

The Role WhatsApp Plays in Impacting L2 Spanish Learners' Intercultural Sensitivity in a Language Immersion Setting



**By: Timothy Ashe, Jr. – Arizona State – Dissertation
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Defining Culture

- Geertz's (1973) defines culture as **“the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions.”**
- Kramsch (1993) says that culture is a **“social construct, the product of self and other perceptions.”**
- Gianchiglia, et. al (2013) defines culture as **“consisting of something that is shared and/or learned by a group of people,”** but the *content of the culture varies* in different definitions.

The Culture Wheel



Why is Culture Important for Language Learning?

- Culture makes language learning more enjoyable.
- Learning culture leads to a deeper understanding of how the language works.
- Culture gives language learners context.
- Culture motivates students to pursue more language learning.

Why Learn Language and Culture in a Study Abroad Environment?

Study Abroad allows for endless opportunities for students to become immersed.

Students must interact in new language exchanges where they have to step outside of their comfort zones.

Study abroad leads students to reflection and often more critical thinking about specific themes and issues.

Students are motivated to study abroad for career development opportunities.

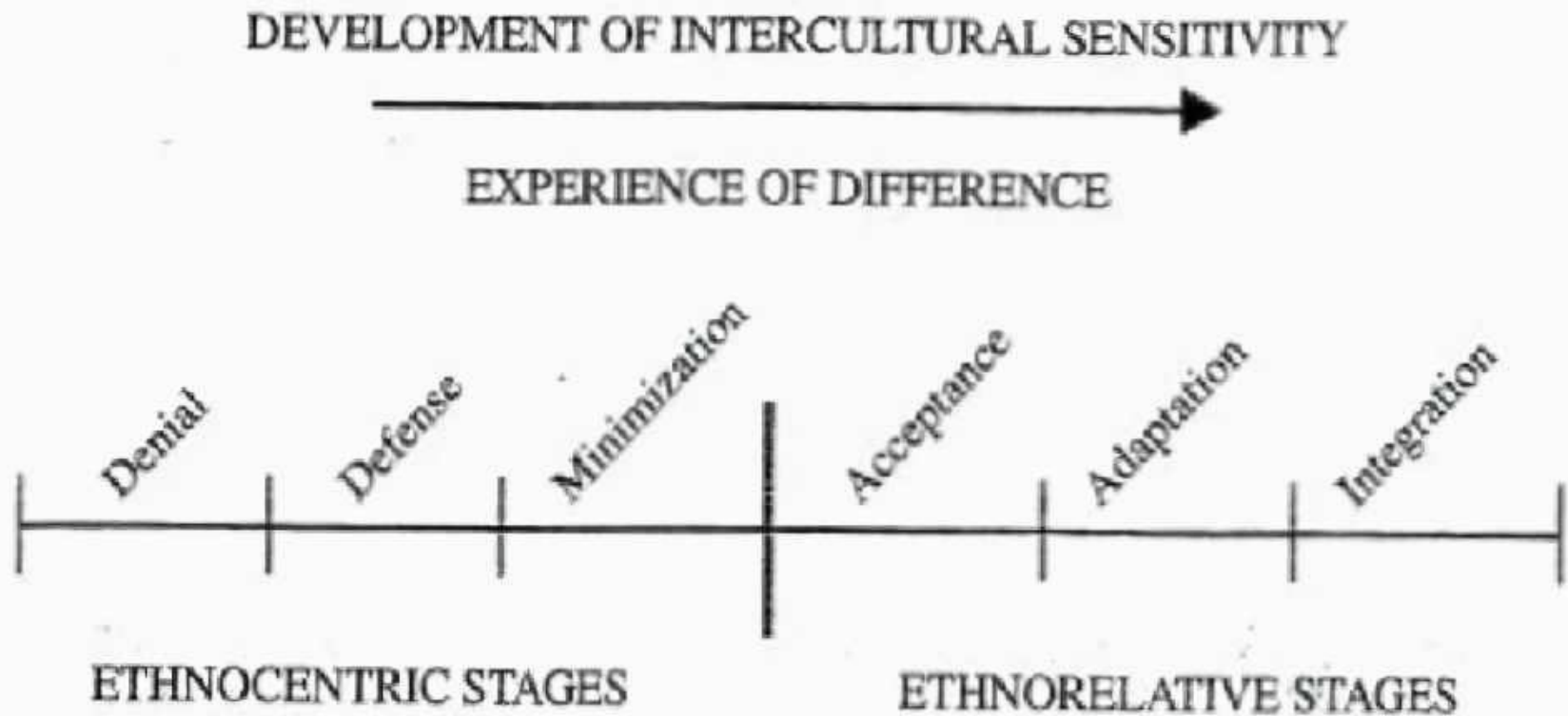
Introduction to the Study

- Social media tools have allowed immersion students to document their experiences and discuss culture in various ways (Dressler & Dressler, 2016).
- **How do CALL and MALL fit in?** (CALL) frameworks and mobile devices (MALL) in the classroom allow for different cultural perspectives due to rapid connectedness with the multiple technology tools.
- Planning task-based activities will encourage more participation and lead to more curiosity and motivation, which is crucial for culture learning (Lomicka and Lord, 2016).

What is Intercultural Sensitivity (ICS)?

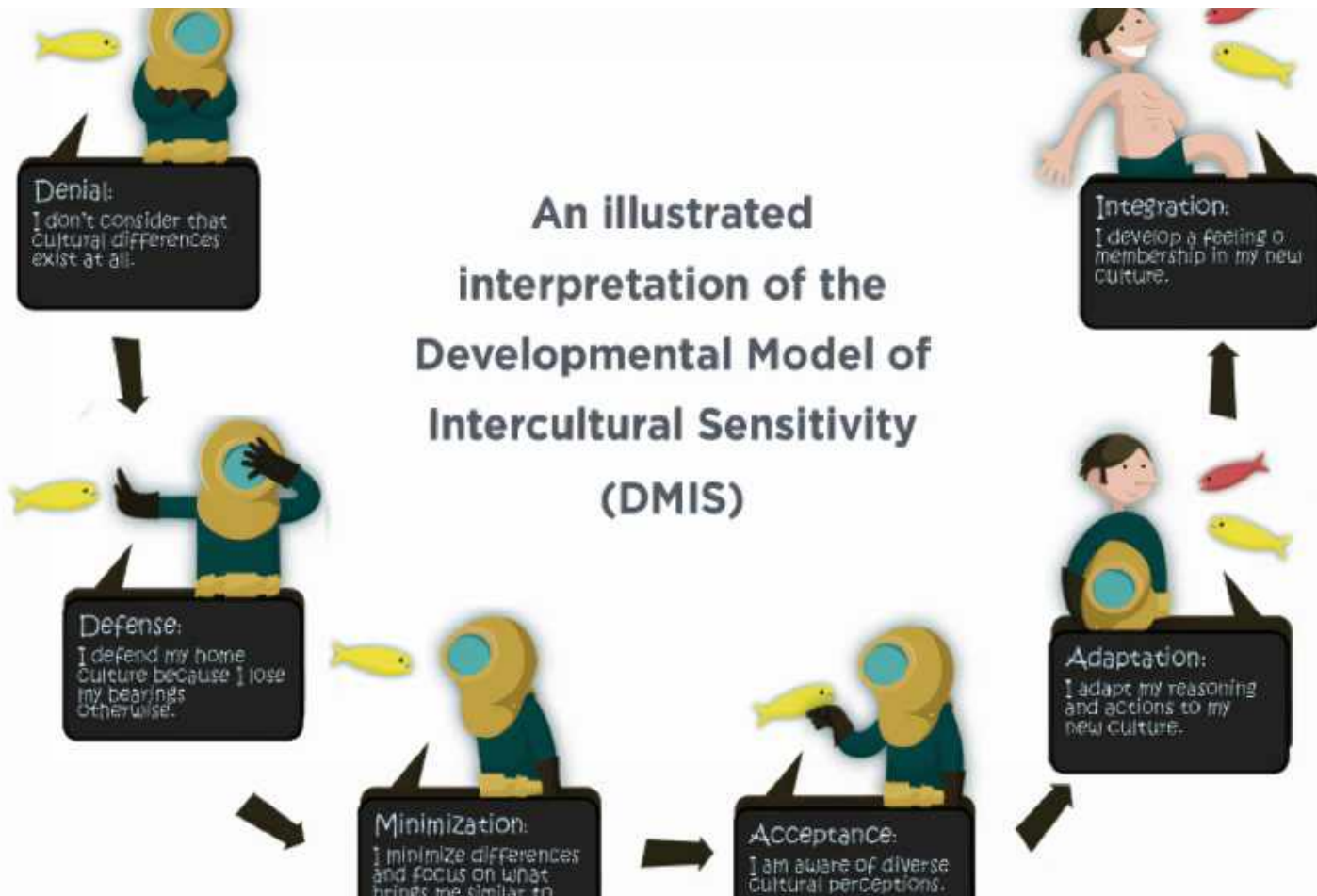
- ***A branch of Intercultural Competence and Transcultural Competence, Derived from Intercultural Communicative Competence**
- Communicating with people who are different from you (Intercultural communication) brings together a particular set of ideas that comprise several cultures (Belz and Thorne, 2006).
- Chen and Starosta (1997)--*Intercultural Sensitivity is defined as "the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication."* This covers the ways in which people think and how their behaviors can lead to greater intercultural learning and sensitivity.
- Intercultural sensitivity makes second language (L2) learners more sensitive to cultural nuances if and when the student can adapt in various ways to someone else's culture.(Bennett, 1998)

Bennett's DMIS Model for Intercultural Sensitivity (1993)



DMIS CATEGORIES

- Denial – 1
- Defense – 2
- Minimization – 3
- Acceptance – 4
- Adaptation – 5
- Integration - 6





The Supporting Literature (Part I)

- Thorne (2003) says *that Intercultural Learning allows the students to acquire language proficiency and make ICS gains through a “lens of hyperpersonal engagement.”*
- Tech tools in an immersion context allow students certain affordances and can make students work independently which impact their intercultural sensitivity (Lee, 2011).



Intercultural Sensitivity=Necessary for Language and Culture Learning

Brembeck (1997) posits that learning another person’s language and not their culture is a “legitimate way to make a fool of yourself.”

Setting

- A Faculty-Led Study Abroad Program in Segovia, Spain (Castilla y León)(Spring 2019) through the KIIS Consortium
- Immersion setting with Spanish as a target language for American undergraduate students from Kentucky (n=12)
- An Advanced Oral Spanish Course (400 level) with 3 workshops and a 3-module special session during weeks 7-9 of the 13-week program
- An LMS system and smart TV in the classroom, tasks and assignments handed in via the mobile app system (WA)

Design and Methods

- Students immersed themselves for 13 weeks in an immersion setting speaking completely in Spanish – all courses in Spanish, stayed with host families.
- Courses used Flipped method – students did homework for course through Google Classroom and WhatsApp – use class time to discuss and analyze course topics.
- Students came to class for conversation/writing/listening practice; full immersion – 95% in target language.
- 9 of the 12 students had never taken an advanced course in Spanish culture before.

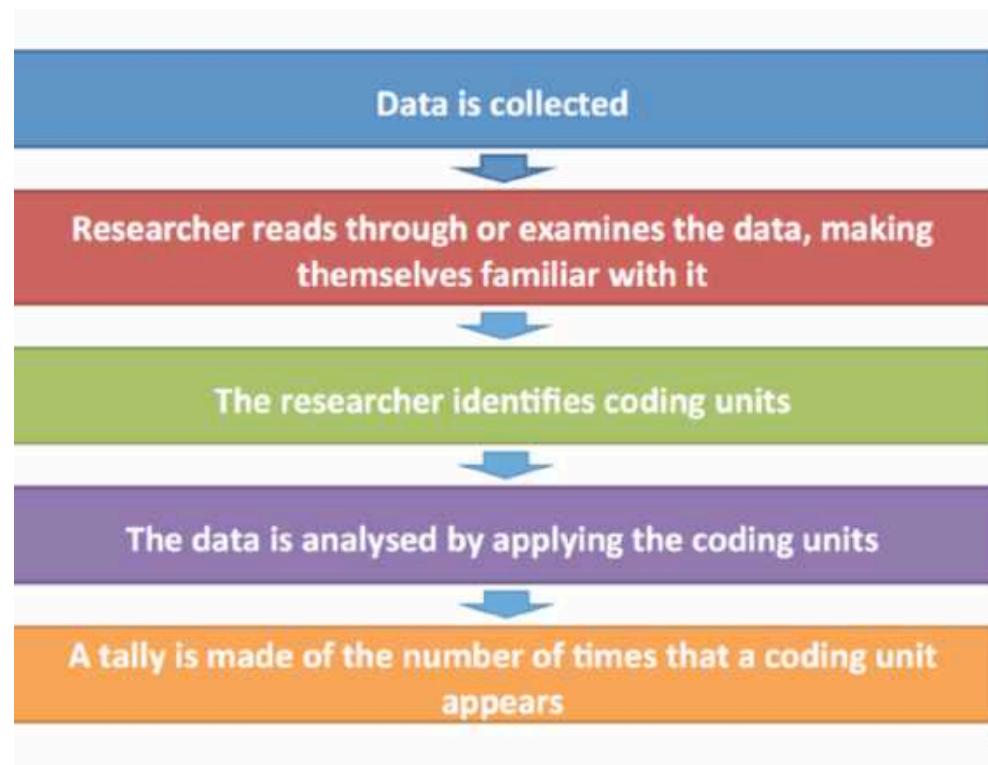
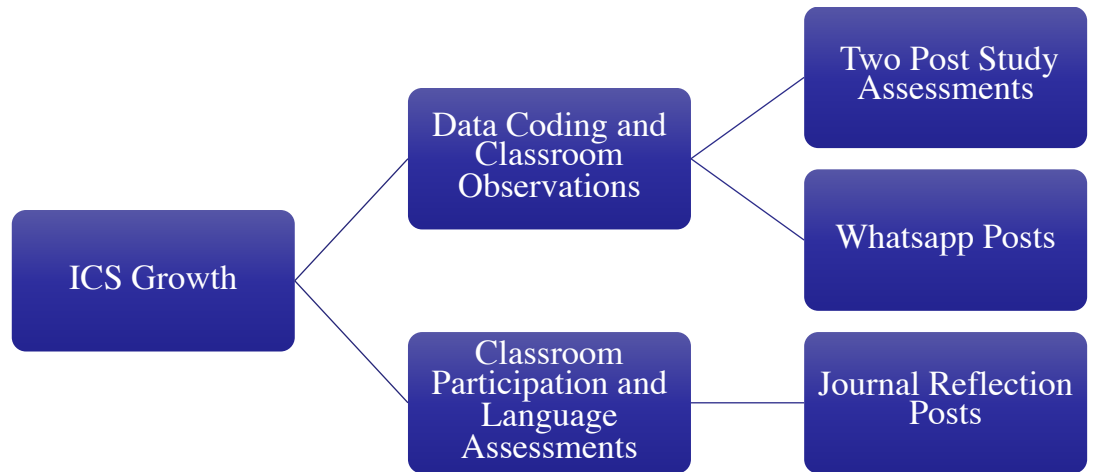
Research Questions

1. How do Spanish learners employ the affordances of WhatsApp while completing mobile task-based culture activities in an immersion experience while abroad?
2. Can WhatsApp (WA) be harnessed to facilitate the development of Intercultural Sensitivity?
3. How do Spanish foreign language learners articulate newly acquired intercultural sensitivity?

Methodology – Part I

- **A thematic analysis** - method for identifying themes in qualitative data research
- **The content analysis framework** – investigator perform a controlled analyses of texts within a reliable context of communication.
- Both of these approaches together (thematic/content analyses) used to conduct a mixed-methods study with quant/qual methods.
- **This study collected three types of data:**
 - 1) **Verbal** – group discussions, student-instructor and student-NS encounters
 - 2) **Written** - responses to worksheets, questions, surveys
 - 3) **Written and Listening** - guided discussion questions and interview prompts

Methodology – Part II (The Flow and Thematic Analysis Process)



Coding – Part I

The screenshot displays the Dedoose software interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for Home, Analyze, Excerpts, Descriptors, Codes, Media, and Memos. Below this, the main interface is divided into several sections:

- Media: 21**: A table listing media items with columns for Title, Added, and User. The items are: 1.20_pre, 4.22_post, 2.18_pre, 3.27_pre, 3.23_pre, 1.25_pre, 4.22_Post, 2.23_pre, 4.21_pre, 4.22_pre, and 3.27_post.
- Codes By Descriptor**: A section showing a field for TC ID and two bar charts. The first chart, 'Goals and Values', shows percentages for categories like (1.2-1.9) at 23.7%, (1.9-2.7) at 24.8%, (2.7-3.5) at 24.8%, (3.45-4.22) at 7.7%, and (4.22-4.22) at 9.0%. The second chart, 'Letter Recognition Skills', shows percentages for categories like (1.2-1.9) at 27.3%, (1.9-2.7) at 23.7%, (2.7-3.5) at 23.7%, and (3.45-4.22) at 25.3%.
- Excerpts: 147**: A list of excerpts with columns for Resource, Added, Username, and # Codes. Four excerpts are visible, each with a preview of text.
- Code Cloud**: A section showing a cloud of codes with labels like 'Letter Re', 'School Pines', 'Great Quotes', and 'Reading H...'.

- Used different sources of data from conversations (in WA) by reviewing the students' answers to questions on handouts and reflections/images/text that they posted.
- Used notes and/or recorded observations electronically to monitor the student's participation and understanding of the content from the modules.
- Collected the data from the 12 participants and the data were entered into the **Dedoose software program(left)** for analysis.

Coding - Part II

1. Workshop Importance – Tapas (**TW**)
2. Workshop Importance – Omelet (**OW**)
3. Workshop Importance – Castle (**CW**)
4. WA Recognition – Positive Tech Use (**PTU**)
5. DMIS Marker – ICS Level 3 (**ICS 3**)
6. DMIS Marker – ICS Level 4 (**ICS 4**)
7. DMIS Marker – ICS Level 5 (**ICS 5**)
8. Native Speaker Interaction (**NSINT**)
9. Importance of Food to Spaniards (**FIMP**)
10. Recognized New Aspect of Spanish Culture (**CULIMP**)
11. Mentioned Art Event or Food Outing (**CEFO**)
12. Stated Family and Cultural Relevance of Activity (**FAM**)
13. Life at Home (**LAH**)
14. Comparison of Host Food v. Home Food (**FCOMP**)

Coding – Part III - Examples

Workshop Importance - Omelet Workshop (OW)

e.g. “Aprendí en el taller de tapas que la tortilla española es un plato típico de aquí porque es barato, fácil para hacer y tiene un buen sabor.”

[I learned in the tapas workshop that the Spanish omelet is a typical dish here because it is cheap, easy to make, and has a good taste.]

- **DMIS Continuum Category Marker - ICS Level 3 (ICS3)**

e.g. “En la cocina de Pasapan (el restaurante del segundo módulo), el cocinero no cocinó para un público, pero ojalá que él reciba satisfacción en su trabajo y en lo que él ha creado para nuestro taller. Fue difícil para mí entenderlo y él trabajó en una cocina muy pequeña, pero fue agradable e intentaba impresionarnos.”

[In the Pasapan kitchen (the restaurant of the second module), the chef did not cook for an audience, but I hope he receives satisfaction in his work and in what he has created for our workshop. It was difficult for me to understand him and he worked in a very small kitchen, but he was nice and tried to impress us.]

Coding – Part IV - Examples

- **DMIS Continuum Category Marker - ICS Level 4 (ICS4)**

e.g. “Creo que los estadounidenses van a gustar la tortilla española pero solamente para desayunar porque parece mucho como una comida de desayuno.”

[I believe that Americans (from the U.S.) are going to like the Spanish Omelet but only for breakfast because it seems to be like a breakfast food.]

- **DMIS Continuum Category Marker - ISC Level 5 (ICS5)**

e.g. “Un edificio similar en los Estados Unidos al Alcázar es la Casa Blanca del gobierno. Es similar en propósito en que las personas más importantes del país trabajar y vivir allí, pero es diferente en que no está usado por la seguridad - no realmente hay mucho seguridad creado por el edificio, solamente hay guardas y una valla allí. No he visitado la Casa Blanca, pero yo sé todavía que el dentro también está muy lujoso y decorado como el Alcázar.”

[e.g. “A similar building to the Alcazar in the U.S. is the government's White House. It is similar in purpose in that the most important people in the country work and live there, but it is different in that it is not used for security - there is not really much security around the building, there are only guards and a fence there. I have not visited the White House, but I still know that the interior is also very luxurious and decorated like the Alcázar.]

Instruments

- **Mixed Methods (Quantitative and Qualitative) – Transcriptions from WhatsApp Mobile Platform**
- **Post Program Treatment #1 -**
Surveys in Spanish about what they enjoyed from the course
- **Post Program Treatment #2 -**
Recorded (Audio Only)
Semistructured Interviews reflecting on program interactions and intercultural sensitivity questions

Field Notes and Observations (for 13 weeks, focused on Weeks 7-9)

- Addressed and reviewed their common obstacles
- Monitored their cultural growth
- Made notes and reflections from each student's module progress
- Saw how they compared and contrasted their home culture v. target culture

Tasks

- 4-5 major tasks per week that comprised the 3 modules (each task had multiple phases)
- 15 tasks detailed in the Data Analysis
- Speaking tasks/activities tied to the theme for that week were performed in class before the workshops
- 1 Reflection per week (to be submitted on Friday or Sunday)

Topics for the ICS Tasks

- **Week 1 – Learning about Tapas and Socializing in Spain** (*Ir de Tapas*)
- **Week 2 – How the Spanish Omelet Brings Families Together** (*Preparando la Tortilla Española*)
- **Week 3 – Learning about Art, Culture, and History with a Castle Visit** (*La Visita al Alcázar*)

Learning about Tapas (Module #1) Video



Important Numbers

- Across the three modules, **text messages** were the most selected coded type of message with 45 selections.
- The next most frequent coded response was the **reflection post**.
- **The most coded responses were taken from the Castle Module.**

The total coded responses were as follows:

Module #1 (Tapas)=53 posts total; 48 coded

Module #2 (Omelet)=90 posts total; 58 coded

Module #3 (Castle)=33 posts total (33 in documents); 66 coded

Reflection Posts=37 posts total (32 in documents); 69 coded

Note that these numbers include the total posts and the posts used for the 14 coding categories. **The students submitted the most overall posts in module #2 (Omelet). *Many posts were submitted as attached word or worksheet documents and not as text.*

Some Examples from the Students' Posts

Brad: (about Tapas):



Taylor (about the Spanish Omelette):

“I think people from the United States would like to eat the Spanish Omelette for any meal, too. It is something that can be eaten for a snack, breakfast, lunch with other things and dinner, too. I like both the sandwich and large plate options because my host mom carefully prepares them for me.”

Sally (about the Castle):



Sample Questions from the Survey (Post Assessme nt #1)

1. How do you think learning about Spanish culture helped you get a better sense of other global cultures?

2. How do you think your views and cultural knowledge have changed after studying Spanish intensively for over 13 weeks, especially with the three culturally focused modules in the middle of the course related to the workshops?

3. Can you share a way in which you feel more comfortable interacting with people from a different culture now and what you may not have known before about Spanish culture?

4. What did you think WhatsApp allowed you do to help you more quickly learn about cultural interactions in Spain?

Post Treatment Survey - Responses (Post Test #1)

- Students answered the survey after the three week study period in week 9
- It was a **two page questionnaire with cultural experience questions** and what they learned about themselves by performing the tasks with the workshop/technology assisted model.
- The overwhelming response was that they “**felt more confidence, motivation, and more in touch with the host culture after performing the activities through the App**” – liked the speed of commenting on a post or being able to review information outside of class.
- They **said they felt more composed and less anxious** when recording their speaking activities through the App, compared to in class with the teacher and other students watching them.
- The students enjoyed commenting on their colleagues’ reflections about the host culture through the App.

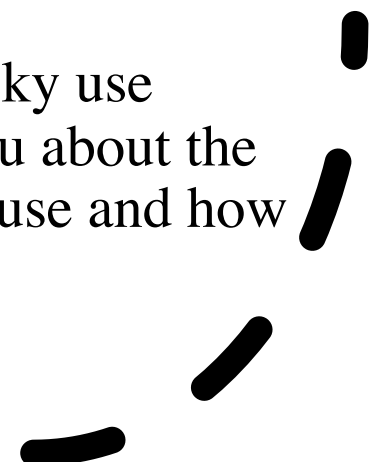
**Post Test
#2 Sample
Questions
– Audio
Interviews
(in
Spanish)**

1. What did you like most about learning about Spanish culture in Segovia?

2. Which part of WhatsApp did you like using the most (Audio, Texting, Listening, etc.)?

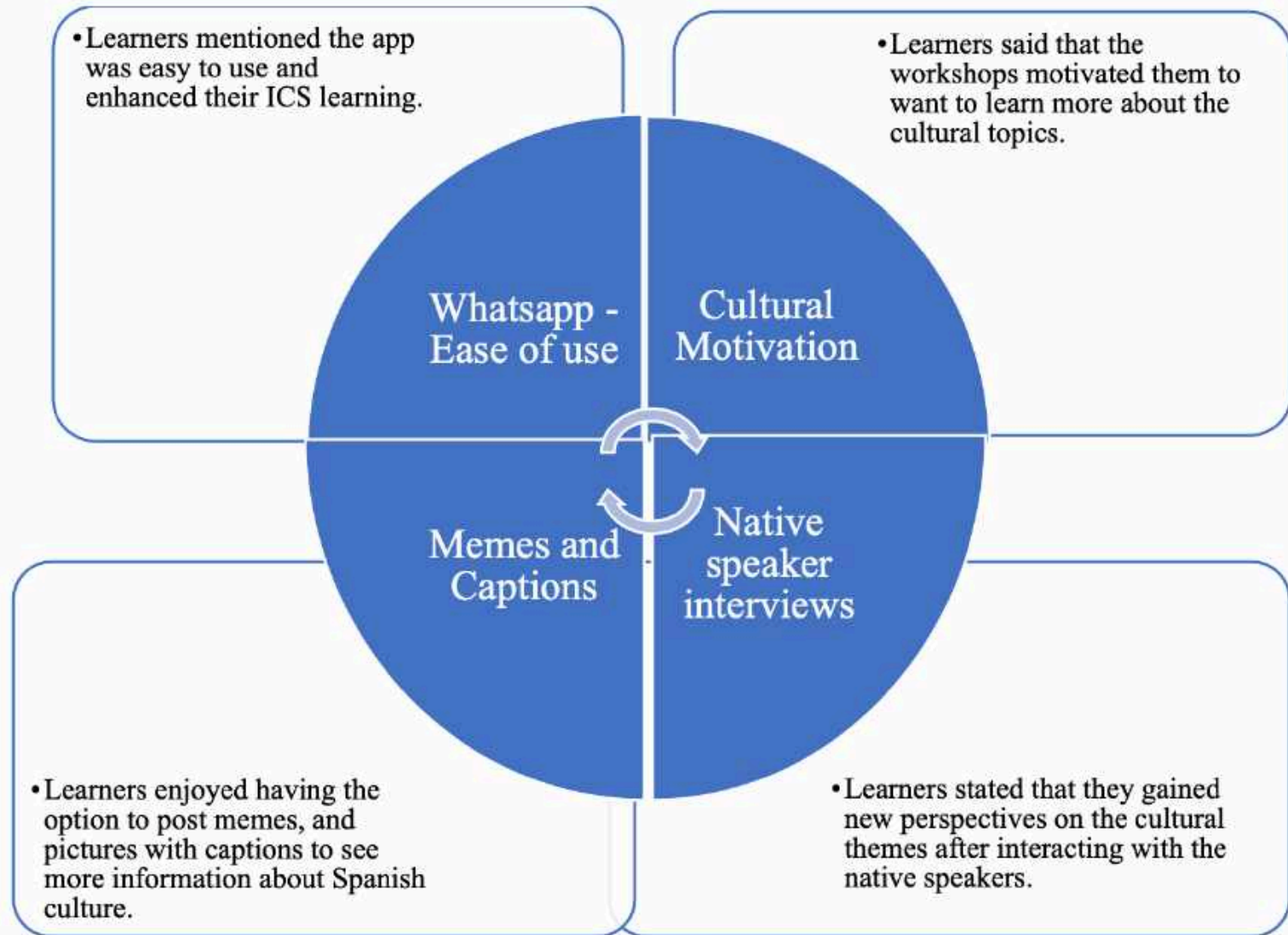
3. Do you generally like using Apps in a language and culture class? Why/Why not? Does it motivate you more to learn?

4. Do your instructors in Kentucky use technology and apps to teach you about the Hispanic World? What do they use and how do they use them?



A Summary of Post Assessment #2 Results

A Summary of Student Comments from the Oral Semistructured Audio Interviews



Summary of Results and ICS Growth/Insight Gained

- Students' ICS growth = **shown through their language use in the posts and with their comments in the two post study assessments that they had arrived at a more robust understanding of the intercultural connections.**
- **The learners' ICS growth was enhanced by their more effective way of communicating** in the foreign language to answer comprehension and reflection prompts to describe their various immersion experiences.
- The student's ICS growth was **largely influenced by both the digital reflection journals and the impact the module workshops had on their learning process due to the increased and more hyperpersonal native speaker encounters.**
- The students not only enjoyed being able to quickly access or comment on situations with their fellow classmates **but stated in their reflections that the native speaker interactions along with the design of the tasks within each module were a key part to their new understanding of Spanish culture.**

Limitations

- No pre-test was done. The investigator did not know what their entering ICS level was as they began the program (Logistical difficulties).
- The students did face obstacles completing some of the tasks but did not express any dissatisfaction with using the app (some were initially overwhelmed by the various task phases).
- The researcher would have liked to do class activities with more excursions on the immersion program. He would have liked to have done a survey of the students after they arrived back to the USA, too.

Discussion/Pedagogical Implications

- More interdisciplinary efforts are needed between teachers of various subjects – hold joint classes to foster more ICS growth while using the FL.
- A culturally relevant pedagogy course should be implemented as a mandatory requirement for undergraduate Spanish majors/minors and Spanish graduate students.
- Having ICS as the core course theme in a conversation course abroad created a more interculturally sensitive classroom - the diverse groups of students could unite to learn language and culture together.
- This study showed that previously planned activities in the program coupled with the previously used course textbook tasks did not incorporate ICS elements.

Future Research

- Future studies could focus on **how task-based learning** can influence mobile-assisted learning to make students continue to grow their ICS growth in different study abroad settings.
- The need for more ICS studies **in multicultural environments** where learners continue learning a foreign community **to help them reflect on their native speaker interactions with MALL.**
- The investigator believes that study abroad program students **are more likely to build more positive and constructive relationships with people from other countries.** *More investigations are needed to see how technology assists in that process.*
- More studies need to look at how to train program leaders and study abroad instructors so that ICS elements are at the forefront of their courses

Conclusions Part I

- Pedagogically, students need to be shown what intercultural sensitivity and hyperpersonal engagement are. **In a 3 week study, students showed modest growth with ICS.**
- *Students posted the most information in the “Speaking focused” module*
- Students DID use the App with ease to complete homework activities and reflections where they demonstrated some movement along the ICS continuum.

Total Movement along the ICS Continuum from All Modular Work (Weeks 7-9)

DMIS Categories

Started at *Minimization (DMIS Level 3)*=5 Students

1.Emma, 2. Lexi, 3.Kelly, 4. Mary, 5. Taylor, 6. Amy, 7. Caitlin

Started at *Acceptance (DMIS Level 4)*=7 Students

1. Barbara, 2. Brad, 3. Haley, 4. Sally, 5. Margaret

Started at *Adaptation (DMIS Level 5)*= 0 Students

Conclusions – Part II

Participants' Specific ICS Growth from Start to Finish of the Experiment (Weeks 7-9)

| |
|---------------------------|
| Week 7 ICS Score Mean=4.3 |
| Week 9 ICS Score Mean=4.6 |

The participants' mean score was in the high Acceptance range (4.6) at the end of the experiment.

BASED ON THEIR ASSIGNED SCORES FROM ALL TOTAL POSTS AS WELL AS OTHER CODED REFERENCES IN THE QUALITATIVE SECTION, THE INVESTIGATOR INDICATES THAT

THREE (3) STUDENTS MOVED FROM MINIMIZATION TO ACCEPTANCE (3 TO 4).

1. EMMA

2. LISA

3. KELLY

Based on their assigned scores from all total posts as well as other coded references in the qualitative section, the investigator indicates that four (4) students moved from

Minimization to Adaptation (3-5).

1. Amy

2. Caitlin

3. Mary

4. Taylor

Based on their assigned scores from all total posts as well as other coded references in the qualitative section, the investigator indicates that five (5) students moved from Acceptance to

Adaptation (4-5)

1. Barbara

2. Brad

3. Haley

4. Margaret

5. Sally

Conclusions Part III

- WA motivated the students to feel more comfortable and less anxious using the various modalities of the app to complete the phases of the modules. The module framework allowed them to see more cultural nuances and explain them in the FL.
- The findings showed that **WA did facilitate the development of ICS since it allowed for structured groups to be constructed and designed in different ways within WA**—the students' reactions and interactions were more dynamic and meaningful.
- **The students exhibited ICS understanding and eventually modest ICS growth as they gained more experience with understanding the words and expressions mentioned in the native speaker interviews** and participated hyperpersonally in interactions to more fully appreciate the cultural nuances in their modules.

Thank you! Gracias!

Questions, Comments, Etc.?



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