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The Impact of Immersion in Level 3 Spanish and French Students in Developing their Listening and Speaking Skills.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the impact of long-term immersion programs on language students in Trinidad and Tobago at the tertiary level. It looks specifically at Spanish and French students at Level 3 at the University of the West Indies (UWI) St. Augustine Campus, and focuses particularly on its effects on the listening and speaking faculties, as integral parts of the communicative process. This study was done to establish a connection between participation in immersion programs, and a noted improvement in the capabilities of students. Through thorough discourse by students on their experiences, and the comparisons between their abilities before and after participating in their respective immersion programs, we are able to identify the aspects which are primarily affected, and in what way this experience influences their learning. There is also a clear acknowledgement of mutual positive and negative results stemming from the interviews performed. It is important to note that, although mention will be made of other skills such as reading and writing, focus will indeed be placed on the highlighted aspects of listening and conversation. Through the research conducted on this topic, upcoming students will be able to utilize the information presented, being more informed with regards to deciding on whether or not they should participate in an immersion program, and what should be expected.

Keywords: Trinidad and Tobago, Immersion Program, Language, Speaking, Listening, Tertiary

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INTRODUCTION

Title of Thesis

“The Impact of Immersion in Level 3 Spanish and French Students in Developing their Listening and Speaking Skills”

Thesis Statement

This paper seeks to explore the widely held belief that participating in immersion programs benefits the student, focusing on the faculties of listening and speaking, through the analysis of first-hand accounts of students about their experiences.

Rationale

Although research has been conducted on this topic, there seems to be a deficit of studies within the Caribbean region. In addition, most of the research focuses on obtaining evidence through test scores, a more quantitative factor. This contributes to the research in a more general manner, rather than being able to focus on specific skills. Hence, a different research method will be applied in order to collect data pertaining to distinct abilities.

Parameters

In order to ensure that the validity of this study was maintained, several parameters were put in place. Firstly, all participants of this research took part in immersion programs which had a minimum duration of one (1) semester. Participants also had to be enrolled during the academic

year 2019-2020 at the University of the West Indies (UWI), in order to have sufficient post-program experience on which they would be able to articulate. As such, the research pool consists of only a few individuals, hence the decision to use an interview-based research method, as it facilitates extraction of more detailed data, allowing for a more in depth analysis of the topics at hand.

Objectives

This paper seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

- What are the positive impacts of immersion in language learning?
- What are the negative impacts of immersion on language learning?
- What are some techniques that could be utilized by those seeking to take full advantage of this language learning experience?

By following this guide, this study will accomplish the overall objective of establishing clearly defined and detailed results of participating in immersion programs. In this way, the information provided can be utilized by students not only when making the decision of whether or not they would like to take part in programs like these, but also for them to be able to put contingency measures in place in order to mitigate any of the negative effects of immersion.

Methodology

All participants went through an interview process, in which they answered questions centered around the research questions detailed above in the “Objectives” section. First the criteria for

being a participant was established, as in the “Parameters” section. Once this was done, the appropriate students were selected, and permission was received from them to conduct interviews and utilize the information. Release forms were provided for the participants, in which they gave their permission for the data collected in the interviews to be used as part of this study. The forms also assured that their anonymity would be protected.

Each interview lasted around half an hour, with participants focusing on their learning experiences during their respective programs, and making comparisons between their proficiency in the highlighted skills, both before and after their participation in their programs. Focus was also placed on prospective approaches to maximize the learning experience. Once this was done, the interviews were transcribed, allowing for easier data analysis. Patterns and trends were noted between the interviews and used as examples of possible effects of immersion programs.

Limitations

A major challenge faced was as a result of the location in which the research was being done. There were not a lot of secondary research materials of Caribbean origin which were available, thus, most of the papers used as a part of the secondary research came from other parts of the world.

Additionally, there were not many individuals available that would have fit within the parameters of the prerequisites for participation in the interviews. Not only were there less language students, compared to students of other programs, but only a select few are chosen each year as

participants of immersion programs. As such, the research pool was limited to a small sum of participants.

As such, the short time period allowed for this research project could also qualify as a limitation. If more time had been available in which research could be carried out, it would have been possible to gain access to more individuals who would have the traits required to be a participant.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter explores material that already exists on the topic at hand. It outlines already existing beliefs on the matter, research that has been done, and the results that came out of said research. Through this, differences in methodology and possible shortcomings of the previously done research can be established. This allows for the methodology utilized in this study to be established, in order for the previously seen shortcomings to be avoided.

From this point onwards, the main focus will be placed on the primary research done, with a few references and comparisons being made to the secondary research. The second chapter explores the positive impact of immersion programs on language learning, underlining the learning experiences of those interviewed.

The third chapter scrutinizes the negative aspects of immersion programs with respect to language learning. It delves into details of their overall abilities that worsened as a result of conditions or situations present during the programs. Also highlighted are the counteractive aspects that were noted following their experience, which were as a direct result of participating in an immersion program.

The fourth and final chapter focuses on the measures used and suggested by the participants. These would not only contribute to the development of the positive aspects previously highlighted, but can also be used to mitigate the negative effects mentioned in the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

The concept of immersion programs has currently been in existence for approximately sixty (60) years. The term “immersion education” was first introduced in Canada during the 1960s. It was then adopted in the United States, with their first program taking place in 1974 amongst public schools in Cincinnati (Genesee 541). Since its conception, there have been many assumptions about these programs, which seem to have become accepted not only by students, but even by professionals of high acclaim in the field of languages and language learning. One such assumption is that “[full immersion] programs are more effective at achieving a full range of outcomes than other program models,” (Dwyer & Norris 121). This sudden blind acceptance and adulation of immersion programs was further compounded by the fact that no formal research had been done pertaining to the effects of immersion programs until twenty or thirty years after the idea was introduced and put into practice. Of course, this has changed quite profoundly in the last decade or two, as there has been an influx of research being done in this area. For example, Claudette Tardif and Sandra Weber speak about the increase of studies pertaining to outcomes of French immersion education (67). There has also been an increase in research regarding the factors that may influence the outcome of participating in exchange programs, as well as the reasoning for participating (Baker & MacIntyre 72). Overall, there has evidently been an increased interest in this particular topic.

Despite this newfound curiosity, even when studies in this area began, researchers were not quite sure how to go about collecting data to show a correlation between immersion

programs and an impact on language learning. Many studies compared the test scores of students who participated in immersion programs, and those who did not. For example, a study conducted by the Department of German Studies and Slavic Languages of Brigham Young University compared the performance of students who had participated in immersions programs, with those whose sole method of learning was through the traditional classroom setting, looking at various linguistic-based and language-based components, to come to the conclusion that the traditional classroom could promote as much learning and improvement as the highly regarded immersion program (Brown 534-549). Another example of this type of comparison is between immersion programs, and CLIL programs, where students are taught material in a foreign language over an extended period of time. Results gathered from this comparison show that, “The goal of immersion programmes is to reach an L2 proficiency similar to that of native speakers, whereas CLIL programmes cannot have such a far-reaching objective,” (Lasagabaster 372). In essence, even though both methods of learning have their advantages, it appears that the results obtained by those participating in immersion programs would be far too ambitious for those who participated in CLIL programs.

In other circumstances, there was a comparison of test results that were collected both before and after participation in an immersion program. For example, a study was done in the United States of America, with participants within the category of paediatric doctors who would often have to treat children of first generation immigrants from Latin America. They were sent to

Guatemala for a short immersion program, after which there was an average of a 27% increase in proficiency, which was sustained for a year after the program (Barkin et al. 258). Another vast example looked at 2,782 students who were studying either French, German, Italian, Russian or Spanish. Based on the results recorded, both before and after participation in immersion programs, the following statement was made, “Time spent abroad is clearly one of the most potent variables we have found, and this is not surprising, for reasons that need not be elaborated. Certainly, our results provide a strong justification for a ‘year abroad’ as one of the experiences to be recommended for the language majors,” (Carroll 137). Evidently, the results of this study provide strong support for participating in immersion programs. Nevertheless, these two approaches were seen as fundamentally flawed due to the fact that test scores can be influenced by a multitude of reasons. In addition, many people rejected the acceptance of exam grades as a measure of intelligence, especially in the field of language learning, embracing a more holistic approach (Grissom 3). Also, there has been a lot of evidence claiming that there are varying reasons for negative test scores, therefore making it an inaccurate representation of students’ true abilities. For example, test anxiety has been identified as a major influencer with regards to test results (Chapell et al. 268-274). Thus, testing was ruled out, and instead, interviews were chosen as the method of collecting information. Despite being more subjective, it gave a more detailed introspection into if and how the participants were able to identify self-improvement with regards to foreign language learning, and why they believe this occurred. It also gave insight into factors that cannot be extracted through analyzing test scores, for example,

confidence and social anxiety. Additionally, there was more introspection into the day to day usage of the language, rather than solely that of an academic context.

More recently, researchers have begun to simply focus on entire languages as a whole, especially with the surge in two-way immersion programs. They compare the effects of immersion programs on different languages rather than the actual learning of the language. For example, there is a study published about a two-way immersion program between Italians and Germans in 2009. The following excerpt shows a comparison drawn between both groups of students, "... the German speakers have not had any disadvantages through TWI education and their achievements correspond with those in mainstream schooling... In contrast, the Italian group did not do as well in German when compared to the average mainstream achievements," (Meier 425). Even though there is a clear comparison between the two groups, the study does not outline the possible reasons or explanations as to why such a disparity may exist, thereby omitting key information on what factors influence the success of immersion programs. In some cases, individual languages were not even mentioned. For example, "These reports and studies indicate that TWI can be an effective model for...teaching other languages to English-speaking students, teaching English to students from other language backgrounds..." (Christian 263). Even though there was mention made of the target language, there was no specification of the participants' origins or what their native language was, thus making the study vague and invalid. Although it is possible that immersion programs may have differing levels of efficiency

depending on the target language, there was no definitive evidence which suggested this to be true, as correlation is completely different from causation. As such, for the purposes of this study, participants were not separated by the target language on which they focused on during their program.

Another issue encountered during secondary research of this topic was the contradictory nature of results. Of course, many studies done bore positive results. For instance, in a research paper done, analyzing patterns of language retention of students participating in Spanish immersion programs, it is said that “...students are generally at grade level on standardized Spanish achievement tests and have developed a level of communicative competence rarely, if ever, achieves in a traditional elementary foreign language program,” (Campbell et al. 183). This shows that students who had participated in this immersion program were more perceptive to the language, making them more comfortable and able in the skills associated with language learning. In another study on students who had also participated in a Spanish immersion program, the outcome was described as “unanimously positive”, going even further to describe the impact of the program on their perception of being “bilingual” and “bicultural” (Christian 111).

However, there were also those which showed little to no benefits of immersion programs. For example, in a study done in the United States, where Mexican-American children were placed in English immersion programs. The results were not as desirable as anticipated, as

“Results on California standardized tests indicate that such pressure [to use English] is having a negative effect on the academic progress of Mexican-American students,” (Gutierrez 219). This disconnect indicates that certain factors were not taken into account when the research was being done. In this case, perhaps the pressure of having to use the language in the daily context was a negative effect, as they would have been forced to do so. It was found that, in previous research, most papers did not examine the impact of personal attitudes and behaviours on the results of participating in an immersion program. This disregard may therefore be one of the reasons for the discrepancies found amongst the results of previous studies. Moving forward, it would be irresponsible to continue ignoring the effects of the students’ attitudes, as it has been proven time and time again that it has a profound impact on the student’s performance. According to an article published in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, “Results indicated a positive significant correlation between students’ attitude towards learning and achievement motivation... and between students’ attitude and academic achievement...” (Bakar et al 4906). Whether or not a student wants to learn a language can drastically impact their performance, as seen in the preceding example. Thus, this is a factor that will be taken into account during the primary research.

As evidenced, there are many factors to be considered going into research in this field. Taking this into consideration, there are also new prospective elements that may be discovered,

which can give us new insight into the effectiveness of immersion programs, and whether or not a general statement can truly be made about their impact on language students.

CHAPTER TWO

When speaking of the positive impacts of immersion programs, there are many things that must be considered. Firstly, all participants noted improvements made to the target language. That is to say, those who traveled to countries where Spanish was the native language saw a marked advancement in their abilities related to the Spanish language. Similarly, students who spent time in French-speaking countries were inclined to experience growth in their skills in the French language. However, these improvements were not seen simply as general. In fact, the participants were able to precisely identify the areas in which they improved. One such area was in the component of listening. An opinion that was upheld by all participants was that, due to being constantly surrounded by the target language, there was an inevitable enhancement to their listening abilities. As one of the participants describes, having a good grasp of listening to the target language was “necessary for survival.” Other participants also highlighted the necessity of listening when it came to speaking to people with accents that were not necessarily familiar to them. They stated that, in these circumstances as well, there would have been noted improvements, as their level of comprehension would have increased over time. This faculty is important to note, as it highlights a broadening of the capability of understanding speakers of the target language, regardless of whether or not they came from backgrounds familiar to the participants. Below, is a table constructed, showing comments made by each participant on exactly how they believe that their listening in the target language was positively impacted.

Figure 1: Improvement in Listening in the Target Language

Participant	Comments made
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Participant 1	“... my listening [improved] as well.”
Participant 2	“... if I were on the street and I passed someone that was speaking, obviously in French, it would be the same as if I passed someone speaking English and I understood them. I was able to understand French so casually, and I noticed that. It was like, ‘Oh my god! I know what they’re talking about!’...”
Participant 3	“These activities were also good for my listening, and both then and now, in the classroom, I can see the impact of it.”
Participant 4	“I think... [the most impacted] would definitely be listening, because it was necessary for survival... over there, you literally have no choice but to listen to what they’re saying. You have to find techniques, whatever you need to do, whether it’s to zone out the background noise, or, whatever you need to do to listen to what these people are saying and then understand it.”
Participant 5	“I still think I could get a bit of work with it, but I do think it has improved. Especially when I checked over the exam that we had for Auditiva [listening], yeah, I didn’t really struggle as much as I used to with the listening.”
Participant 6	“... by the second week I was being able to understand the words, because he was talking really fast, but I got accustomed to it very quickly and yeah, you kinda get accustomed to their language and their

	speed as well, because they speak really fast..”
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Another factor that was positively influenced by participation in an immersion program was speaking in the target language. For some, it was seen as the aspect that had improved the most during their stay in the respective countries. Participants were able to highlight the factors that resulted in the improvements of their speaking abilities. Firstly, there was the constant communication that took place in the foreign language. In most cases, participants would frequently interact with native speakers of their target language, who had little to no knowledge of English, the mother tongue of the participants of this study. As a result, it became mandatory that they speak regularly in the target languages, namely Spanish or French. It was also noted that, even amongst the participants who acted as English Teaching Assistants during their programs, communication in English outside of the professional context was very limited. Below is a small table showing their comments regarding this matter.

Figure 2: The Predominance of the Use of the Target Language

Participant	Comment
Participant 1	“... because people knew that I spoke English, they would try to speak to me in English, but I always tried to use Spanish, because I wanted to improve my Spanish.”
Participant 2	“we would speak English together in the classroom... A lot of the teachers preferred speaking to me in English because that was their opportunity to

	practice. So it was basically when I was out with my friends that I would speak French. Or if I went to the grocery to buy something, things like that.”
Participant 3	“... to interact with my housemate, and other French people, it would be necessary to speak in French... generally, I don’t think that people were that enthusiastic about English.”

It must also be noted that many participants actively sought out interaction with other native speakers. One participant notes their efforts, “I would also go to this cafe, where you would have to share tables, and I would use that as an opportunity to speak French, because they are very nice people from my experience.” Despite being in a new environment and being surrounded by new people, this participant mustered up the courage to spontaneously speak with persons in the target language. Another notes their sense of responsibility in putting herself into situations where she would have used her target language “For me, I put myself out a bit more, meaning I didn’t stay home, I found things to do everyday, whether it was to go to the park, whether it was to go and see a movie, whether it was to meet up with random people, whether it was to go on a trip by myself with a group of people I don’t know. As well as, there was an ERASMUS course I did where there were a lot of international students, making friends within that group as well, it was something that was very beneficial to me too.” Again, another participant shows their initiative in wanting to take full advantage of the language learning experience. This indicates an interest in language learning, thereby giving way to a positive attitude towards the process of the immersion program. As previously mentioned in the literature review, positive attitudes were seen as a major contributing factor to language learning in the context of an immersion program. As such, it can

be said that the results of this study show this notion to be correct, as participants who were more open to the experiences of their respective programs were more likely to see a noticeable improvement in their language skills.

As a result of the improvements to speaking, there were a few secondary fundamental attributes that participants found had gotten much better than when they had first arrived to their respective countries of immersion. A major change was seen in the confidence of the participants. The majority, if not all of them, noted that they had much more confidence after participating in their immersion programs, as opposed to prior interactions. Many participants described a similar awakening of their confidence: that, at the beginning of their program, they were much more shy and reserved, and were a lot more cautious when interacting with native speakers, fearful of committing errors and therefore making a fool of themselves. However, as time went along, they began to accept the criticisms and corrections offered to them, rather than shying away from it, now seeing it as a way to improve their communication skills. As a result, they were not only able to constructively improve their speaking, but also see criticism as being positive rather than negative. Participant 6 goes into great detail about their experience and how it caused a shift in how they approached communicating in the target language. They noted, “It helped me a lot because I was always shy to speak Spanish for fear of making errors, for fear of not saying the right thing, and that’s kind of the reason why I wanted to take part in the exchange program. Doing it kind of allowed me to come out of that shell that I was in and helped me be a bit more confident speaking the language and being forced into situations where you have to speak the language, it’s like you have no other choice, and that kind of pushed me a bit further to speak the language... in the beginning, there was that fear of going out and speaking and putting myself out there because the first day I went, I had to go and talk in English in the International

Office, because I was so scared that I wouldn't understand what he was saying... But that changed.” This is a clear example of a participant using the experience of an immersion program to better themselves, thus becoming more confident and having a more positive attitude. Before the program, the participant was heavily impeded by their anxiety, rendering them at times incapable of communicating in the target language. However, by confronting their fears through the immersion program, they were able to work on what they deemed to be a problem, and became more confident and willing to communicate.

This increase in confidence led to another positive aftereffect, that is, an increase in fluency. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, once participants became more confident, they became more willing and open to communicating with others in the target language, especially with native speakers. Having constant interaction with native speakers would thereby allow the participants to have more insight into the natural flow of the language. They would be able to pick up the subtleties that cannot be taught in the classroom, but can be learnt through constant contact with persons who speak the target language as their first language. For example, factors such as intonation, proper pausing and pace are all related to the idea of fluency whilst speaking, and can be learnt through interaction with native speakers. In addition, increased practice of the language could also increase the participants' levels of fluency, as they become more accustomed to having to speak in a foreign language. As stated by different participants, communicating in the target language in a foreign country, where said target language is the mother tongue, is not an option. It becomes mandatory when you need to speak that language for everyday activities, and moreso, for survival. In this way, most participants acknowledged their improvement, attributing it to their increased practise of the language, as well as their ability to communicate with native speakers. Participant 3 acknowledges this, through their

communication with fellow professionals, who were also native French speakers, “I would always, even though a lot of my colleagues were English teachers, and all of their English was perfect. I started off speaking to them in English, but as I got more comfortable with them, I’d talk to them in French a lot of times, to practise my speaking and improve my fluency.” Here, the participant acknowledges that here increased usage of the target language resulted in an improvement in their fluency. Participant 1, who participated in a similar program, echoes this sentiment, “And you can see the difference. When we speak, everything comes a bit more naturally, there is a marked difference, in fluency...” Even after returning from their immersion program, this participant noted that their improved fluency continued, allowing them better expression in their classes and when speaking with classmates.

Participants also noted that a factor that helped their ability to communicate in the country of their immersion program was the fact that they were able to learn colloquial expressions. They noted that these types of expressions were what was commonly used while speaking in a casual setting. Thus, learning these phrases allowed them to not only understand what was being said in certain contexts, but also facilitated their ability to communicate with people outside of the academic setting, such as friends that they would have made in the country of immersion.

Another independent positive result was an improvement in reading and writing. This came from a student who participated in a study abroad program, where all of her reading materials were in the target language. As a result, she was able to improve her accuracy in spelling and grammar, and also was able to learn new vocabulary and phrases, all of which would have helped to improve her abilities in writing, and her understanding while reading. However, as this only applied to a single participant, the impact of immersion on the reading and

writing abilities requires continued analysis, where different parameters are applied. Thus, there will be further examination in the chapters that follow.

Examining what has been presented with regards to the positive aspects of the immersion programs, it is clear that the more communicative aspects seem to have been positively affected. Although these improvements are quite substantial and cannot be ignored, there must also be a fair examination of what can be considered as the consequences associated with participating in an exchange program.

CHAPTER THREE

Evidently, there are many positive results stemming from participation in immersion programs. Nevertheless, it would be remiss to not equally examine the negative effects. For instance, certain participants noticed a decline in their abilities in the subcomponents of reading and writing over the course of their immersion programs. This applied primarily for the three (3) participants interviewed, who acted primarily in the role of English Language Teaching Assistants during their program. They prefaced their issues by highlighting that they had been warned prior to the immersion programs that they should make a concerted effort to practice their reading and writing skills. However, due to different personal reasons and varying circumstances, they were not able to utilise their reading and writing skills as much as they would have hoped. As a result, these two skills would have been negatively affected. Speaking specifically about writing, Participant 2 notes that, "...I think I need to practise a bit more with my writing, because sometimes, for example if I'm writing "J'ai mangé", I'd mistakenly write it in the infinitive, like "J'ai manger", and I'd realize that it's wrong, so I always have to take my time and make sure that I'm writing the correct thing, because it sounds the same, so sometimes I'd automatically write what it sounds like." Being out of practice evidently led to negative impacts in these abilities. Even though the participant was aware of what was correct, they had fallen out of the habit of writing, and therefore this activity became more difficult. This lack of practise in these particular skills had also caused consequences related to other abilities in the language. Participant 1 makes mention of this, saying, "...when I would speak to people, we would keep to very casual topics. So, yes I did have intellectual discussions with people in Colombia, but reading really gives you that intellectual perspective where you can learn new vocabulary about different topics. Like politics, education, different things like that. So, I think

that's where I would have suffered. Yes, I would have a broad vocabulary, but specific vocabulary for certain topics that is necessary to study here, I wouldn't have focused on that." In this instance, the participant notes how their lack of reading negatively impacted them in a general manner, but more so in the academic context. By not reading, they were not exposed to a more varied range of topics, spanning across a more academic context. Thus, they were not as capable in certain topics as they were in others. Participant 3 echoes these sentiments, revealing that, "if I had read and written a lot, I would have been able to practise a more formal, or a higher register of French. For example, if I had to find a fancier word for "aller", it would probably be easier if I had practised my reading and writing more. So in that sense, my writing was at a lower level than I would have wanted it to be." It is clear that, by not practising their reading and writing, participants noticed a stagnation in their higher registers of the target languages, while their casual register would have improved through oral communication. This lack of vocabulary and phrases used in more formal settings could potentially affect all aspects of the language: influencing their ability to speak in formal settings, their comprehension during formal conversations, their ability to read and understand documents of a formal or academic register, and even impeding their written expression in the event of having to produce a formal piece of writing.

However, this concern about the reading and writing faculties did not affect the students who had participated in study abroad programs. Two of those students noted no significant change in those abilities, whereas one participant noted an improvement. This person stated, "My reading skills, I definitely saw an improvement because there you have to read everything in Spanish. They don't really give you the option of reading the English version of the text, and then the time period that they wanted it in, was like, they wanted you to read a book or an article

with less than a week, so I had to do it. And it pushed me, as well, to read in Spanish, because it helps you improve your vocabulary, it helps you improve your sentence structure and stuff like that, so I definitely saw an improvement in my writing.” Thus, being in an academic setting created an obligation for those participants to read and write in the target language, whereas those with more freedom were seen to err in this regard. This is definitely something to consider moving forward, especially when students are considering going on immersion trips, and what type of immersion program they should engage in.

Another negative impact presented affected those specifically who were studying more than one language, that is, four out of six of the participants interviewed. Being in a foreign country where only the target language is being spoken, difficulties may arise with respect to learning or studying another foreign language. This was the case for these four participants, who found it difficult to practise their other foreign language while in their countries of immersion. Participant 1 and Participant 6, who were both in Spanish-speaking countries, found it difficult to practise their French, whereas Participant 2 and Participant 3 found difficulties in practising their Spanish while being in a French-speaking country. It appears that different participants were affected at differing levels. For example, Participant 1 paints a picture of her French being terribly affected through the lack of practise that she endured during her stay, “My French was definitely impacted. The experience was great for my Spanish, but it was terrible for my French. And I say that because I rarely practised French. I knew that I had to, because I had to come back and study, and because I want to use French in life, and I don’t want to forget it. But the opportunity just wouldn’t present itself. Yes, I could talk to myself, but you need the input of someone else to communicate with and give you feedback. So I felt as though, when I came back to UWI, that I was back to level one with my French. And I was very self conscious. I am still

very self conscious about my French, because I think I lost a lot when it comes to French and studying French.” In this instance, it seems that the participant’s French was severely affected. As the participant rarely practised, there was a noted drop in quality in the French language. However, Participant 6 seems to have been less affected, “I would say that the French kind of got a backseat because of the fact that I was in a Spanish speaking country. I made a friend from France which kind of ensured that I didn’t really lose that in terms of the French. I wouldn’t say that it suffered, but I would say that it wasn’t practised as much as I would’ve liked because of the setting that I was in.” In this instance, although there was also a decrease in practice, the participant did not note such a drastic decline. Instead, it was more of a stagnation in the skills attributed to the language. We must then consider what causes the disparity between the experiences of participants with regards to the impact of the other foreign language. Practise of said language can be taken out of the picture, as all relevant participants admitted to not practising their other foreign language as much as they should have, or not practising at all. We are then left with the element of the time periods spent in the country of immersion. Those who seem to be most affected had a stay of close to a year in their countries of immersion. However, Participant 6, who was least affected, had only been in the country of immersion for a period of five months, and therefore did not have as extended of a period where the other foreign language was not practised. In many articles, such as that published by Moorcroft and Gardner, time away from practising a language can have negative impacts, and the more time away, the greater the impact (327). Hence, the decline in the other foreign language can be attributed simply to the time that was wasted not practising it.

Another aspect brought up by a few participants was the intrusion of the target language in their native tongue, that is, English. After coming back from their immersion programs, three

out of six participants realized that they had begun to replace certain words or phrases in English with the target language while speaking, or they would remember the equivalent in the target language rather than in the mother tongue. Participant 2 clearly demonstrates these effects by explaining, “I guess in that sense, my French has now become more like my English. Sometimes the French just “jumps out”, while I’m speaking English, because some words, they don’t have a direct translation in English, or they don’t convey the exact meaning that I want. So sometimes when I’m speaking to one of my family members, I would have to really think before the English word comes back to me, because they obviously wouldn’t understand if I said it in French. Also, I think that I tend to use simpler English now. I don’t know if that’s an effect of the program. Maybe it’s because my use of English decreased during the program. But yeah, I would say that that was another way in which my English was affected.” In essence, because of the continuous use of the target language, it seems that the target language surpassed the native language to a certain extent. Not only was it the case that they found it easier to use the target language, but they saw a decrease in the level of their native language. This can be attributed to the increased use of the target language at the same time as a decreased use of the mother tongue. Participant 1 points out, “I definitely think that I used Spanish a lot more, because if you look at the time spent in the University, which was the time where I would actually speak English, it was a lot less than the time I would spend outside of the university. So, where I was living, everyone spoke Spanish, no one spoke English. The community that I visited, the Muslim community, nobody spoke English, or rather hardly anyone spoke English.” Here, there is evidence of the increased use of the target language during immersion programs, which would evidently lead to the negative effects mentioned above. Another possible connection, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, has to do with the amount of time spent in the country of immersion. Once again, the students

affected by this problem are those that spent a longer period in their immersion programs, than those who spent less time. Therefore, this could be another contributor to a decline in the native tongue.

Another negative element that should be considered when it comes to immersion programs would be a negative outlook or attitude. Positive attitudes and how it contributed to the learning experiences were already discussed in the preceding chapter, however we will now look at the impact of attitude from another angle. For the purposes of this argument, we will be looking specifically at Participant 5. They admitted that, even though their immersion program was a study abroad program, there was not a lot of interaction between student and teacher, as they were mostly lecture-style classes. In this regard, they did not have control of her situation. However, when it came to communicating outside of the classroom, it appears that they made no real effort in establishing bonds through which they would have been able to improve her skills. They said that, "...while all the native speakers in the classroom didn't make me feel ostracized, they also didn't go out of their way to talk to me either, so I didn't feel okay with that. And there wasn't anything really like a "Welcome foreign Students", well, there was a welcome for the foreign exchange students, but it was only for the foreign exchange students, there wasn't anything like a huge interaction with the others. So, if there was something like that, where we got to mingle with the others, maybe." Whereas the other participants understood that they needed to make an effort to communicate with others, this participant seemed unaware, expecting there to be activities or events in place which would facilitate such interaction. Even when presented with social activities, they preferred to not participate. They attributed this lack of participation to their anxiety. They admitted that, "I didn't really interact with people much outside of the classroom except for some friends who were English speakers, but I would always

have a mental block about it to the point that basic stuff that I know how to say or whatever, I'd draw blank... So yeah, there was a bit of a mental block." In essence, the participant did not feel particularly inclined to make an effort to communicate with speakers in the target language. It could be that they felt anxious or nervous, or it could even mean that they simply felt as though it was not necessary for their purpose in the immersion program. Even though this is a valid drawback, other participants had expressed their problems with anxiety as well, however, knowing that they would be in the immersion setting, they made the effort to exert themselves and find opportunities to communicate in the target language.

It appears that there are also some negative effects that must be considered when contemplating the effectiveness of an immersion program on language learning. Despite the fact that these programs have been lauded tremendously over the years, it appears that they are not as infallible as once thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

In this chapter, we will examine the tools and techniques suggested by the participants. These methods include, but are not limited to things that they would have done during their immersion programs. This means that certain ideas presented are what they were unable to accomplish, or would have thought about in retrospect.

One of the first techniques was to practise their reading and writing. Although it seems like a very simple way to maintain one's proficiency in a language, it appeared that certain participants encountered a bit of difficulty when faced with these tasks. Those who participated in study abroad immersion programs found that they were continuously reading and writing in the target language, due to having multiple readings and assignments to do. For example, in Participant 6's experience, "My reading skills, I definitely saw an improvement because there you have to read everything in Spanish. They don't really give you the option of reading the English version of the text, and then the time period that they wanted it in, was like, they wanted you to read a book or an article with less than a week, so I had to do it. And it pushed me as well to read in Spanish, because it helps you improve your vocabulary, it helps you improve your sentence structure and stuff like that, so I definitely saw an improvement in my writing." Therefore, through the continuous practice of reading and writing, there would have been an improvement in these skills. However, for those who participated in the role of a teaching assistant, they found themselves with more freedom, and were subject to the temptation of other activities, despite being told in advance that this was something that should have been done. Participant 2 admits, "Well, while I was there, I was told that it was important to read and write a lot in French. Because most people who go away to be an assistant, they don't really write a lot. And I understand, because there were a lot of informal registers that I used." Evidently, there is

not a lot of focus placed on reading and writing for the English language teaching assistants. Most of their communication is oral due to the nature of their work. As a result, they are usually advised to practise this privately during their programs. However, although this advice was given, it appears to have fallen on deaf ears for the most part. For example, Participant 1 states, “When I was in Colombia, I really didn’t practice reading or writing a lot. And if I did, it was only because I knew that I had to come back to UWI to study, and I needed to keep practising so that my speaking and listening wouldn’t be at a higher level than my reading and writing. The only things that I would actually read would maybe be Facebook posts about Colombian news, but I think that’s it. I didn’t practice at all.” Despite the forewarnings, it appears that what truly influenced any form of practice regarding these skills was preparation for the inevitable return to university classes. Thus, the statement can be made that academic stimulus was necessary to incite the participants to actively practise and refresh their skills in reading and writing. In essence, although participants knew that reading and writing would be beneficial to them, it was only done sufficiently in the instances where it was seen as mandatory to do so.

Also in the academic sphere, there were some students who noted that attending language classes either helped or would have helped them. For some, it would have assisted with the target language. For example, Participant 6 states that, “There was an ERASMUS course I did...” Participant 4, who participated in a similar program, but did not take this course, also identifies that this course would have been beneficial to her, “But this one specific course that didn’t go for any credits or anything, it was just to learn, that course I would say might have been a technique, but it wasn’t of my own doing. It was offered and I didn’t do it, so I didn’t take any initiative to do it. So that would have helped because they did things like grammar, vocabulary, freshening up on things that you need to know when learning the language...” As briefly explained by

Participant 4, this type of course would have allowed participants to refresh their already existing knowledge. It would have also been a very all-rounded revision, as each component of the language is given equal attention in the class setting. Thus, it would have been an opportunity for participants to work on those areas that were seen as neglected outside of the classroom, creating an equilibrium amongst the abilities of the language. Additionally, those who study more than one language at the tertiary level noted the significance of taking a class for their other foreign language during their time in the immersion program. For example, Participant 1 states, “...for French I would have tutorials, random tutorials with the French assistant at the university. And I would try to speak to her in French.” Participant 3 notes their downfall in not taking part in such opportunities, “The irony is that I didn’t practise any Spanish even when I was surrounded by Spanish teachers. Even when they would speak to me in Spanish, my brain just wouldn’t absorb it...” They noted that their Spanish was definitely affected negatively by not practising, therefore attending Spanish classes would have assisted in maintaining the knowledge that she already had. In this way, there can be improvement not only in the target language, but also in another foreign language if necessary.

Another technique that was echoed by all participants was the need to communicate with native speakers outside of mandatory interactions. Of course, it is expected that, living for an extended period of time in a foreign country, the participants would have had to communicate with native speakers for certain everyday tasks. As Participant 3 rightfully explains, “Yeah, to interact with my housemate, and other French people, it would be necessary to speak in French.” However, they also stress the importance of placing themselves in new situations, where they would be required to communicate spontaneously, and in a different manner from which they were accustomed to. For example, Participant 3 notes their efforts in communicating

spontaneously with native speakers, utilizing appropriate social settings such as coffee shops with shared tables. By fostering and encouraging this type of interaction, the participant noticed their improvement, specifically in listening, both during their program, and more recently in the classroom setting. This would have also been a way to work on their confidence while speaking, thereby facilitating improvements in fluency and making them more willing to communicate with others in the target language. This effect was clearly experienced by Participant 2, who expressed, “I think I was able to improve how I expressed myself, number one orally, that is, because at the beginning of the trip, I would have to translate what the other person was saying in my head, whereas now, if someone speaks, I’m able to understand them automatically, so I can immediately answer their question or respond to them. I do definitely prefer the way I speak now compared to how I spoke before, because it’s much more fluent. It sounds like French.” This participant expresses their sentiment of feeling as though they had improved in the target language, highlighting certain factors that led them to identify this positive change. They also noted that, by opening themselves up to interact with different people, they allowed themselves exposure to people from different regions and countries, and therefore they were subject to new and varied accents. As Participant 1 states, “So, when I got to Colombia, my landlord actually spoke really fast, and I couldn’t understand almost anything, I couldn’t understand what she used to say. So, that took a lot of getting used to. Also, the community leader of the community that I went to was from the coast apparently, the coast of Colombia, and he spoke really, really fast. And that was really the most difficult part for me, understanding people when they spoke. And, I mean, people from Bogota generally tend to have a very standard accent, so I was able to catch on fast, but those people who I came into contact with that were from different areas, that had a different accent, it was really difficult.” Despite being situated in one region for the most part,

this participant was exposed to a wide variety of accents, leading them to become more versatile when it came to their listening and comprehension. This would have led to not only a better understanding of different accents, but also an improvement in the general comprehension of participants. By being exposed to different accents, the participant would also have become more aware of certain variations which exist in the language. This includes but is not limited to differences in pronunciation, omission of sounds, dialectal phrases, and vocabulary differences. As such, there would have been an improvement in listening and comprehension, due to a heightened awareness of new and possible meanings of what is being said.

One participant also cited her use of subtitles as a medium of learning, “With regards to colloquial French, I didn’t have a lot of friends, so I watched a lot of Netflix, and I picked up a lot of colloquial language from that.” While watching television, she would either keep the audio in English but have the subtitles in the foreign language, or vice-versa. This facilitated the learning of new words and expression, and even improved her reading, writing and grammar, as she would have been exposed to correct grammar, sentence structure and other elements that would improve these abilities through accurate subtitling. It also introduced the participant to various words and phrases that were considered to be slang. Living in a country of the target language, being exposed to colloquial language would have been beneficial, especially pertaining to communicating with native speakers on a daily basis. Considering that colloquial language would be integrated into general speech, having knowledge of it would make the communication process much quicker and easier.

In essence, most participants were able to identify potentially beneficial activities which supplemented their passive learning experiences during their immersion programs. This is of immense value, as it outlines what future immersion program participants can utilize to

maximize their experiences. It must be noted however, that although these activities seem to not exert much effort, they do require a certain level of discipline from participants in order to be effective, thereby obtaining the desired results of immersion programs.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, it is clear that many factors must be taken into consideration by students when presented with the opportunity of an immersion program. With regards to the primary concern of its impact on listening and conversation, it is evident that the results are, above all, overwhelmingly positive. Many participants saw great improvements in their communication skills through engaging in a community where the first language would be their target language. Of course, given that their interactions would not have been limited to only a formal setting, they would have been exposed to informal interactions, where colloquial expressions would have been used. Thus, this was one of the few things to take into consideration when looking at the negative impacts on listening and speaking during an immersion program.

However, with regards to the abilities of reading and writing, it is clear that more research must be done, at a more profound level. Based on what was expressed by participants, they lapsed in practising these aspects, unless their purpose during their exchange programs required them to do so. Hence, only very basic and general assumptions can be made regarding these capabilities.

Overall, in depth and qualitative assessments such as this one must continue. In the past, there have been numerous studies which analyze participant ability based solely on test performance. This type of examination fails to recognize the factors which may influence a participant's achievements, rather encompassing all immersion programs as one, and making general assumptions about not only the programs, but about the students participating in them.

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APPENDIX
Interview 1
Interviewer - I Participant - P1

I: Good morning.

P1: Good morning.

I: So, to begin, could you tell me a bit about yourself, what you study, and some details about the immersion program that you participated in?

P1: Okay, my name is [redacted]. I am 22 years old. I study Spanish and French here at UWI. So, the immersion program I took part in was for the year 2019/2020. It was as a result of a direct relationship that UWI has with the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional in Colombia, in Bogota specifically.

I: So that program was how long?

P1: It was from August 2018 till May 2019.

I: And what did you do on the program?

P1: We were language assistants, English assistants. So we basically had to assist students with any problems that they had, assist teachers in classes if they requested us to. Also, we were in charge of creating groups and clubs for the English students, so that they could come and practice different things. So we had conversation club, writing club, and culture club as well.

I: So I want to get into your use of language during your stay. Would you say that you used Spanish more than English? Or were there certain situations where you used either language?

P1: I definitely think that I used Spanish a lot more, because if you look at the time spent in the University, which was the time where I would actually speak English, it was a lot less than the time I would spend outside of the university. So, where I was living, everyone spoke Spanish, no one spoke English. The community that I visited, the Muslim community, nobody spoke English,

or rather hardly anyone spoke English. But when I communicated with people, it was mostly in Spanish. So, I definitely think it would've been more Spanish than English, because we only used English in the university.

I: And, as you mentioned being a language assistant, did you find that people would approach you and want to practice English? Would there have been circumstances like that?

P1: Yes? Are you speaking about within the university, or outside?

I: Outside.

P1: Yes, definitely. But, people who had high levels of English, yes. And those who wanted to learn English, they just asked me to teach them small stuff, like how to say something in English, like that. But, yeah, because people knew that I spoke English, they would try to speak to me in English, but I always tried to use Spanish, because I wanted to improve my Spanish. So it was a good exchange, not necessarily because I was a language assistant, but because they knew that English is my native language.

I: Okay. So, what do you think you learned during that time? And I'm speaking specifically language wise. What are some things that you learnt?

P1: I learnt a lot about English actually, because I had to learn a lot about the rules and the structure of my own language to be able to successfully teach it. But I also learnt a lot of Colombian phrases and expressions that they would use, which is really interesting. And that's why I always find myself using Colombian sayings and Colombian things. For example, I would say "digamos" when I want to give an example. And sometimes in class, I would catch myself before I say it. I always do that. I always use Colombian sayings that maybe other Spanish-speakers would not understand., words that they wouldn't really be able to identify. So I try to

keep to the standard Spanish in class, but yeah, I learnt a lot about the jargon that mostly young people would say.

I: Okay, and would you say that you learnt more with regards to, because you mentioned speaking, would you say that that was what was influenced the most by your stay?

P1: No, I think my listening as well. Because when I got there, well, I think I practised speaking here in UWI more than the listening. So, when I got to Colombia, my landlord actually spoke really fast, and I couldn't understand almost anything, I couldn't understand what she used to say. So, that took a lot of getting used to. Also, the community leader of the community that I went to was from the coast apparently, the coast of Colombia, and he spoke really, really fast. And that was really the most difficult part for me, understanding people when they spoke. And, I mean, people from Bogota generally tend to have a very standard accent, so I was able to catch on fast, but those people who I came into contact with that were from different areas, that had a different accent, it was really difficult. So I think, yes my speaking improved a lot, but my listening as well.

I: And what about with the students? For example, I befriended a student and he was from Santander, and he spoke really really quickly. And I know, because we did the same program, that most of the students were from Bogota, but did you have any experiences with students from other parts?

P1: Yes, I actually had a student from Barranquilla, which is the same place that the Islamic leader is from, but he didn't speak as fast. I mean, maybe he was slowing it down for me, but I don't think so because he was speaking very naturally. But most students tend to speak to you like this.

I: Now that we've spoken about listening and speaking, what about your reading and writing?

P1: Hmm (laughs). When I was in Colombia, I really didn't practice reading or writing a lot. And if I did, it was only because I knew that I had to come back to UWI to study, and I needed to keep practising so that my speaking and listening wouldn't be at a higher level than my reading and writing. The only things that I would actually read would maybe be Facebook posts about Colombian news, but I think that's it. I didn't practice at all.

I: So, I know that you mentioned jargon, and I want to ask if you think that that has negatively impacted your speaking, because as you mentioned, it's not standard, and not everyone would understand it.

P1: I think so. For example, when we're doing exams and everything has to come spontaneously, it's kind of difficult to remember to not use certain words and certain phrases that aren't widely accepted as standard Spanish. So that could be a negative impact. But, I also think that it's good to have a different cultural experience with language, to be integrated into the Spanish language.

I: With regards to Spanish language, do you think that there's anything else that would've been affected negatively? So for example, reading or writing?

P1: Yes. I think so. Definitely my reading. And yes, my writing as well. I say this because, when I would speak to people, we would keep to very casual topics. So, yes I did have intellectual discussions with people in Colombia, but reading really gives you that intellectual perspective where you can learn new vocabulary about different topics. Like politics, education, different things like that. So, I think that's where I would have suffered. Yes, I would have a broad vocabulary, but specific vocabulary for certain topics that is necessary to study here, I wouldn't have focused on that.

I: And since you study Spanish and French, I want to ask you how you think your French was impacted, or if there was any impact.

P1: My French was definitely impacted. The experience was great for my Spanish, but it was terrible for my French. And I say that because I rarely practised French. I knew that I had to, because I had to come back and study, and because I want to use French in life, and I don't want to forget it. But the opportunity just wouldn't present itself. Yes, I could talk to myself, but you need the input of someone else to communicate with and give you feedback. So I felt as though, when I came back to UWI, that I was back to level one with my French. And I was very self conscious. I am still very self conscious about my French, because I think I lost a lot when it comes to French and studying French.

I: This rolls into my next question. Were there any specific things that you would do to practice the language, be it Spanish or French? So for example, I would go to language exchanges, where yes I would help people there with their English, but I would use the opportunity to practice, more than anything, my French, and also my Spanish. So, was there anything like that that you did?

P1: Well, Spanish was just continuous practice, and for French I would have tutorials, random tutorials with the French assistant at the university. And I would try to speak to her in French. But I think that was the most I got out of French. But I would actually watch movies in French, but that could only compensate for so much.

I: And you didn't do anything specific for Spanish right?

P1: I was just living in a Spanish environment, so I didn't feel the need to do anything specific to practise.

I: And coming back now, would you say that overall your Spanish has improved?

P1: Definitely. My Spanish has definitely improved. In Colombia, a lot of people would approach me and say that I had a really good accent, and that I sound Colombian or native, and I really wouldn't believe them. Because every time I made a mistake, I would correct it or overthink it. And then when I came back to Trinidad, and I started speaking Spanish regularly here at the university, I would realize that my Spanish definitely improved a lot, and I stopped being so hard on myself because I realized that my Spanish was really good. Yeah, that made me feel really good.

I: Do you think that there was a boost in your self confidence?

P1: Yes, definitely. Speaking around natives all the time made me nervous, but when I came back and started practising here at the University, it showed me that the exchange program really helped me a lot, and my Spanish just shot through the roof. I was really happy with my level of conversation.

I: So you saw a marked improvement from before you left versus coming back now.

P1: Yes. Even my roommate commented on that. She said "ya eres colombiana". She said that when I came, my Spanish wasn't as good as it was when I was leaving. For a native to tell you something like that, it means that you've really improved.

I: So one thing a lot of people said about me was that at first I was really shy and nervous, and I think that was because I was also self conscious around so many natives. Coming down to the end, I gained a lot more confidence, and I think it shows, even in class, even when you compare the people who went on exchange programs versus the people who didn't, you can see that marked difference in confidence. I don't know if you have the same opinion.

P1: Yeah, I just didn't want to say it because I didn't want to seem cocky. I think that was the reason why I realised that my Spanish really did improve, because when I came back and I spoke

in class, and my conversation and your conversation versus the other students who didn't participate in exchange programs, I realised that my Spanish really did improve. And you can see the difference. When we speak, everything comes a bit more naturally, there is a marked difference, in fluency, vocabulary, even grammar.

I: And I think even if we have difficulty with vocabulary or a certain grammatical structure, we are really quick to switch it up and use a different structure or a different word.

P1: Yeah, because that's what we had to do in order to communicate. And I should've mentioned this before but, when you study Spanish, you study grammar, but in Colombia I didn't study grammar at all. So I just learned things on the way. And I had very nice people around me who corrected me when I made mistakes, which I appreciated. So after a while, I would stop making the same grammatical errors. So, I guess that's why I didn't really feel the need to study grammar.much.

I: Okay, thank you so much for your time.

P1: You're welcome.

Interview 2
Interviewer - I Participant - P2

I: Good afternoon. To start, can we just get a bit of information about yourself?

P2: Okay, my name is [redacted], I am 22 years old. I am a French major, with a double minor in Spanish and International Relations.

I: And can you tell me a bit about the program that you participated in?

P2: Well I went to France in the 2018-2019 academic year. I was an English assistant at a lycee, so I basically helped the English teachers at the school teach English to their students.

I: So, tell me about your use of French during this program.

P2: To be honest, I didn't speak as much as I wanted to in French, because I spent most of my time at the school, where we would obviously speak English. So we would speak English together in the classroom, unless they couldn't understand something that I was saying, and that I couldn't translate another way. A lot of the teachers preferred speaking to me in English because that was their opportunity to practice. So it was basically when I was out with my friends that I would speak French. Or if I went to the grocery to buy something, things like that.

I: So would you say that you spoke more English than French then?

P2: I would say that I spoke them equal amounts, and I also spoke in Spanish. Because I lived with two girls, one was from England and the other was from El Salvador.

I: Okay, so then what about your use of Spanish?

P2: So, I got to speak with her in Spanish. She really did encourage me to speak in Spanish, and she would speak to me in English. Also, in the lycee, I went to some of the Spanish classes. The Spanish teacher was nice enough to have me in her class, so I did that as well.

I: So with regards to both your Spanish and French, was there anything that you learnt?

P2: I learnt a lot about colloquial expressions. Well, while I was there, I was told that it was important to read and write a lot in French. Because most people who go away to be an assistant, they don't really write a lot. And I understand, because there were a lot of informal registers that I used. But I read a lot, so I learned a lot of formal and informal vocabulary, from reading, speaking and listening in French.

I: And what about your Spanish, how was it impacted?

P2: Well, if you're asking if it was negatively impacted, it definitely was. Even though I would've spoken with my roommate, we didn't speak that often. So, as opposed to year 2 where I was always speaking in Spanish, in France I was only speaking Spanish like twice a week. So it really took a toll. And you know that language learning is a continuous process, so I think it really affected my Spanish.

I: Okay, and where in France did you stay?

P2: I stayed in Lille, that's in the North, you can't get any more North than that.

I: So, what could you tell me about understanding that accent, or how easy or difficult it was to understand.

P2: I think it was average. Like, if someone approached me and said one sentence, I would be able to understand. But, to listen to an entire conversation, I would probably lose my train of thought. So, I would definitely say that at the beginning I wasn't up to speed, I would say.

I: But do you think that has gotten better?

P2: Much better. For example, if I were on the street and I passed someone that was speaking, obviously in French, it would be the same as if I passed someone speaking English and I understood them. I was able to understand French so casually, and I noticed that. It was like, "Oh my god! I know what they're talking about!"

I: And did you travel to other parts of the country?

P2: Yes.

I: Okay so for example in Colombia, people from the coast are known to have a really difficult accent. They speak a lot quicker, a lot more broken. So when you encounter these people, it can be a bit more difficult to communicate with them. Did you have any similar experiences in France?

P2: Yes. I was in Bordeaux, and I was able to compare the Northern accent with the South accent. When I went to the South, I noticed that the accent was a bit strange, but I don't think it was particularly difficult. Sometimes I would be talking, and something would strike me as really weird, but I would be able to understand.

I: So, what are some things that you think you achieved?

P2: I think I was able to improve how I expressed myself, number one orally, that is, because at the beginning of the trip, I would have to translate what the other person was saying in my head, whereas now, if someone speaks, I'm able to understand them automatically, so I can immediately answer their question or respond to them. I do definitely prefer the way I speak now compared to how I spoke before, because it's much more fluent. It sounds like French.

I: With regards to the French that you would have learnt, do you think that it would have impacted your English in any way?

P2: I guess in that sense, my French has now become more like my English. Sometimes the French just "jumps out", while I'm speaking English, because some words, they don't have a direct translation in English, or they don't convey the exact meaning that I want. So sometimes when I'm speaking to one of my family members, I would have to really think before the English word comes back to me, because they obviously wouldn't understand if I said it in French. Also,

I think that I tend to use simpler English now. I don't know if that's an effect of the program.

Maybe it's because my use of English decreased during the program. But yeah, I would say that that was another way in which my English was affected.

I: And what can you say about your French now that you have come back from France?

P2: I noticed the difference from the moment I stepped foot into the university. Even with reading, I found that I was doing so well.

I: And with regards to your understanding of the language.

P2: Yeah, I think that my understanding is much better in French. Unlike before, when I would have to listen to sentences, I would easily get confused, especially when they were said one into the other. But now, I know how to divide them and understand them. So I can definitely say that my understanding has improved, in both reading and listening.

I: And what about your writing? I know you said you practiced your reading, but I don't think you mentioned your writing. So I'm a bit curious to know how or if that was affected.

P2: No, I think I need to practise a bit more with my writing, because sometimes, for example if I'm writing "J'ai mangé", I'd mistakenly write it in the infinitive, like "J'ai manger", and I'd realize that it's wrong, so I always have to take my time and make sure that I'm writing the correct thing, because it sounds the same, so sometimes I'd automatically write what it sounds like.

I: Okay. Were there any techniques that you would've used to take full advantage of your experience in France, with regards to learning the language? Like for example, something popular in Colombia would be language exchanges, where people would go, and each table is designated a specific language to be practised. There would usually be native speakers as well,

due to incentives offered to them. It's a very relaxing way to practise a language. So was there anything along those lines, events or places that you would go to to practise Spanish and French.

P2: Well, I didn't hear about many opportunities like that. In general I spoke Spanish and French, and English obviously, but it wasn't like I was making a concerted effort to go out there and practise per say. Even though I really wanted to practise my French especially, because of my job, I didn't get as many opportunities as I would've liked. Actually, looking back, I did go to events similar to the one you described. The first time I went to one, I was really excited, but to me, the event wasn't at all organized. Instead of having specified tables, you were placed at random, so it was really difficult to practice since most people wanted to speak English. I don't know if reading on my own would count as a technique that I would've used to practise, but that was something that I made sure I did. I read and I listened to the news a lot.

I: And is there anything that you wish you would've done?

P2: My best French friend is an English teacher so a lot of times when I got tired at the end of the day or whatever, I would speak to him in English and he would understand. So I wish that I had used that time to actually speak French, and force myself so that I would be even better than I am now, because I ended up speaking too much in English. My French now is obviously much better, but it could've been even better.

I: Okay, thank you very much.

P2: You're welcome.

Interview 3
Interviewer - I Participant - P3

I: Good morning.

P3: Good morning.

I: To begin, can you tell me a bit about yourself, what you study, and the program that you participated in?

P3: Okay. Hi, I'm [redacted]. I am 21 years old. I study French and Spanish, a double major. I participated in the TAPIF program, which is a teaching assistant program in France.

I: And how long was this program?

P3: About eight months.

I: And what specifically was your role in this program?

P3: Well, I basically just had to help the teachers, with certain topics in English. Some teachers would actually allow us to conduct the class.

I: Okay. so those classes were conducted in English, correct?

P3: Yes.

I: So what was your use of French like, because you were in France.

P3: Well the level I had was middle school, so that would be around ages 11-15. In France, they start teaching English at primary school, but I can't say how intensive their English classes are, because I noticed that when they enter middle school, they still don't know that much English, and they tend to use a lot of French in the classroom. So I really tried to use a lot of English, and even though it was something I shouldn't have done, just to make my job easier, I'd just speak to them in French. Like, any instructions which should've been in English, I would say it in French, just to make things go faster.

I: And what about outside the classroom, so, in general? Did you use a lot of French?

P3: Yeah, to interact with my housemate, and other French people, it would be necessary to speak in French. Of course, if I was speaking to my friends from Trinidad, I would speak in English.

I: Okay, and being an English teaching assistant in France, were there a lot of people who would approach you, wanting you to teach them English, or asking you to speak with them in English? And I'm speaking in general, not necessarily in school.

P3: Well, no. If I was walking on the street people wouldn't know who I am, or that I'm not a native French speaker. In school, only one teacher, a non-English teacher, came up to me, but it wasn't for me to teach him English. It was this guy that he knew that was doing his course and needed English lessons, so we ended up getting into contact and meeting up to have English conversation lessons. But, generally, I don't think that people were that enthusiastic about English.

I: And you mentioned you're a double major. You study Spanish. Did you use Spanish there? Did you practise?

P3: I should have. The irony is that I didn't practise any Spanish even when I was surrounded by Spanish teachers. Even when they would speak to me in Spanish, my brain just wouldn't absorb it, because there was always French and English in my head. So it was a bit harder for me to communicate in Spanish, so then to make our lives easier, we would opt to speak in French. I practised Spanish very rarely, very very rarely.

I: Okay, so how would you say that that experience impacted each of your languages? So, English, Spanish and French.

P3: I think that my French definitely improved. Spanish, strangely, I do feel more comfortable with Spanish. I didn't really expect that. Because when I came back, and I had to start back classes at the university, of course I was a bit nervous to participate in class. But with time, I began to feel a bit more comfortable, and I started applying what I had learnt in French to Spanish as well. I don't know why, my brain just did it. But also, being there, I just developed a different approach when it came to exams, for both French and Spanish. Before, for conversation especially, I would prepare exactly what I was going to say. Like I'd have each line fully written out. But now, I've come to the realization that a language is just something that people speak every single day, it's spontaneous, and it's not supposed to be planned out like that. So now, I don't do all of that preparation going into those exams. Of course I'd have points in my head, but I wouldn't try to memorize an entire paragraph. So I can speak more freely. For English, I tend to speak a lot of "Franglish". So some words just sound better in the other language. Or sometimes there would be a word or a phrase that I would know to say in French and not English, or the English translation would be something crazy to use. So yes, I would sometimes use French or even Spanish words to replace words or phrases in English. Another thing I find myself doing is starting off a sentence in English, and finishing it off in French, because it just sounds better.

I: And during this program, was there anything you learnt with regards to French?

P3: I did pick up a lot of vocabulary, that was the primary thing I think. With regards to colloquial French, I didn't have a lot of friends, so I watched a lot of Netflix, and I picked up a lot of colloquial language from that. I would also go to this cafe, where you would have to share tables, and I would use that as an opportunity to speak French, because they are very nice people

from my experience. These activities were also good for my listening, and both then and now, in the classroom, I can see the impact of it.

I: And, were there any negative aspects, with reference to language learning? Or, was there anything that negatively impacted your French?

P3: I'll say that I didn't write a lot. Not writing, okay if I had read and written a lot, I would have been able to practice a more formal, or a higher register of French. For example, if I had to find a fancier word for "aller", it would probably be easier if I had practised my reading and writing more. So in that sense, my writing was at a lower level than I would have wanted it to be.

I: And you mentioned that you picked up a bit of colloquial French. What about that? Would you say that it had an impact on your French at an academic level?

P3: I think I know how to use it when it needs to be used, and not in inappropriate circumstances. Like if it was in an academic essay, I would never put colloquial language.

I: And what techniques did you use in France to learn and to take advantage of that opportunity?

P3: I would always, even though a lot of my colleagues were English teachers, and all of their English was perfect. I started off speaking to them in English, but as I got more comfortable with them, I'd talk to them in French a lot of times, to practise my speaking and improve my fluency. Other techniques, as I said I'd watch movies like where they were speaking in French. A lot of the time too, I would watch series with subtitles in French. I would always write down new words and phrases that I found or heard, so that ever so often I could look back and refresh my vocab.

I: And is there anything you wish you had done?

P3: I wish I had written more. Before we went on the program, the teacher did recommend that we write a lot, because he knows from experience from the other students that did it in the past

that the written expression is what is affected the most. I mean, my writing wasn't affected badly, but it could've been better. So yeah, I wish I had written more. I wish I had made friends, and tried harder to make friends.

I: How do you think that would have improved your French, making friends?

P3: Yes, my speaking improved, there's no question about it, because if I'm going to run errands, or going to a grocery or a restaurant, I'd kind of be forced to speak French. But I think with friends, it would've been a bit easier and more inviting to want to speak in French, because I would look forward to seeing them and interacting with them.

I: Okay, thank you.

P3: You're welcome.

Interview 4
Interviewer - I Participant - P4

I: Good afternoon.

P4: Hello, good afternoon.

I: To start off, can you tell me a bit about yourself, what you study and the immersion program that you participated in?

P4: Okay, so my name is [redacted], I'm a Level 3 student here at UWI. I study Spanish and Communication Studies, well, I completed my Spanish course3s, so I'm just wrapping up my double major in Communication Studies. From September 2018 to February 2019, I was part of a five month long immersion program. I went to Spain, and I enrolled in the University of Valladolid, and there I studied 4 courses, and the credits from those courses transferred to help me complete my Spanish program here at UWI.

I: Okay, so you said that you did 4 courses. Were all of those courses taught in Spanish?

P4: Right, so 3 were taught completely in Spanish: 2 were Spanish literature courses and 1 was about Spanish America, that would be Latin America, where we compared the different types of Spanish and the different variations of the language. And then there was one, that was English to Spanish translation, so it was both English and Spanish depending on the topic, or depending on which language the lecturer wanted to focus on on that day.

I: And in those classes, did you have any difficulties understanding the teachers, or understanding the students?

P4: To be honest, I was lost. Especially for the literature courses, I cannot lie, lost, because I think, obviously my grasp of Spanish would have something to do with it, the fact that I'm not native, I'm not going to know everything. But at the same time, I think it had to do with the fact that it was Spanish literature. So some of the terminologies and the names of authors and stuff

like that were very specific to Spain and it was difficult to understand what they were talking about. There were some times where I would just go to class and record it, and go home and try to figure up and Google stuff and translate stuff, because I was lost. But then in terms of the Spanish of America course, the vocabulary that he was using, it was good, understandable, his accent wasn't hard, it was good. And then for the translation, well it was English and Spanish, but when he would speak Spanish, it was understandable. I mean, of course, on one or two words, I wouldn't know what he was saying, because I just don't know that word, but the literature courses, like I said, are complete confusion, just madness. Just not knowing what was going on the majority of the time.

I: And what about outside of the school? So, interacting with friends that you would've made.

P4: Um, with that one it was easier, it was better because, with regards to the topics, it would just be casual conversation, things that you're familiar with, so it's easy to find vocab, your fluency is good. And for example if you go to the bank, it would be familiar once again with the words that they would be using, and their accents aren't very hard to understand. Well, a lot of the students that we interacted with weren't native Spanish speakers, so it would be like other foreign exchange students from Greece or Ireland, so their level of Spanish would be similar to ours, so trying to converse with them was fairly easy. So understanding and talking wasn't really a problem outside of the classroom.

I: And did you travel to other parts of Spain?

P4: I did not, because I had visited Spain as a tourist before, so I wasn't really interested in that aspect of it, but I would have other friends who traveled to different parts of Spain, but I stayed in Valladolid.

I: And you said that the accent was fairly simple, right?

P4: Yeah, fairly simple. I mean, it was pretty guttural.

I: What are some things that you'd say you learnt language wise?

P4: How to make sure they understand what I'm saying, in the sense that, not every word that I want to say in English, because I might be thinking in English, I would know the equivalent in Spanish, but I know how to get the point across for them to know exactly what I'm saying without having to get that exact word. So, I learnt how to manipulate my knowledge of the language to make sure they understand, so that would be one thing. What else? This one is still kind of language wise, but not very specific to language, but in terms of confidence, I learnt that I knew what I was saying, and it's okay to make a mistake. So I learnt to be confident, because if I'm talking softly and subtly, they're not going to take me on, and I want them to take me on. I want them to converse with me.

I: Would you say that there was anything negative about going to Spain? So, things that would impede your ability to communicate in the foreign language or impede learning?

P4: Definitely, initially, I wasn't comfortable with the people. It's open to perception, but in my opinion, me and the other three girls that I went with, I think we would have encountered what I would term as a bit of discriminatory behaviour towards us, being of different skin complexions, just being different from them. So with that, I didn't necessarily feel comfortable to put myself out there to say that I'm going to try to interact with this person to help me practise. Like, I could do that, and it would benefit me, but because I'm not comfortable in the context, I would just be like "Nah", and I think that would have robbed me of the experience that I could have had with practising. So something like that. I think that would be one of the main things

I: And what about things like jargon or dialect?

P4: Definitely, especially, you know those that, in South America they use this, but in Spain they use that. All my life of being a Spanish student, I would be taught the South American version of whatever they were using, but then I'm suddenly in Spain, they're out here using "vosotros", which they tell us we're never going to need or use, because they only use it in Spain. Well, hi I'm in Spain now, not knowing the vosotros. And then the terms that they use, I'd know it as this, but in Spain they say it like that, so those things would've definitely been confusing, because I wouldn't understand what they were saying. And that would've prevented me from having a lengthy conversation, because I just wouldn't understand what they were saying.

I: And with respect to that, if you were to have a conversation in Spanish now, do you think you would use some of those words? So for example, I went to Colombia and you went to Spain, and obviously I wouldn't know some of the words that you know and vice versa. Do you think that it would be difficult for you, with regards to using words that I wouldn't know?

P4: No, I think because my experience in Spain was just a drop in the ocean of all of the Spanish learning that I had, I would almost instinctively revert to the South American version of Spanish that I would've learnt at some point along the years that I've been learning Spanish. It wasn't that, I don't want to say "impactful" because it sounds kind of bad, but it wasn't that monumental to say that I'm gonna remember these words and include them in my speech.

Sometimes, like vosotros specifically, if I'm in a context where "vosotros" is appropriate, I may resort to that in place of the "ustedes", but in terms of other vocabulary, like words and stuff, no, I would most likely use the South American version.

I: So during your experience, were there any specific techniques or specific activities that you did to take advantage of the language learning experience there?

P4: Like, on my own?

I: Yeah.

P4: Honestly, no. Like, my focus honestly, I can't lie, was passing the courses. Yes, it was a Spanish immersion opportunity, but at the end of the day, if I had failed those courses, I would have failed that semester, and I would've had to repeat courses, and it would have affected my GPA and my degree program, so it would have been nice to be able to study without having the stress of having to pass exams, but because I had to pass exams, I really didn't take any advantage of those opportunities that I could have created for myself. The most I would do, like I said, I wouldn't have understood in the Spanish literature courses, so I would take notes of the words that I'm hearing, or if she calls some sort of monumental author, I would take note of that, then go home, do my own research, and find out the information for myself. But, in terms of learning the language and using strategies, no I really didn't do that.

I: So, going from that, is there anything you wish you would've done. Like any specific thing that would've been available.

P4: So, I guess that I didn't do anything on my own, but one of the things that was offered in the program was a Spanish course. So the other things, the same way that Economics is taught here in English, the Spanish literature was taught in Spanish, so those courses were about the content, not about my language learning. But this one specific course that didn't go for any credits or anything, it was just to learn, that course I would say might have been a technique, but it wasn't of my own doing. It was offered and I didn't do it, so I didn't take any initiative to do it. So that would have helped. because they did things like grammar, vocabulary, freshening up on things that you need to know when learning the language as opposed to the other courses which were just like, this is a course and it's taught in Spanish, and you're learning as a byproduct of it. But what I would've done, would be, I think that course if I had done it continuously, because that

was only for a part of the time at the beginning and then that was it, we didn't have to do it. If I had done it continuously throughout the entire stay, then I think that would've been a bit more beneficial to me, but I can't think of anything that I would've done or taken the initiative to do.

I: So now, I want to get into the specific skills. So, looking at speaking, listening, reading and writing, are there any specific ones that you think that you focused more on, or that improved more?

P4: I think it would definitely be listening, because it was necessary for survival. Like here, we would do a listening, a video, and it's beneficial to your learning in that, if you don't know a word you can go and look it up, so it's beneficial in that sense. But over there, you literally have no choice but to listen to what they're saying. You have to find techniques, whatever you need to do, whether it's to zone out the background noise, or, whatever you need to do to listen to what these people are saying and then understand it. Because sometimes it's not that you don't know the words that they're saying, it's that, because they're speaking so fast, you don't hear it, so you don't understand it. So I feel like I left there learning how to listen better. I can't really say if I still have that skill, because it's been a while since I've heard only Spanish, but when I came back, in that period of time as I came back, my listening skills were better. Speaking as well, but listening would be the most impacted by the experience, speaking in terms of confidence like I said earlier was impacted as well, and with confidence comes fluency. But in terms of grammar and stuff, nah.

I: And what about reading and writing?

P4: Reading and Writing wasn't really impacted, which is neither bad nor good, because my reading and writing is good. Obviously, there's room for improvement, but it wasn't like I went

there and suffered in those aspects. It just didn't improve, there was nothing towards it to make it improve.

I: And nothing was negatively affected then?

P4: No, nothing was taken away. Everything was either improved, or remained as it was which was good in my opinion.

I: Okay, thank you very much.

P4: Okay, you're welcome.

Interview 5
Interviewer - I Participant - P5

I: Hi, good morning.

P5: Hi, morning.

I: Okay, so can you tell me a bit about yourself, what you study and some information about your immersion program?

P5: So, my name is [redacted]. I'm in my third year, and I'm majoring in Spanish. So my immersion program, it was a five month exchange program in Spain at the University of Valladolid.

I: Okay, and can you tell me about what you did there at the University?

P5: I was a student solely. So, the classes were more linguistics and literature.

I: And can you give me some specific details about the courses? So like, each course, what was it about?

P5: Okay, so, one of my literature courses was 18th Century Spanish Literature, where we explored not just, and you see the thing is, and you can notice it also with Oscar's [one of the Spanish literature teachers here at the UWI] teaching, it's heavily content based, and it's almost as if the literature itself was supplementary to the content rather than the other way around where where the literature just helps, and was a background, but we mainly focused on the literature itself. So yeah, with both literature courses actually. I did 19th Century Spanish literature as well, which, same thing again, it was more content based with the literature itself being examples. Then I did Español de Américas which explored the different types of Spanish spoken in the Americas. And then, a translation course from English to Spanish and Spanish to English.

I: And tell me about firstly, your use of Spanish in the classroom. How was that?

P5: Very rarely did I actually participate in the classroom because the way the classes were, it was more receptive than participatory, although for my 18th Century class, they tried to encourage participation a lot, but in the other classes, no. And in that class, I did use Spanish, and I was very nervous about using the Spanish in class, like really nervous. For the Español de Américas, that wasn't participatory at all. No honestly, he was legit reading from the handouts. Maybe explain something a little bit here or there. And then the other one, I used a lot more English than I would Spanish, because it was a translation course from English to Spanish so you could've used either, but the class was held more in English than Spanish. I think it's because that is an English course, not so much of a Spanish course than an English course. So it was specifically for the native Spanish speakers to learn English or whatever, for those who were doing their English degree. So even though there might be a Spanish word here or there, and yeah you'd have to translate in Spanish, or translate from Spanish or whatever, there was still more English instructions than Spanish instructions.

I: Okay. And you said it was a lot more receptive, how would you describe your listening abilities or your comprehension of the classes?

P5: Understanding and following in the classes were not hard, but the real thing personally for understanding Spanish, it's easy to understand academic Spanish because, usually, the teachers. they speak at, in any language, they speak at a pace that's easy for you to follow along, they stick normally to your standard [Spanish] or whatever else have you, they stay away from slangs, so it's easier to understand than casual Spanish that you would be speaking in the streets or with your friends or whatever, in an informal setting.

I: So now that you've brought up the informal setting, how would you describe your interaction with people in general, outside of the classroom I would say?

P5: I didn't really interact with people much outside of the classroom except for some friends who were English speakers, but I would always have a mental block about it to the point that basic stuff that I know how to say or whatever, I'd draw blank. Like one time, I asked someone to hold my phone for me, long story, but I forgot how to say it properly! So I didn't ask! I just gave him the phone! And he was probably very confused, and then afterwards, after the situation had happened and I was on my way, it came to me, like "You could've just said this," you know? So yeah, there was a bit of a mental block.

I: Okay and did this affect you throughout the program? Or was it something that was concentrated at a certain point?

P5: Well, it was more in reality again, because I'm kind of self conscious when it comes to speaking with Native speakers because, in a classroom at least, and that's also why I was self conscious while answering questions in the 18th Century class because it's different from learning it here in Trinidad because, here in Trinidad, nobody here except your teacher is a native Spanish speaker, so you have this comfortable environment where you know you're going to mess up but you know that you're going to learn, that's what the teacher here is for. Whereas, when you're over there, there's no school setting or whatever, so I personally felt kind of like, very nervous about speaking.

I: Okay and, how did that affect your experience there, like how would you say that affected it?

P5: The experience on a whole wasn't very affected, it was more like the moments themselves that I would have this kind of anxiety or nervousness. But the experience on a whole, no.

I: But do you think, if you weren't as nervous, do you think that you would've been more outgoing or you would've communicated more?

P5: I'm not sure because, again, while all the native speakers in the classroom didn't make me feel ostracized, they also didn't go out of their way to talk to me either, so I didn't feel okay with that.. And there wasn't anything really like a "Welcome foreign Students", well, there was a welcome for the foreign exchange students, but it was only for the foreign exchange students, there wasn't anything like, a huge interaction with the other. So, if there was something like that, where we got to mingle with the others, maybe. But then again, that would be kind of pointless, because it's not their first year. A lot of them, they'd be continuing their programs or whatever, so to have that kind of, almost orientation styled thing for them, it really wouldn't have made any sense. So yeah, because there wasn't that type of, some type of activity established, a major activity established, to make contact, I would've felt awkward just going up to a random person and saying "Hi, let's be friends," and you know they have their friends, they have their own environment or whatever so they probably never felt the need to reach out either.

I: Okay, and taking all of this into consideration, do you think that, or was there anything that you learnt during your program? Like language wise, cultural wise, anything.

P5: Cultural wise, they don't say good morning. Like honestly, when you pass people on the street, I'd usually say good morning, and I felt really awkward doing it because no one would say it back, so I stopped. And I still felt like, oh my gosh I have such bad manners. So yeah, that was really really awkward. They use "joder" [swear word] quite frequently. They said "Hola buenas" at no matter what time of the day. And they kind of adopted it all over the country. Also, I don't say "de nada" any more, I just say "nada nada". They just cut off the "de".

I: Okay, that's pretty similar, because in Colombia they'd do the "buenas" thing as well. And instead of "Hola", they'd say "Holi". So I guess what you would've noticed would be geographical differences in the language, because that's what they do over there in Spain.

P5: Geographical in terms of what? Like, different forms of Spanish being spoken in different regions or whatever?

I: Yeah, like slight differences.

P5: No, not actually. Because, that's how language works. Especially since we were using the second person plural. Vosotros. We actually used it.

I: And how was that?

P5: Really not that hard when you think about it. Of course there are certain words there that, like for example, what's the word I'm looking for? The abnormalities in the grammar. The exceptions to the rules or whatever. If it is that you've not used those exceptions in that sense often, it's going to be kind of difficult because it's not like you can just imply or infer what it is because you know what the rule is and you know what the pattern is supposed to be, because you know the exceptions to the rules. It's either you know it or you don't.

I: And aside from all the things that you've mentioned, was there anything that you would describe as particularly negative? Maybe that would've impeded your learning?

P5: There was nothing particularly negative that impeded my learning. The only negative that I really had observed so far was maybe the , okay no, there is something kind of, well, negative. In the sense of literature classes. They don't tell you when they're going to do a specific topic. They don't have plans. So, like how we would get the syllabus, they didn't have that. If they did, I probably didn't see it, but in the sense that, and this came up with the other foreign exchange students as well, well the ones that I spoke to anyway, that they'd come and say " Okay, we're going to discuss this particular thing," and we're like "What? We're supposed to do that for this week?" So it was kind of like, dropped on us that we were supposed to prepare for those things. Another issue with those literature classes, it's just for those classes, I don't know if it's just the

teachers themselves or whatever, but for both the literature classes I did, there were two teachers, one was the actual teacher and one was the student teacher, it was that they were probably doing it to get their Masters or whatnot. So they'd break up their parts. For the older actually established teachers, they didn't use audiovisuals or post anything on Campus Virtual, which was like mylearning, they didn't post anything. So really, if you missed a class for whatever reason, tough luck. Maybe, you could see if you'd find somebody who could give you the notes, and also the thing is they're reading it out or calling out the notes, so you have to try and type as fast as you can and especially for someone who is learning and not very accustomed to the accent, especially the older male teacher, God that man could eat up his words, yeah if you're not very accustomed to the language and the accent, it would be hard for you to understand what was being said and you might miss something. So to me that was something negative.

I: So you had some difficulty listening to and understanding that particular teacher?

P5: And certain words too were difficult to understand, especially when they wanted to move a bit quicker, some words would sound differently. Fortunately I was sitting next to a girl who, when she realized that I would've missed something, she would show me. I was very grateful for that.

I: So, aside from that classmate that helped you, was there any other thing that you would've done that you would've tried to kind of help yourself out a bit with in that class? So I have a friend who did that program the year before, and what she would do is that she would record the class, and then go home and try to figure it out, use Google, and do all of that. I don't know if you would've done anything similar.

P5: That's an interesting idea, but then you know audios kind of get muffled, so that might make it even worse. For me, anyway. And also, again, it's like certain words, especially with certain

pronunciations, you could've sworn they said a 'b' when they really said 'v'. Or other things like spelling.

I: Were there any techniques in general that you used to try to improve your language during that time.

P5: Not really. I'm not really a technique kind of person.

I: So you kind of just wanted it to happen naturally, I guess.

P5: Yeah. But so far, I think I can see a bit of an improvement in my speaking Spanish. Now, I'm hearing a bit of an improvement, and I think my grammar, although I still have to think about certain things related to grammar, I think it's becoming a bit easier. And especially in my conversation.

I: Okay, and what about in your listening, reading and writing? Is there anything that you can say about those aspects?

P5: Reading and writing was never really like a big issue. I may have encountered the odd word that I wouldn't have heard before, but it wasn't really an issue. Although I do have to say that literary Spanish is of course always going to be tougher than your academic reading because the academic reading is more straightforward and scientific and concise, whereas the literary reading, you have a higher chance of encountering words that you've never seen before, and even if you encounter that in your academic reading, a lot of the times the words would be so close to English that you can figure out what it means. But with literary, it's going to be a term that you haven't seen before, not to mention a lot of literary devices will be used, so that will kind of affect how you understand. That's why I preferred the Poetry of the 18th Century, at least the more enlightened one. The more baroque one was a mess. Baroque has so much metaphors

and fanciness, whereas in the enlightenment period, they just wanted to be straightforward. So that one is so much easier to understand.

I: And, with regards to listening?

P5: I still think I could get a bit of work with it, but I do think it has improved. Especially when I check over the exam that we had for Auditiva [listening], yeah, I didn't really struggle as much as I used to with the listening. And, again, even though you still have little problems with understanding certain pronunciations, I'd still be able to get it at the end.

I: And was there anything that you could think of that you wish you would've done in retrospect? Like opportunities that you could've taken.

P5: Maybe hopped on the travelling a bit more, because they went to different places in Spain. While I did travel, I didn't go to many different places in Spain. I would've gone on the snow trip, I would've sucked up my sickness, and actually gone.

I: And what do you think that travelling would've given you, like what do you think that that would have provided you with.

P5: Experience. To see these different places, because, and this is the really bad thing, I went for five months to a temperate country and I didn't see snow, because where I was didn't snow. The first snow trip, I was sick, and the second one, I really couldn't because I was going to Italy that week anyway. So I didn't want to spend the money to go when I was already going somewhere. And that's just a shame.

I: Okay, that'll be all for today. Thank you very much.

P5: You're very welcome.

Interview 6
Interviewer - I Participant - P6

I: Good morning

P6: Good morning

I: Can you tell me about yourself, what you study, and the immersion program that you took part in?

P6: My name is [redacted]. I am currently doing my undergraduate studies, a major in both Spanish and French at UWI. I did the study abroad with Spain, at the University of Valladolid in Spain, for the first semester of my third year. It's an exchange program that the University in Spain has a partnership with the University here, and you get a scholarship as well from the ERASMUS program that funds your stay, that allows you to pay your travel fees and everything like that. So that's what I did.

I: Okay, and can you tell me what you studied there?

P6: I did the same thing that I do here, which is a language course for French and Spanish, and a literature course for French and Spanish.

I: Okay, and can you tell me about the use of language in those classes?

P6: Well, for the Spanish classes that I did, the literature and the language course, they were fully in Spanish. All texts were in Spanish, the professors spoke in Spanish, you had to respond in Spanish, all the exams were in Spanish. And similarly for the French courses, all those things were done in French.

I: And how was that experience? Did you have any difficulties or anything like that?

P6: Yeah, the first literature class I had I didn't understand anything the guy said. All I heard was "Good morning", and then at the end he said "Hasta luego". For the whole hour I didn't understand anything but by the second week I was being able to understand the words, because

he was talking really fast, but I got accustomed to it very quickly and yeah, you kinda get accustomed to their language and their speed as well, because they speak really fast.

I: Okay, and what about in French?

P6: French was normal as well, because I'm accustomed to having French professors here at UWI, so it was a lot more easier for me, the classes in French.

I: Okay, and how was your participation in those classes? Like did you speak a lot?

P6: Not really, because of the setting of the classes. It was more lecture classes in terms of the language course that we did there wasn't like the language courses that we do here. It was more of a linguistics course, so there wasn't really much participation going on. In the French however, there was more participation because it was set up the same way that the Spanish was set up here, where there are the different aspects, oral, written, comprehension, stuff like that. But for Spanish, it would've been harder to be participatory and have interaction.

I: Okay, and outside of the classroom, so with other classmates, or even outside of the University, would you say that you communicate a lot?

P6: Yeah, I would say so, because there were a lot of groups that had events, meetups, travel trips together, where, when you come together, the one language that anyone could speak no matter what country you're from was Spanish, so you'd have to speak Spanish no matter what. So that allowed for the practise of Spanish and the speaking as well.

I: And how would you say that affected your ability to speak and listen??

P6: It helped me a lot because I was always shy to speak Spanish for fear of making errors, for fear of not saying the right thing, and that's kind of the reason why I wanted to take part in the exchange program. Doing it kind of allowed me to come out of that shell that I was in and helped me be a bit more confident speaking the language and being forced into situations where you

have to speak the language, it's like you have no other choice, and that kind of pushed me a bit further to speak the language.

I: Okay, so we spoke about speaking and listening. What about your reading and writing skills?

Did you notice any difference, be it good or bad?

P6: My reading skills, I definitely saw an improvement because there you have to read everything in Spanish. They don't really give you the option of reading the English version of the text, and then the time period that they wanted it in, was like, they wanted you to read a book or an article with less than a week, so I had to do it. And it pushed me as well to read in Spanish, because it helps you improve your vocabulary, it helps you improve your sentence structure and stuff like that, so I definitely saw an improvement in my writing.

I: And with reading, you saw the same level, more or less?

P6: Yeah, more or less.

I: Was there anything specific that you'd say you learnt during the program with regards to language?

P6: For me, one thing I learnt was a lot of colloquial expressions, which I found was interesting, expressions that they use a lot in Spain, which kind of helped me to adapt a bit better to the culture because, in the streets, in the normal supermarkets etc, they use colloquial slangs and sometimes you wouldn't understand. But as you stay there more and hear it more often, you'd get more accustomed to it.

I: Can you maybe give me some examples?

P6: For example, "Que chulo", which means "How cool". They say "Que guay" which also means "How cool". They say "Ponerse como una sopa" which means to be soaked, like drenched if you pass through the rain, so there were a couple little nice expressions.

I: And was there anything negative with regards to your Spanish?

P6: As I said, in the beginning, there was that fear of going out and speaking and and putting myself out there because the first day I went, I had to go and talk in English in the International Office, because I was so scared that I wouldn't understand what he was saying. So I think that that was the only negative aspect in terms of the language. But that changed.

I: And as you mentioned the colloquial language, does that affect you now in the academic setting?

P6: Not really, because I wasn't there for that long of a period where it becomes part of you in a sense. You just use it, or you just understand it when you hear it, it's not something you get to use every single day>

I: And with regards to your French, I'm kinda curious to know how you're French was impacted.

P6: I would say that the French kind of got a backseat because of the fact that I was in a Spanish speaking country. I made a friend from France which kind of ensured that I didn't really lose that in terms of the French. I wouldn't say that it suffered, but I would say that it wasn't practised as much as I would've liked because of the setting that I was in.

I: And do you notice a difference in your French now being back in class? Or would you say that it kind of remained the same?

P6: I think it remained the same

I: And your Spanish has improved? You can see it in the classroom?

P6: Yes, it has improved.

I: What are some techniques, or maybe things that you did, to kinda take full advantage of your experience in Spain?

P6: For me, I put myself out a bit more, meaning I didn't stay home, I found things to do everyday, whether it was to go to the park, whether it was to go and see a movie, whether it was to meet up with random people, whether it was to go on a trip by myself with a group of people I don't know. As well as, there was an ERASMUS course I did where there were a lot of international students, making friends within that group as well, it was something that was very beneficial to me too.

I: So, do you think that your attitude going into this program helped you a lot?

P6: Yeah, it did.

I: And was there anything that you wish you would've done?

P6: Not really, to be honest. I think I did everything that I wanted to.

I: Okay. Thank you so much.

P6: No problem.