substantial increase. Even though their speech was not entirely appropriate or grammatically correct, they seemed to be more comfortable using and expressing ideas in Spanish. Some students also acknowledged their increased fluency in their interviews: “Pienso que mi fluidez con los verbos ha mejorado mucho …
ahora pienso que hablo con más rapidez … [estas] son las cosas más importantes que he aprendido” (I think that my fluency in using verbs has improved a lot … now I think I can speak faster … [these] are the most important things I have learned).

The fourth category that was examined was the relevance of students’ responses to questions. Students’ responses were sometimes too short or incomplete. When this was the case, the researcher utilized probes to elicit more elaborate responses. In the pre-stay interviews the information was oftentimes too fragmented and ideas were not expressed in a clear manner. This changed in the post-stay interviews. Students’ responses to questions became longer, which may be related to an increase in their confidence in oral production. Within this category, the researcher also evaluated the students’ listening comprehension of the questions. Overall students understood the questions correctly, although repetition and paraphrasing of the questions was sometimes needed.

In conclusion, the interviews provided evidence of an increase of the students’ fluidity of speech, which was observed in their longer and less hesitant oral interventions. Grammatical accuracy and vocabulary range also improved, though to a lesser extent. It could also be concluded that students at initial lower levels of proficiency presented the most noticeable gains. This goes in line with the findings of previous studies (see: Freed 1990; Lafford, 1998).

**Questionnaire Analysis**

The first survey showed positive results regarding the amount of time students spent speaking Spanish throughout the day. Initially nearly all (14 out of 18 students) claimed to do so 80-100% of their time. In the second survey, the same trend continued, although the number of students using Spanish 60-80% of the time increased from 3 to 5.
These findings are substantial in that they demonstrate the students’ commitment to improving their language skills. Initially, the researcher surmised that having students stay in Spanish throughout the stay abroad would pose challenges for the viability of the project. Nevertheless, the data seem to draw positive conclusions in this respect.

Another important point was the extent to which students felt comfortable using Spanish as the only means of communication. The first survey showed that students were not entirely at ease using the target language. As a consequence, 13 students still seemed to rely on English 20-80% of the time to explain concepts or ideas that they could not convey in Spanish. Overall the majority of the students claimed to be confident using the target language, even though they felt they could not express all their thoughts entirely in Spanish.

The second survey showed few but substantial changes. According to the students’ accounts, the amount of time they spent speaking Spanish remained high; except from one person, they all claimed to speak Spanish more than 60% of the time. Students also seemed to be more optimistic with respect to their linguistic accomplishments. In line with the previous survey, 16 students responded that they were able to express more than 60% of their thoughts and ideas. It is significant, however, that the number of students who could express more than 80% increased from 5 to 7. The same tendency was observed in the use of English. The number of students who needed English less than 20% of the time increased from 5 to 10, which suggested a decrease in the use of English. This suggests that students opted for circumlocution rather than translation when a word was unknown to them in the target language.
In relation to their oral comprehension, responses varied depending on the activity. Eleven out of 18 students claimed to have understood 60-80% of the content of the talks, although 3 students said to have comprehended as little as 0-40%. This may be due to the heterogeneity of the group in terms of level of initial and later proficiency. In turn, the level of comprehension of the interactions with speakers from the community scored higher. Twelve students said they had understood more than 60% of their conversations with native speakers. The results of the second questionnaire suggested an increase in the students’ comprehension of both talks and interchanges. For instance, 10 students claimed to have understood more than 80% of the information provided in the talks and workshops. Five students said they had understood 60-80% of the talks, and only a three members understood less than 40%. The fact that half of the students comprehended the talks in their entirety signals an important improvement in the learners’ oral comprehension skills. In regard to conversations with native speakers, 10 students claimed to have understood 80-100% of these interchanges, followed by 7 who said to have understood 60-80%. Only one person reported a lower level of comprehension (40-60%). Despite the subjectivity of the above data, students’ accounts offer a powerful insight to their skills development and of their perception of the latter.

Question 6 in the survey asked students to rate the usefulness of some of the activities listed in the curriculum in terms of their relevance for the learner’s language development (Appendix C). Results showed that students’ opinions did not vary significantly throughout the program. In both first and second surveys students reported that the most useful activities were the cultural interchanges and the interaction with other peers. In contrast, they noted that the activity that helped them to improve the least
was the interlanguage journal. This finding is consistent with the findings of earlier studies that suggest that activities that take place at the social sphere and that emphasize communication with other speakers of the target language are the most useful and relevant for their language development (see: Yager, 1998). The communicative goal of these activities contrasts with the interpersonal and private nature of the interlanguage journal. It can thus be inferred that learners favor communicative activities as far as their learning is concerned in the study abroad context.

Students’ perspectives on the usefulness of the talks and workshops was similar in both surveys. Yet, students’ views on the reading of texts, namely the novel, varied moderately. Thus the second surveys showed an increase from 5 to 7 in the number of students that believed reading to be very helpful (80-100%) for their learning. Although the changes were not sufficiently substantial, they may suggest that as students grow more confident using the language, their capacity to benefit from more complex activities such as reading might increase as well.

**Interlanguage Journals Analysis**

Another source of measurement for students’ improvement were the interlanguage journals (activity 7 in the curriculum) where students reflected on the development of their interlanguage. Experiences varied from student to student, which may have been due to their different levels of initial proficiency. Some common trends, however, were identified as a result of the coding process. The journals were collected twice: once half-way through the program and once towards the end of the trip. Results will be discussed taking into consideration this time distinction. The discussion will focus on the main categories extracted from the data analysis, and it will be organized in the
following manner: areas of struggle, language processes, language gains acknowledged by the speakers, and problems during stay abroad.

1. Areas of Struggle

These diaries provided important insights on students’ perceptions on language development, and signaled areas where they struggle as learners of Spanish. Students’ areas of struggle differed, but common language gaps were found:

Lack of Vocabulary

A considerable number of students reported a lack of sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas and thoughts. Whereas they felt rather confident when talking about daily-life matters, they considered that their vocabulary was limited when it came to expressing more specific ideas or terms. The emphasis on vocabulary limitations diminished towards the end of their stay. This may be due to the amount of contact with native speakers and the various contexts where they could learn and practice new lexicon.

Specifically, students also stressed that they wanted to learn more transition words, connectors and other high-frequency used words (some examples are: like, anyways, though) that contribute to enhancing the flow of conversation. They make use of this type of words in their first language. However, they highlighted that the fact that they did not know words that served the same function in the target language made their speech less authentic. Thus they all seemed to agree upon the importance of learning these words to enrich their use of the language. This finding is relevant for instructors as the inclusion of transition words in the curriculum may not only fulfill this gap in the learners’ L2 knowledge, but also help them to improve their overall fluidity of speech.
Grammar Issues

Grammar occupied a central position in the students’ journal entries. Virtually all students reported having difficulties insofar as the use of grammar was concerned. These issues could be classified into two categories.

On the one hand, students discussed having some problems with verb conjugations and, more specifically, with the conjugations of less frequently used verb tenses such as the future or the conditional. Despite being a part of the language curriculum throughout intermediate and advanced Spanish classes, these verb tenses are not as commonly used outside of the structured activities of the classroom setting. As a result, students tend to seldom include these forms in their extemporaneous speech. This lack of use may limit their confidence and ability to use these tenses in future interchanges, which seemed to be the case in the present project.

In addition, students discussed having problems when using the subjunctive. This connects to the second category: the inability to use particular verb tenses or modes even when the rules of usage are well-known. According to the students’ accounts, they claimed to know the rules of use of the subjunctive. However, they failed to apply them in their regular speech. This problem persisted throughout the study tour. In fact, it appeared to be a recurrent topic among the students. In taking this into account, one may deduce that students may benefit from traditional classroom instruction that fosters an active use of the grammatical tenses or structures learned and that resembles an authentic use of the language. This may similarly increase the use of said structures in the abroad context. The discussion on the subjunctive is also worth highlighting because it demonstrates a high level of language development awareness on the part of the students.
The subjunctive pertains to a late stage of acquisition. Thus the fact that students where questioning about its usage signals a deeper understanding of language and its overall structure and use. This may also be related to the noticing hypothesis mentioned above. The fact that students were questioning about the subjunctive involves noticing, which may be the first step towards not only correction, but also acquisition of the appropriate rules of usage.

Another aspect discussed by the students was the imperative mode of the verb, that is, the use of commands. The inability to accurately utilize this mode was highlighted during the second half of the study tour. Students had studied commands in their previous language classes. Yet, given that it is a grammatical mode that is not that commonly used by students in the classroom setting, it seemed to cause problems for the students when they had to use it in the study abroad context. The use of commands was needed to complete activity 5 ("show me what you know!") since they had to conduct a mini lesson on a topic of their choice. Various students approached the instructor regarding this matter. This suggests that this mode of the verb ought to be further stressed in language classes if students are to use it not only accurately, but also confidently.

Lastly, students also discussed having issues when forming questions. They commented on this problem during the second half of their stay, which could be linked to the completion of activity 1 (interview a person from the community). As it was mentioned above, students had to interview one person from the community based on the topics covered in the talks and workshops. From this, it might be concluded that the activities in the curriculum helped students recognize areas of weakness in their
interlanguage. As a result of the recognition of these gaps in their learning, students noted that some sort of additional grammatical instruction might be needed.

Grammatical instruction was also mentioned in their discussions on errors. In fact, it was a recurrent topic in virtually all of the students’ journals. Students stated that whenever grammatical errors were committed, corrections did not ensue. Students did not dare to correct other peers, or were not certain of whether a correction was needed. As a consequence, errors were not addressed and were thus perpetuated. Some students even commented that this was detrimental to the group’s language development since the dearth of corrections sometimes made them dubious of the the correct use of a word or structure. This seemed to affect the learners in different ways. For instance, one of the most advanced students reported this problem with regard to the use of the verbs tratar y probar, which translate into English as to try. She discussed being familiar with the use of both verbs. However, owing to the incorrect use made by her peers, she began doubting about her own language hypotheses, which had an impact in her future L2 production. This seemed to become an issue especially for more advanced students.

**Oral Comprehension Problems**

Students seemed to find it hard to understand words when used in regular discourse. Native speakers tend to talk faster than what students are normally accustomed to. Also, discourse in the language classroom is much more measured and delimited. In the classroom environment students somewhat know what the topics of conversation are, what the vocabulary words to be used will be, and so on and so forth. However, in authentic language contexts there do not exist such predictors. In lacking these cues, students seemed to fail to fully comprehend native speakers, at least at the beginning.
When words were repeated in isolation, students could easily identify their meanings, but identifying them in native speakers’ speech became more daunting. This problem was especially discussed during the first half of the study tour as the students lacked, for the most part, sufficient previous experience with native speakers of the language. During the second half of the study tour, students’ accounts suggested that as they got used to the accent, increased their self-confidence, and engaged more and more with the speakers from the community, their ability to understand and process language improved substantially. In light of this finding, it might be useful to brief next year’s students about what to expect regarding oral comprehension.

**Oral Production Problems**

The problems related to grammar and vocabulary discussed above seemed to pose problems for the students’ oral production in Spanish. Their sometimes limited knowledge of vocabulary and inaccurate grammar production had an impact on the students’ oral expression and hindered the comprehension of their output. In addition to that, lack of confidence in using the target language, pressure or fear of not being understood, and personality traits such as being introvert seemed to also affect their oral production, especially at the beginning of the program. In regard to the students’ confidence using the language, some students tended to underestimate their language skills. These views changed as the program progressed and students became more comfortable in using the language. Students also accounted for this fact, and by the end of the study tour noted that they were using Spanish more confidently.

They also seemed to be preoccupied by the speed of their speech. In this sense, the fact that they could not interact as fast as they wanted to contributed to their lack of
self-confidence. This also led to feelings of frustration, which were reported during the first half of the stay abroad. These concerns, however, were not expressed during the second half of the program. Accent seemed to be another concern for a considerable number of students. Students often perceived their foreign accent negatively, and believed it could cause misunderstandings and even communication failures when interacting with native speakers from the community. These negative self-perceptions might have influenced the degree of interaction of students with native speakers of Spanish. Lastly, some students admitted that their being more introverted hindered their initiative to start and maintain conversations with other speakers of Spanish. This is consistent with previous studies that have underscored the role of personality traits on language use and acquisition in the abroad context (see: Ozańska-Ponikwia, K., & Dewaele, J. M., 2012)

It should be noted that although these issues seemed to concern students during the first half of the study tour, their importance decreased substantially during the second half. By the end of the program, students only reported grammar or lexical issues as the source of their problems with language production.

2. **Language Processes**

**Process of Thinking in Spanish**

All students described how their thinking passed from being entirely in English to, at least, being a mix of the target language and their first language. Students acknowledged these changes in their thinking processes, which seemed to improve their listening comprehension and overall language expression. Several students stressed that it was easier for them to stay in Spanish when all the surrounding environment was in
Spanish. In this sense, they noted that when one of their peers used English, it was harder for them to think and express their ideas and thoughts in Spanish. It can thus be inferred that having students work together with native speakers who do not speak English is beneficial since it ensures the use of the target language as the only means of communication.

Their comments on the switch from English to Spanish are important because they provide an insight of the processes undergoing the brain during a study abroad. What is more, they evidence the internalization of the target language to a much more complex level.

3. Language Gains Acknowledged by the Students

Increase in Listening Comprehension

Virtually all students discussed the development of their listening comprehension skills. Most students were not accustomed to interacting with native speakers, which caused some frustration during the first days of the study tour. As days passed by, students reported having gradually overcome this frustration. This finding is consistent with what was found in the questionnaires and helps explain the increase that learners reported in their oral comprehension.

In relation to students’ interactions, they reported that their level of comprehension varied depending on the speaker’s age. Most students reported that young adults were easier to comprehend and to connect with. The sharing of similar interests as well their different views on same realities appeared as some of the reasons why students felt more connected to this group of speakers. The conversations were not as formal as
conversations with older speakers. This eliminated part of the concern about being rude or disrespectful.

Students also stated that their learning was highly influenced by these interchanges, which supports the interactionist theories of language acquisition. Nearly all of the students commented on the improvement these conversations yielded. This sheds some light on the benefits of promoting linguistic interchanges with speakers close to the learner’s age (Brecht & Robinson, 1993). Students also discussed having learned slang terms and informal expressions from these exchanges. As a result, they developed a deeper sense of belonging to this group. This finding reveals important information regarding the building of social networks in the study abroad context.

**Learn Vocabulary Words**

Students received input constantly which favored the acquisition of numerous new vocabulary words. In their interlanguage journals, many students had a personal glossary where they wrote down the words they learned each day. In examining these lists, some common trends were found. Each learner’s glossary varied, but they all seemed to include quotidian words that dealt with objects or elements of the surrounding environment. Some examples were: *picadura* (mosquito bite), *ampolla* (blister), *picar* (bite), *ordeñar* (to milk a cow), or vocabulary related to corn.

As it was discussed above, the majority of the students talked about their interactions with young adults. Not only did they note that they felt more confident interacting with them, but also that they learned numerous vocabulary words from them. Therefore, it could be concluded that in fostering these social networks, learners may expand their vocabulary further.
Attachment with the Community of Speakers

As has been mentioned before, creating a sense of belonging is central to connecting students to the language and to promoting their use of the target language. If students feel comfortable within a community of speakers, they will also be more at ease when using the language. Students discussed that participating in activities where community members were also involved had contributed to their creating deeper bonds with them. They also highlighted that as they got to know more members of the community, they grew more confident in using Spanish. Students especially noted their relationship to speakers of similar age.

Languages are alive, and by enabling the creation of bonds between native speakers and learners of the language, the latter can get to appreciate the usefulness of the language since not only does it enable communication, but also socialization with members from different cultures and backgrounds. Ultimately, this is to motivate students to further study the language.

Problems during Study Abroad

In implementing the curriculum, some issues arose. These as well as the interventions made will be detailed in the following section.

The first problem appeared as soon as the informative talks started. Upon their arrival, students were given a copy of the book *Cooperativa Nuevo Horizonte* ‘...La Estrella de la Esperanza Continuará Siendo Nuestra’ that aimed to familiarize them with the history of the community. However, no other reading was assigned to set the context for the talks, which started on the fourth day of the study tour. The students’ lack of
historical knowledge coupled with their recent arrival to the community brought some feelings of frustration to the learners who did not have sufficient background information to understand the complexity of the talks. This conclusion was also evidenced in the first questionnaire, where the majority of the students reported having understood the talks only partially. The instructor thus decided to distribute additional historical reading packets to facilitate the understanding of the issues and historical events discussed in the talks. Students gathered in groups of 4 or 5 people to read the texts aloud and to discuss them. This was to enable the students to obtain a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. Ultimately, this practice had a twofold objective: to increase their cultural and historical awareness and understanding, and to enhance their language comprehension through an authentic text.

Another issue had to do with the use of the English tag word *like*. At the beginning of the program only two students used it occasionally. It is a linguistic device that students utilize frequently in their first language and that, owing to lack of knowledge of a second language equivalent, was transferred into the students’ interlanguage. Students did not know how to replace the use of this tag word in their second language speech and so they started to incorporate it in their speech more and more. This did not lead to any miscommunication problems among the learners since they all shared the same language and were familiar with the use of *like* in their L1. However, it became a comprehension issue with the speakers from the community. The researcher realized this was causing communication problems and thus addressed the issue to the students. Some students continued their use of *like*, but they became aware of its incorrect use and attempted to reduce it.
Lastly, at the beginning of the program students tended to use English words whenever they lacked a specific term or expression in the target language. This strategy worked when students were talking with one another. However, as they became more involved with the speakers from the community, they realized that device no longer worked. In this sense, the researcher observed an important change in the students’ speech. As the program progressed students changed from relying on their first language to express ideas to circumlocuting these ideas so as to elicit the word they were missing in the target language. This was indicative that students were more comfortable using the target language as the only means of communication, which coincides with the findings of the second questionnaire.

**Conclusions**

The present project intended to design a curriculum that would be implemented in the 2016 Guatemala J-Term study tour and that would serve for future Guatemala J-Term programs. The purpose was to foster language acquisition and improvement. In line with the existing literature, the present project attempted to promote as much social interaction with native speakers as possible and intended to provide structured activities that would enhance the students’ language development. The approaches adopted in creating the curriculum were hands-on, communicative, and multidisciplinary. Activities were designed to elicit communication at a more complex level, and to have students improve and acquire language by using it, that is, in a hands-on manner. In addition, the activities intended to broaden the students’ horizons and to raise their cultural awareness on social, cultural and historical issues of the present and past Guatemalan society.
As the findings suggested, the study abroad together with the implementation of the curriculum seemed to promote language development. The pre and post-stay interviews revealed an increase not only in the students’ fluidity of speech, but also in their grammatical accuracy and range of lexicon. This was noteworthy in that it suggested the positive effects of implementing somewhat structured activities to a language immersion program.

Students also valued the positive impact of the study tour on both their language competency and overall cultural awareness and openness. As they discussed, the abroad experience helped them to improve their overall fluidity in the language. They grew more confident and felt more comfortable communicating only in Spanish. Staying in language during the entire month seemed daunting at first, but students accomplished this goal and appreciated the progress they made. This experience also served them to open their horizons and to acquire a global perspective. Over the course of the program their contact with inhabitants from the community, their attendance to the talks, and their participation in workshops and activities organized by community members helped them to better understand the culture behind the language, which is a central part of learning a language.

All in all, students not only enjoyed the experience abroad, but also they accomplished the goals set at the beginning of this project. This sends an important message to instructors who may implement this curriculum in the future, and to students who might find in future versions of this study tour an opportunity to travel abroad, improve their oral language competency and get imbued with the culture of a country as rich and diverse as Guatemala. This may also offer students the possibility of combining their undergraduate studies with a study abroad. As was discussed in chapter one,
students who minor in Spanish often cannot combine their studies with a study abroad, which ultimately has an impact in their overall command of the language. In this sense, the present project affords a feasible solution for students to grow linguistically and culturally.

**Recommendations**

One important recommendation would be to include some grammatical instruction as part of the curriculum. As some of the students discussed in their journals, the lack of grammatical instruction led to confusion regarding the correct use of some verbs and tenses. Students spent a great part of their time interacting with one another, where the use of the target language was not always accurate. Thus they claimed that even though they were certain of the uses of a specific form before the study tour, the incorrect use made by other peers ended up confusing all learners. A clear cut example of this was the use of the verbs *tratar* and *probar* that was mentioned above. Students approached the researcher in several occasions and expressed their concerns about grammar. This suggests the students’ interest in reinforcing and expanding their grammatical knowledge, an aspect that could be strengthened in future versions of this study tour.

It should be noted, however, that this grammatical instruction should not be understood as a form of formal instruction, but rather as a workshop where grammar issues, questions or doubts are discussed in small groups. These workshops could be conducted weekly. Ultimately, this will enhance their fluidity of speech by making it more accurate.
Another possible recommendation has to do with the enhancement of vocabulary acquisition. As students were living together during the month abroad, it might be a good idea to have a wall or a space where they can post some of the words they learn throughout the study abroad. This may contribute to creating an atmosphere of joint learning, in which students may benefit from each other’s vocabulary learning experiences.

**Strengths of the Project**

One big strength of the program was that it promoted target language use at different levels: From day to day interchanges with speakers from the community (activity 2: cultural interchanges), to more complex activities, such as activity 1 (interview a person from the community), which required students to make a much more structured and formal use of the target language. As discussed in the literature, this leads to language development. The curriculum also facilitated the students’ participation in social networks, which also intended to further promote language use and acquisition. Lastly, another important strength of the curriculum was that it fostered the use of language in the four basic skills: Reading, writing, listening, and speaking. As the findings of the study underscore, adopting this type of holistic approach seems to be beneficial in terms of language acquisition.

In relation to the study, the researcher utilized three different evaluation methods to assess the students’ language development during and after the study abroad. The analysis and combination of the three helped to provide a meaningful insight on the development of the students’ command of Spanish during a short-term study abroad. Ultimately, this contributed to the validity of the conclusions drawn.
Limitations

One important limitation of the curriculum was the inability to evaluate the outcome of some of the activities in the curriculum. For instance, group activities such as activity 5 (“show me what you know!”) and activity 4 (literature circles) were supervised, but were not officially assessed since different groups were carrying out the same activity at the same time.

With regard to the study, one limitation was that the size of the sample was relatively small. Future studies consisting of a larger number of participants may offer more sound results. Furthermore, including individuals pertaining to divergent proficiency levels might provide further information on the role of structure in an immersion program or short-term study abroad, and might elucidate whether the idea of structure is equally relevant at different levels of proficiency. Ultimately the adaptation of this curriculum to abroad programs pertaining to different languages may afford a different perspective on the results here yielded.

Experience Conducting the Project

This curriculum was designed in a gradual manner. First of all, clear objectives that addressed specific areas of language were established for each of the activities. Activities were then designed on the basis of how the acquisition of these areas of language could be maximized. In addition, the researcher intended to create activities that would foster a much more structured use of language and that would favor communication. Despite having established a structured curriculum, the researcher was aware that the latter would be implemented in a non-traditional setting. Thus, she bore in mind that the successful implementation of the curriculum might be affected by external
factors related to the context of the study tour such as health-related issues. In this regard, the other two instructors of the study tour discussed the viability of the intended activities with the researcher. The researcher designed the activities in abstract, but, as the other instructors suggested, kept in mind that their implementation might need to be accommodated to the Guatemalan context.

Indeed, the implementation of the curriculum was sometimes challenging as external factors affected and sometimes interrupted students’ participation in the activities. For instance, some students suffered from stomach pain owing to the change in diet and water, which unexpectedly impeded their participation in the scheduled activities. In these cases, the experience with and knowledge about the medium of other instructors of the study tour was crucial.

Overall, this experience was enriching for both instructor/researcher and students. On the one hand, not only did students improve their oral competence, but they also learned about and were immersed in a whole new different culture. This served a double purpose: it enhanced their understanding of Guatemalan culture and use of language, and it opened their horizons and provided them with a new perspective of life. For the instructor/researcher, this project enabled her to gain experience on how to develop a curriculum from scratch, and to apply it in a setting divergent from that of the traditional language classroom. This provided her with expertise that will be of valuable importance in both her careers as a researcher and as an instructor.

**Suggestions for Areas of Future Inquiry**

This project intended to provide a holistic view on the improvement of oral production during a short-term study abroad. In light of the results yielded, suggestions
for areas of future inquiry may include the study of specific aspects of language such as vocabulary acquisition. This may offer more precise views on the development of this linguistic element during the study abroad. In this sense, it would be interesting to examine quantitatively the acquisition and development of different aspects of language.

Another interesting point may be to analyze the effects of the implementation of the present curriculum in other study tours pertaining to different languages. This would enable the researcher to determine whether the conclusions drawn on the present study are generalizable to other study abroad contexts or not.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter discussed the findings yielded from the pre and post-stay interviews, the questionnaires, and the interlanguage journals. These three sources of data suggested that the implementation of the curriculum coupled with the immersive nature of the program helped students to improve their oral command of Spanish, which was measured through the assessment of students’ grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use and range, and fluidity of speech. The strengths of the program, its limitations as well as some suggestions for areas of future inquiry were also discussed. These are intended to help future instructors of the study tour to maximize the benefits of a short-term study abroad. In short, this project provides valuable information on the usefulness and potential of a shot-term study abroad, and offers prospective students a feasible opportunity to combine their studies with a study abroad.
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APPENDIX A

Syllabus and Itinerary
Instructors: Edward Montanaro, Arnulfo Figueroa, Nerea Delgado

Course Description:

This course will provide Spanish majors and minors a month-long opportunity to live, study, and work in a culturally authentic environment where Spanish is the language of all activities. Most of the class will take place in and around a remote agricultural cooperative in Santa Ana, Petén, Guatemala where only one of the approximately 400 residents speaks English. There will be three forms of intentional instruction: formal classes, individual tutoring, and service learning. Additionally, because the community has a large population of young people and a paucity of urban distractions, the students’ free time will be spend in social and recreational activities with members of the community. All instruction will be given in Spanish, much of it by Guatemalans, and students will be required to conduct their daily interactions with each other in Spanish. Grading will be based on measured progress made during the class and on the extent of compliance with the Spanish-only requirement. At least a brief home stay with families in the community will be required in this course.

Instructional content will include Guatemala’s history, ancient and contemporary Maya culture, and the economic and political challenges facing contemporary Guatemala. Instruction will address all four language capacities: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. All instruction, classroom and otherwise, will take place within a purposeful communicative context in which the use of Spanish is instrumental to the learning activity rather than the subject of instruction.

A substantial portion of the course content will deal with the indigenous roots of contemporary Guatemala. Since a large proportion of Guatemala’s population self-identifies as Maya, whether or not they speak a Maya language at home, the ideas and values of traditional Maya culture inform many aspects contemporary Guatemala. The students will study the manifestations of those Maya ideas and values in social patterns, spiritual practices, farming, and education.

Major Student Learning Outcomes and Methods to Measure Success:

Student Learning Outcome 1:
As a result of this course, students should make measurable improvement in one or more aspects of their Spanish language proficiency (reading, listening, writing, speaking).

Anticipated Methods of Assessment: Students will be tested before leaving for Guatemala and after returning in order to measure the change in proficiency.

Student Learning Outcome 2:

As a result of this course, students should become more confident in their oral use of Spanish and should demonstrate greater ease of speech in oral interactions with native speakers of Spanish.

Anticipated Methods of Assessment: Students will be tested before leaving for Guatemala and shortly before returning in order to measure the change in confidence and ease of oral interaction. Students will also be asked to make a qualitative assessment of confidence and ease of oral interaction before leaving for Guatemala and shortly before returning.

Student Learning Outcome 3:

As a result of this course, students should be able to explain how traditional Maya ideas with respect to the place of the human species among other species that inhabit the planet as well as the roles and obligations of individuals with respect to their families and communities, lead to contemporary Maya economic behavior that economists and development specialists from the developed world often find frustrating, incomprehensible, and irrational, but that the Maya view as rational within the context of contemporary and traditional Maya culture.

Anticipated Methods of Assessment: Students will demonstrate their knowledge in this area through group discussions.

Itinerary

Depart from Chicago O’Hare December 31, 2015

Overnight in Guatemala City

January 1, 2016 Travel by bus to Cooperativa Agrícola Nuevo Horizonte, Santa Ana, Petén
January 1-25 Cooperativa Agrícola Nuevo Horizonte and surrounding areas, including Tikal

January 27 Return to Guatemala City

January 28 Antigua Guatemala

January 29 Return to Chicago O’Hare.
APPENDIX B

Weekly Schedule
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domingo</th>
<th>Lunes</th>
<th>Martes</th>
<th>Miércoles</th>
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<td>9:00 am</td>
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<td>7:30pm Intercambio Cultural</td>
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<td>7:30pm Intercambio Cultural</td>
<td>7:30pm Intercambio Cultural</td>
<td>7:30pm Intercambio Cultural</td>
<td>7:30pm Pelicula con Jovenes de la Comunidad</td>
<td>Camping en Tikal</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Tortillas</td>
<td>Laguna</td>
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<td>7:30pm Intercambio Cultural</td>
<td>7:30pm Pelicula con Jovenes de la Comunidad</td>
<td>Camping en Laguna Queベキ</td>
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<td>Clases-Primaria-Basico</td>
<td>Clases-Primaria-Basico</td>
<td>Clases-Primaria-Basico</td>
<td>Sayaxche, El Ceibal, El Pato</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talleres EPA</td>
<td>Talleres EPA</td>
<td>Talleres Escuela Primaria</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comidas Tipicas</td>
<td>Encuentro Juvenil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clases EPA</td>
<td>Mural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capital-Antigua-Capital</td>
<td>Salida-GU-USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Noche Cultural
Bailes Tipicos
Canciones
Poemas
Video
Fotos
Agradecimiento
APPENDIX C

Language Use Questionnaire
Encuesta

1. ¿Cuánto tiempo hablas en español a lo largo del día?
   a) 0-20%  b) 20-40%  c) 40-60%  d) 60-80%  e) 80-100%

2. ¿Cómo ha sido tu expresión en español? ¿Cuánto has conseguido expresar en español sin recurrir al inglés?
   a) 0-20%  b) 20-40%  c) 40-60%  d) 60-80%  e) 80-100%

3. ¿Cuántas veces has utilizado el inglés como soporte para expresar conceptos o ideas?
   a) 0-20%  b) 20-40%  c) 40-60%  d) 60-80%  e) 80-100%

4. ¿Cuál ha sido tu nivel de comprensión de las interacciones con habitantes de la comunidad?
   a) 0-20%  b) 20-40%  c) 40-60%  d) 60-80%  e) 80-100%

5. ¿Cuál ha sido tu nivel de comprensión de las charlas de esta semana?
   a) 0-20%  b) 20-40%  c) 40-60%  d) 60-80%  e) 80-100%

6. ¿Cuánto crees que te están ayudando las siguientes actividades a mejorar tu nivel de español? Utiliza los porcentajes que se muestran a continuación:

   0-20%  20-40%  40-60%  60-80%  80-100%

   A Charlas
   B Intercambios lingüísticos
   C Interacción con los compañeros
   D Lectura de textos
   E Redacción del diario

7. ¿Cómo te sientes al utilizar el español como único medio de comunicación?
   a) Frustrado/a  b) Un poco frustrado/a  c) Con cierta comodidad  d) Cómodo/a  e) Muy cómodo/a

8. ¿Cuánto crees que está mejorando tu competencia lingüística?
   a) Muy poco  b) Poco  c) Neutro  d) Bastante  e) Mucho
APPENDIX D

Rubric for Interview Analysis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standards met</th>
<th>Standards barely met</th>
<th>Standards not met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammatical Accuracy:</strong> verb forms &amp; tenses, agreement:</td>
<td>20 – 19 - 18</td>
<td>16 – 14 - 12</td>
<td>10 – 8 – 6 – 4 – 2 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Ser / Estar Past Future Other verb tenses (conditional, subjunctive)</td>
<td>Engages in conversation in a clearly participatory manner, in the major time frames of the past present and future. Tense is appropriate to content/context</td>
<td>Grammatical elements of response sometimes hinder expressions of meaning. Tense is usually appropriate to content/context (occasional errors)</td>
<td>Grammatical errors regularly hinder expression of meaning. Tense is regularly used incorrectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>20 – 19 - 18</td>
<td>16 – 14 - 12</td>
<td>10 – 8 – 6 – 4 – 2 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary is varied and always appropriate to the situation</td>
<td>Vocabulary is somewhat varied and generally acceptable (occasional problems with correct meaning of words) The speaker sometimes needs help identifying the correct words</td>
<td>Vocabulary is limited, English was used Incorrect words are often used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency</strong></td>
<td>20 – 19 - 18</td>
<td>16 – 14 - 12</td>
<td>10 – 8 – 6 – 4 – 2 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The speaker speaks confidently and naturally. Ideas flow smoothly Natural pauses, fluent speech</td>
<td>The speaker hesitates several times, but generally seems to know the desired words. Pauses are generally not awkward</td>
<td>Speech is marked by hesitancy and has great difficulty remembering or selecting words Pauses may be awkward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information and comprehension</strong></td>
<td>20 – 19 - 18</td>
<td>16 – 14 - 12</td>
<td>10 – 8 – 6 – 4 – 2 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clear, relevant, and complete response to questions</td>
<td>Responses are not complete or too short. Questions had to be repeated</td>
<td>Irrelevant or unclear responses. Questions had to be repeated and rephrased</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Handout for Activity 4 (Literature Circles)
SECCIONES

PARTE I (Capítulo 1 al 7, páginas 1-51)
PARTE II (Capítulo 8 al 15, páginas 52-97)
PARTE III (Capítulo 16 al 26, páginas 98-168)
PARTE IV (Capítulo 27 al 39, páginas 169-234)

ROLES

1. **Líder**
   - Organizar el grupo literario
   - Elegir al menos 3 citas para comentar con el grupo. Las citas pueden tratar cualquier tema/personaje
   - Preparar preguntas para los compañeros

2. **Resumen**
   - Resumir la parte asignada
   - Destacar partes interesantes/cruciales para el desarrollo de la historia
   - Incluir citas con ejemplos representativos

3. **Análisis de personajes**
   - ¿Quiénes son los personajes? ¿Cómo son? ¿Cómo evolucionan a lo largo de la novela?
   - ¿Existen diferencias en cuanto a género?
   - Incluir citas con ejemplos representativos

4. **Elementos culturales**
   - ¿Qué tradiciones o rasgos socioculturales encuentras en la novela?
   - ¿Qué diferencias/similitudes encuentras con tu cultura?
   - Incluir citas con ejemplos representativos

5. **Vocabulario**
   - ¿Qué palabras nuevas has aprendido? ¿Qué palabras te han llamado la atención o te parecen curiosas?
   - Explicar al grupo estas palabras
   - OJO: El estudiante tiene que leer el capítulo centrándose en el contenido. Una vez haya hecho esto, ha de seleccionar algunas palabras que le hayan parecido interesantes, que haya aprendido o que sean propiamente guatemaltecas
6. **Adivino: [rol individual o grupal]**

- ¿Qué crees que pasará después?
- ¿Qué rumbo crees que tomará la historia?
- ¿Cómo crees que evolucionarán los personajes?
- Comenta tus hipótesis

**REGLAS GENERALES**

- Leer los capítulos asignados para cada semana
- Preparar un análisis textual de acuerdo con el rol asignado
- Participar activamente en el grupo
- Comentar y complementar las intervenciones de los compañeros
APPENDIX F

Activity 5 ("Show Me What You Know!")
Fig. 1 A group of students conducting a ballet lesson.

Fig. 2 Students engaging children from the school in a memory card game.
Fig. 3 A student conducting a karate lesson.

Fig. 3 Students building piñatas with teachers and students from the school in an activity (*taller*) organized by the school.
APPENDIX G

Activity 6 (Final Project)
Fig. 5 Students collaborating in the painting of the mural.

Fig. 6 The mural.