Factors that Lead American Foreign Language Students to Discontinue the Study of the Target Language Past the Minimum Requirement

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FACTORS THAT LEAD AMERICAN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS TO DISCONTINUE THE STUDY OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE PAST THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

by

Gabriele Seffert

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree Master of Education

REGIS UNIVERSITY

April, 2007
ABSTRACT

Factors that lead American foreign language students to discontinue the study of the target language past the minimum requirement

This research project expanded on a study by Shedivy (2004) who investigated motivational factors for continuation of foreign language acquisition after the two-year minimum requirement during high school. Seffert’s (2007) study sought reasons why students did not continue beyond the two-year minimum. The phenomenological inquiry was supported by literature on historic-political factors, motivational considerations, and educational strategies influencing students’ interest in second language acquisition.

Subjects of this study were between the age of 18 and 40 and had discontinued foreign language classes after two years in high school. The interview was taped, transcribed, and differentiated by emerging themes. These themes were broken into six categories, representing factors leading to the discontinuation of foreign language education. The themes were: (a) general, (b) travel, (c) pragmatic application, (d) historic-political implication, (f) motivational factor, and (e) instructional methodology.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing need for foreign language use in the United States. The belief that English is the primary world language does not absolve Americans from learning a second language. Nations or groups of nations such as the European Union can only remain compatible by understanding the diversity of their members and their respective cultures and languages. Speaking a second language provides an advantage that goes beyond business advantages; it is also a matter of respect. In a speech in January 2006, George W. Bush acknowledged this by saying:

“Learning somebody else’s language is a kind gesture, and a gesture of interest. It is a fundamental way to reach out to somebody and say, ‘I care about you’. I want you to know that I’m interested in not only how you talk but how you live” (Department of Education, 2007, p 1). Faced with globalization and international terrorism, the question of why Americans do not continue the study of a foreign language or gain proficiency in another language has become a matter of national security.

Background of the Problem

According to the Department of Education (2006), 200 million children in China are currently studying English, compared to only 24,000 American school children learning Chinese. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, only 31% of American elementary students are exposed to foreign language classes (2006, as cited in Department of Education, 2006). The Department of Education has also found that less than eight percent of United States undergraduates enroll in foreign language courses
(2006). A recent study by the Center of Applied Linguistics found that only 15 percent of elementary-school children take foreign languages, compared to 52 percent in High School (Liebowitz, 2006).

The reasons why Americans, unlike Asians and Europeans, do not pursue foreign language studies might be identifiable through the historical – political background, motivational influences, and instructional methods. Examining American foreign language policy and its application critically, might be an important step to finding solutions and a new approach to second language acquisition in this country.

Statement of the Problem

The recent efforts made by the Federal Government to change the priority of second language learning in this country seems to indicate a transformation in Americans’ view of foreign language education and its value. Together with the Department of State and Defense, the Director of National Intelligence, and the Department of Education, grants and training of second language educators are part of that new direction. President Bush purposed a $57 million initiative in the 2007 budget to increase the number of advanced foreign language speakers in the United States (Department of Education, 2006). However, a problem impacting these policy changes is that many American students do not continue their foreign language education beyond the required two-year minimum.

Purpose of the Project

Shedivy (2003) identified elements that motivate students to continue the pursuit of proficiency in the target language. What Shedivy’s (2003) project did not address were factors that discourage Americans from pursuing a second language. The purpose of this
study is to identify the reasons for students’ choosing to discontinue their language studies. By following the format of the Shedivy’s (2003) study, this study should broaden the findings and provide further understanding of motivational characteristics in foreign language education.

Chapter Summary

Identifying factors that deter foreign language students can be a helpful instrument to map out a new direction in second language education programs. The intent of this project was to broaden the scope of understanding and allow for change in perspective on the future of foreign language instruction. Understanding what motivates a few does not help to find the reasons for the failure of many. The literature review in chapter 2 identifies how historical and political events as well as methodological factors influence foreign language students’ willingness to continue their studies. Chapter 3 details the data collection and evaluation process of this project.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The United States is a powerful nation with a history defined by its diversity and willingness to lead. The rest of the world is aware of this and trying to attract American youth to its own borders. For example, the Chinese government is trying to influence the American College Board to implement a newly developed Chinese AP exam (McGray, 2006). The Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal is trying to intrigue U.S. Harvard and Georgetown students with the Arab world by donating of $40 million for Middle Eastern studies (McGray, 2006). The globalization wheel is spinning increasingly faster and such investments and cross-cultural exposure are a prudent policy for any nation.

The United States, however, lacks behind in this charge to stay abreast on other countries in foreign language proficiency. The following overview of the country’s history-political direction, motivational issues, and instructional methods will shed light into the different foreign language acquisition processes.

History and Political Influences

The challenge of early North America was to find its identity in midst of diversity. Italians, Poles, Dutch, German, Irish, French, and others tried to find a new identity without completely shedding their own. Their mother tongue became a key anchor to their heritage. In most cases, however, this language was a vernacular only loosely connected to the classic language of their country (Zimmerman, 2002). Influencing their typical speech were regional dialects and individual liberties that
differed sharply from their written language (Zimmerman, 2002). Zimmerman (2006) suggests that many immigrant language classes offered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were unattended because of the discrepancy between academic and street language.

After the United States entered WWI, German language instruction was almost eliminated from school curriculum. In 1915, approximately one quarter of high school students took German; in 1922 the number shrunk to less than one percent (Los Angeles Times, 1917, as cited in Zimmerman, 2002). During WWI Americans believed strongly in showing support for common values such as language and attitude. It was believed that the more homogeneous the nation, the more effective the fight against the enemy (Brumberg, 1998). To accomplish this task, immigrants were forced to assimilate rapidly. Schools became a catalyst of this movement, focusing on teaching English to non-English speakers, and thereby forcing new Americans to abandon their cultures and languages. This process is also known as Americanization, a federally supported program. The goal was to “make the world safe for democracy” (Brumberg, 1998).

This political influence manifested itself in policies influencing foreign language instruction in American schools today. Brecht and Rivers (1999) compared the United States to 14 other nations with second language introduction as early as six years of age and found that the average age of an American child taking a second language is 14. The importance placed on foreign language in those nations is also evident in the placement of it in curriculum. In Germany, for example, foreign language has the same status as mathematics, reading, writing, and social studies (Brecht & Rivers, 1999). Finland requires all students to study a minimum of two languages (Brecht & Rivers, 1999). In
contrast, many U.S. high school students study one language as an elective for the obligatory two years, in most cases never reaching intermediate proficiency (Shedivy, 2004).

Motivational Influences

Gardner (1985, as cited in Shedivy, 2004) believes that motivation consists of four aspects: goal, effort, want, and attitude towards the goal. He groups the aspects into two classes, instrumental and integrative. The instrumental class focuses on the benefits of learning a second language; the integrative is more interested in connecting with culture and the social benefits. Further studies by Gardner and MacIntyre, (1991, as cited in Shedivy, 2004) concluded that the integrative reason to learn a second language is superior to the instrumental in terms of gaining proficiency. In their studies, both instrumental and integrative groups increased in language proficiency over time but the integrative group learned more.

Peirce (1995, as cited in Shedivy, 2004) expanded on Gardner’s research and found that limited ability to apply second language knowledge, rather than motivation lack of motivation is the cause for discontinuation of study. Crookes and Schmidt (1991, as cited in Shedivy, 2004) also question motivation as a decisive reason to further pursue a second language. They claim that language study is an extended process and is applicable inside and outside the classroom. Dörnyei (2000, as cited in Shedivy, 2004) supports the need to evaluate over an extended period not only the motivational factors and natural fluctuations of any one subject but also internal and external influences on the student.
Daley, Onwuegbuzie, and Bailey (1997) found that many new foreign language students are intimidated and have difficulties in the learning process. Consequently, students' performance is poor, disaffection increases, and students delay taking foreign languages (Young, as cited in Daley et al., 1997).

Researchers also found anxiety to be an important factor in this language acquisition (Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; McIntyre & Gardner, 1998, as cited in Daley et al., 1997). Although students were generally interested and motivated to learn a foreign language, they showed avoidance behavior by skipping class, turning in homework late, and being generally unengaged (Gardner, 1985; Horwitz et al.; McIntyre & Gardner, 1998, as cited in Daley et al., 1997). In fact, McIntyre and Gardner (1989, as cited in Daley et al., 1997) found anxiety levels higher in a foreign language class than in Math or English.

Other research focused on anxiety levels during oral examinations and found that a lack of confidence impacts the ability learning and motivation (Phillips, 1992; Scott, 1986; Gardner, Moorcroft, & Macintyre, 1987; Trylong, 1987; McIntyre & Noels, 1997; & Horwitz et al., as cited in Daley et al., 1997). Therefore, researchers consider anxiety an important negative predictor of achievement. Horwitz (1991, as cited in Daley et al., 1997) estimated a 25% variance in grades of students with anxiety. Daley et al. (1997) warn, however, that his study was based upon a very small sample size and other subsequent studies were limited to only one language, making the expansion of the research topic essential.

There is a broad spectrum of research on motivation, providing many answers but also creating new, contradictory results. William, Burden, and Lanvers (2002) identified
this dilemma in their research on foreign language motivation. They found that the many ideas and findings have been mixed together under the theme of motivation but this mixture lacks connection. In many cases motivation has been explored in a narrow, isolated way, making it difficult to understand its meaning in context (William et al., 2002). Hence, Dörnyei (1998) concluded that lack of coherence in research on motivation is failing to provide true insight into the complexity of the issue.

His views on motivation have shifted from traditional views of mental and emotional to process-oriented factors, where beliefs and thoughts play a dominant role. Some key questions in this approach are what mental triggers are influencing motivation, how they affect learning, and by what means they can be improved up on and brought to an optimal level (Dörnyei, 1998). Dörnyei’s views on attitude and its affect have been thoroughly investigated in the field of social psychology (William et al., 2002). The focus is on intention in relation to a social context (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, as cited in Williams et al., 2002); how an individual approaches a task in light of exterior expectations and frameworks.

A cognitive motivational theory is expectancy value (William et al., 2002). This theory explains motivation by considering the degree of expectation placed on success and what value it serves. The higher the possibility for success and the incentive of a goal met the higher the expected motivation (Wigfield, 1994, as cited in William et al., 2002). Influencing this are attributions (Weiner, 1970, as cited in Williams et al., 2002), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993, as cited in Williams et al., 2002) self-worth (Covington, 1992, as cited in Williams et al., 2002), and intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995, as cited in William et al., 2002).
Deci and Ryan (1985) associate intrinsic motivation with an action performed solely for the pleasure it provides. It is based upon self-determination and associated with positive feelings (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, is a task performed to reach a specific goal such as a job promotion (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, Dörnyei (1998) argues that the complexity of foreign language reaches far beyond the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. He believes that foreign language learning requires more from a student than in any other subject (Dörnyei, 1998). A student must adapt to some additional form of personal and social dimension, impacting motivation directly (Dörnyei, 1998).

Students’ age also affects their motivation. William et al. (2002) observed a trend, in which motivation decreases as age increases. Research by the Department of Education and Science/Welsh Office (1983, as cited in William et al., 2002) found that fewer than half of language pupils completed their studies after turning 16. Another study by Chambers’ (1999, as cited in William et al., 2002) showed that in Germany interest in foreign language education declined in year seven and nine. These findings have confirmed earlier research by Gardner and Smythe (1975, as cited in Williams et al., 2002) where interest in language studies declined as students aged.

Research has investigated what impact maturity levels and age have on language learning. Lennenberg (1967, as cited in Wode, 1989) found that 2-14 year old students no longer learn a foreign language the same way younger children do. In further research by Krashen (1981, as cited in Lutz, 2002) and Whitaker, Bub and Leventer (1989, as cited in Lutz, 2002) found that by age five, lateralization is completed and that the brain takes on the language learning capacity of an adult. Krashen (1981, as cited in Lutz, 2002) also
found that native like attainment of a second language was only possible if the learning began very early in life. These findings are an important criterion in the search for effective second language teaching strategies.

*Instructional Methods*

Brecht and Rivers (1999) research on different European approaches to second language instruction focused on how second language teaching functions as an important component in language acquisition. The Netherlands, for example, has shifted responsibility to the learner through implementation of high course standards and specific requirements for all levels (Brecht & Rivers, 1999). In Denmark, teachers are trained to raise students’ awareness for foreign language at an early age and teach reading and writing strategies, assist with approaches to closing vocabulary gaps, and provide other useful learning strategies (Brecht & Rivers, 1999).

One of those strategies is Content-Centered Language Learning developed by Krashen (1978). He suggests that second language acquisition is most successful when the instructional conditions are similar to conditions during acquisition of the mother tongue and the focus is on meaning rather than on form (Krashen, 1978). He believes that engaging students in an anxiety-free environment with relevant content increases interest, and thus, success. In a content-based instructional model, students are engaged in content across disciplines. The second language is a means to teach mathematics, science, social studies, and other academic areas (Crandall, 1994). To foster learning in the second language, students are instructed in an environment that excludes much of their native language (Crawford, 2004). In Luxembourg, for example, students are taught six to eight
hours in German and French, covering content materials in the foreign language. The
system in Luxembourg slowly integrates the foreign language into the curriculum,
starting at age five (Brecht & Rivers, 1999).

Modular Teaching is a means to instruct foreign language students according to
their proficiency level at a class ration of 15:1 (Brecht & Rivers, 1999). The small class
sizes promote greater student interaction and greater general satisfaction (Wishard, 1972).
Wishard (1972) also points out that this approach is not coupled with old curriculum
structures; rather, instruction is enhanced through films, slide presentations, technology,
and immersion in the target language, such as – German restaurant visits and weekend
getaways. Wishard (1972) warns, however, that such an approach is only sustainable with
a flexible class schedule, allowing students to take the time they need to be successful.

An example for the application of Modular Teaching is a group of intermediate
German students and an instructor who spent two instructional blocks in Germany
(Wishard, 1972). Students attended class daily but were otherwise independent. They
lived with German families and participated in daily life. Students also had an
opportunity to explore the country further through travel and cultural activities (Wishard,
1972). Under these conditions, students gained much greater insight and comfort in the
language as well as the culture. Furthermore, students showed increased interest and
preparedness for advanced studies (Wishard, 1972).

Project-Oriented Learning is a common approach to teaching second languages in
the United States (Brecht & Rivers, 1999). The emphasis of this approach is on authentic,
relevant materials applied through technology, especially in higher grades (Brecht &
Rivers, 1999). Texas University (2002) illustrated this teaching technique through a
restaurant activity. The objective of this lesson was: (a) to provide a relevant exercise, (b) to give students the ability to apply the learned material, and (c) provide an opportunity to apply reading strategies in authentic Spanish (Texas University, 2002). Students were asked to imagine an evening in a Mexican restaurant with a companion who did not speak the language. Additionally, students needed to consider dietary restrictions, requiring them to look up authentic Mexican menus on the Internet and select items that met those needs. In class, students were paired with a peer and asked to create a dialog. One student took the place of the waiter and the other that of the customer and visa-versa.

Chapter Summary

A country’s history of and its political implications play a central role in foreign language education. In the United States, immigration policies and historically significant events have molded a country that believes unity and pride can conquer all. Foreign language education has only had a brief dominance in U.S. history and has since fallen into the background. Americans are not encouraged to learn other languages, and thus, lack a fundamental motivation to do so.

The language classes offered are often electives and/or are structured without proficiency in mind. With these limits, it is even more important to engage students and support their motivation to pursue further second language education. Students must be engaged through extrinsic stimulants, such as job opportunities and professional success as well as intrinsically, validating personal interests and finding new ones. Research shows higher success with exposure to foreign language when expectations and goals are clear.
Another important consideration is the age at which students are introduced to a second language. With research pointing clearly to the impact of early life education, it comes as no surprise that many high school graduates do not pursue proficiency in college after having taken a foreign language for only an average of two years. Stronger foreign language emphasis in daily curriculum and an early introduction to such programs might also lower students’ anxieties. Students become involved sooner in a second language and, therefore, can identify more with it. While the described anxieties of foreign language learning might not disappear completely it might be lessened.

Teaching methodology is a component important to furthering interest in foreign language learning. Students must feel engaged and challenged without feeling threatened. Depending upon the size and the flexibility of a program, there are teaching strategies able to support the teacher and interest of students.

If to inspire American high school students to continue their foreign language education, is to become a priority, the school systems must support the introduction of a strong, effectively timed program; students must find comfort in the process and its support; and classes must be interesting and engaging. Language education should be an opportunity for personal growth and growth of society as a whole. A multilingual country cannot operate optimally under a monolingual education system. (Roy-Campbell, 2001). The United States no longer has the luxury to ignore the importance of foreign language acquisition and its impact on the future of the country.
Chapter 3

METHOD

Assessment of Current Situation

The purpose of this study was to identify reasons why American high school students do not continue their foreign language education past the two-year minimum. Former high school students are an important resource in identifying motivational components undermining the pursuit of foreign language proficiency.

Sample

The sample follows the structure of Shedivy’s (2002) study. The researcher interviewed five participants chosen through criterion sampling. The criterion is participants between the ages of 19 and 40 who did not continue foreign language study in high school beyond the two-year minimum requirement.

Instrument

Data collection mirrored Shedivy’s (2002) approach. Taped personal interviews between two and four hours in length explored what role historic-political, motivational, and strategic factors played in students’ decision to discontinue foreign language classes. The interviews explored changes in motivation throughout primary education. To conduct this interview, open-ended questions were asked, allowing the interviewee to pursue his or her own direction. The initial focus was on concrete details, exploring attitudes and opinions secondarily. To prevent confusion and infusion of personal interest, each interview question was presented to the interviewee in writing, and the
researcher kept the participants on track with ‘navigational nudges’ (Seidman, 1991, as cited in Shedivy, 2002).

Data Analysis

Shedivy (2002) applied the process of phenomenological inquiry, which is broken into four major steps (Creswell, 1998, as cited in Shedivy, 2002). The initial step was to tape the interviews, transcribe them, and read them in their entirety. Secondly, the researcher identified important statements and extracted them. The third step was to make meaning out of these statements and combine them into themes, which were illustrated in a narrative format. During the last step, the researcher integrated themes into a narrative description in an inductive, not deductive manner. The researcher allowed “the thematic connections and emerging profiles” to develop without interjecting personal hypotheses or preconceived notions (Shedivy, 2002, p.107).

Chapter Summary

After identifying the interviewees, a written questionnaire was developed, considering historic-political, motivational, and instructional influences. The development of the interview questions was guided by the literature review. The outcome of this research project may allow for better understanding of de-motivation in foreign language education and its principal issues. It may unveil new questions and conjectures for further exploration, greater understanding, and possible solutions in the foreign language education arena.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

This research project was an expansion on research by Shedivy (2004). Shedivy (2004) sought to find reasons why students pursued foreign language proficiency past the usual two-year minimum requirement in high school. She placed focus on motivational factors such as initial spark, inspiring interest in a second language, a need to blend in, desire to immerse, political awareness, and pragmatic orientations. Since the subjects of her study had to have traveled abroad during high school, she did not list travel as an emerging theme, although, much of the findings were defined by it.

This study incorporated some of Shedivy’s elements but expanded it to factors inherent to de-motivation. Emphasis was placed on how second language acquisition was viewed through the eyes of society and what motivational components and instructional methodologies had on second language learners. The emerging themes were: 1.) reasons for choosing a particular language, 2.) the impact of travel on second language motivation, 3.) pragmatic application, 4.) historic-political implication, 5.) other motivational factor, and 6.) instructional methodology. Shedivy’s (2004) topic Initial Spark yielded no insight in this research project as the research subjects unanimously identified it as a school requirement rather than as a deep interest fueled by other exterior motivators. Since Shedivy (2004) did not identify specify interview questions in her paper, the researcher of this study used the answers of Shedivy’s (2004) interviewees as a guideline to form questions.
Interview Themes

Table 1

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<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial Spark</td>
<td>Initial Spark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to Blend in</td>
<td>Pragmatic Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to Immerse</td>
<td>Historic-political Implication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic Orientations</td>
<td>Motivational Factor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Awareness</td>
<td>Instructional Methodology</td>
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As in Shedivy’s (2004) study, five participants were selected through the process of phenomenology. The main qualifiers were a specific age group and a two-year foreign language education in high school. To accurately duplicate Shedivy’s (2004) approach, first names were used to identify the interviewees. It is merely a coincidence that all of the interviewed took French.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Subjects</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General

This theme explored reasons why the study subjects chose a particular language. Jen studied French because she was interested in going to France, a culture most intriguing to her.
Charlie studied French because of his heritage. He knew that his ancestors, French Huguenots, had settled in his hometown in 1682 after escaping the tyranny of Louis the 14th. Learning French became his way to connect with family history and a means by which to explore French culture and customs.

Mark was interested in French because it was a great sounding, romantic language. He did not feel the same about Spanish, which he defined as dirty. Another reason for his choice was the ease at which he learned and spoke French.

Christy grew up in a community with a large Spanish speaking population, made up mostly of migrant workers. As a result, Spanish was viewed as an inferior language and considered non-desirable. Consequently, Christy chose French because she felt that Spanish was not an option.

Hakan took French due to its more exotic and romantic feel. Although, Spanish would have been more practical the world today, Hakan found French more appealing.

Travel

This theme explored the research subjects’ experiences, timing of those experiences, or the lack of such experiences, and its impact on second language learning. Jen did not travel abroad during high school but went to Italy twice after graduation. The first time she visited Italy she used the guidebook as a means of communication but was surprised by how much French she had retained. “I was amazed by how many answers came to me as French.” Jen signed up for an Italian course immediately after her return from her second trip. “I was absolutely in love with it [Italian]. She felt that she probably
would have continued learning French if she had visited France during her high school years. The reason she did not continue her French studies after high school and picked up Italian is explainable through her longstanding passion for Italy. “If Italian would have been offered in high school I would have chosen it over French.”

Charlie did not travel during his high school years due to his rural upbringing and financial restraints. “I went to Ohio and New York City during high school. I was inspired by travel.” He connects romanticism with travel and a responsibility to learn the language as a matter of respect. Although Charlie has still not been to France, he is planning to do so one day.

Mark also did not travel abroad during high school but has since seen much of the European continent. His travel to those countries did not inspire him to expand his French knowledge nor pick up another language. “I knew the word for beer in every language plus my sister was very good in French so I did not have to learn.” Mark wants to continue his French education but admits to being lazy.

Christy did not travel to Europe during high school and has yet to visit the continent. “The only country I have ever traveled to is Mexico.” Christy was inspired to learn Spanish during her visit. She described an “ugly American” moment when she and her friend were the only people on a dive boat who did not speak another language. She felt embarrassed and realized again the value of a second language.

Hakan has traveled to Italy, Turkey, Germany, England, Canada, and Mexico but did not travel to France during his high school studies, which would have been a great motivator. On his latest trip to Italy he felt inspired to learn Italian but chose to take
Turkish classes instead as he will return to Turkey this summer. Hankan’s father is Turkish and some of his family still lives in Turkey.

_Pragmatic Application_

The third theme was designed to identify possible applications of the learned language in a profession or personal setting; it was meant to explore the second languages’ usefulness beyond meeting college requirements. For Jen speaking another language has only been beneficial during international, personal travel. As an architect, she does see an increasing trend to speak Spanish but does not feel inclined to learn it for professional reasons. “I would not learn Spanish for the sake of my profession. I am not interested in it and would rather consider a second language for my travel pursuits.”

Charlie believes that learning a second language can actually increase brainpower. “If you don’t stretch yourself spiritually, mentally, and physically you lose that ability.” As an editor, Charlie does see the benefit of another language. He has experienced the advantage of knowing a second language during travel. On a trip to a French-Canadian Province, he had to make use of French and was surprised by how much he had retained. “I had to read directions by the headlights of my car. Knowing French came in handy.” What Charlie cannot understand is how people can travel to another country and not make an effort to learn the native language. “As a guest you need to have some kind of rudimentary grasp of the language just to get around. Whether that is taking trains, ordering foods...try.” He feels that the same standard applies for immigrants in the United States who might have lived here for decades and still do not speak English.
Mark does not see any benefits to knowing French in his current profession. His company does not have any international affiliations. "In general, however, learning a second language is important on an international market but also in life." Mark feels that Americans as a whole are perceived as ignorant and lazy. He described a situation in a Colorado ski area where an American was overheard speaking French and was asked if she was Canadian as Americans are known not to speak another language.

Christy thinks it would benefit Americans greatly to speak another language. She referred to the fact that half of the U.S.' population are immigrants and do not speak English as their first language. "Hello, that is a huge sign that we should be doing something else." Christy sees a dire need for communication between immigrants and English speaking Americans. She added that it could only be beneficial to this country to learn to communicate with our increasing Mexican population. In her professional life, working for a state agency, speaking Spanish is a definite advantage. As a manager of a highly diverse workforce required being bilingual, it would be helpful if she could understand what is being said sometimes if only to build a positive personal connection. "I walk back there and they are talking about their weekend, they are talking about their day, they are talking about their kids. They are doing it in Spanish."

Hakan did not identify any benefits of speaking a second language in his career. He definitely did not find French useful as his life is taking him to other places. He would like to travel and communicate with his father in Turkish. "I feel like I am never going to understand him speaking my language so I must just do what I can to speak his language"
and learn.” As a whole, he believes, speaking a foreign language brings you closer to its culture. “Learning a language forces you to learn how they eat and how they live.”

**Historical-Religious Implication**

This theme intended to uncover perceptions of what it means to be an English speaking American and how those perceptions are formed and supported. Jen views current second language acquisition issues in this country as an historical problem. “America has an ego where English is considered the international language and why should we do anything about it.” Jen feels that problems on our boarders and the influx of illegal immigrants and its resulting negative image on non-English speakers is a problem that politicians have to solve. She places the responsibility to change such perceptions on our leadership who should not cut funding on electives such as art and foreign languages. She thinks that education, as a whole, is taking a back seat in this country. In her view, Washington should put enough money in the system to shift priorities in education more toward foreign languages and art.

“I would guess that our English-only policy is connected to the fact that we are, and continue to be, a melting pot and so the focus on English was a matter of getting different cultures to be able to communicate.” Charlie sees the founding cultures of this country as a group of individuals who had a hard time reestablishing themselves in a country where nothing was familiar. Speaking English seemed to have been a means to connect and find common ground. “Many of them worked 10-12 hours a day and then they went to class to learn English.” In many cases, he felt that such hard work translated
toward a wish to create a better life for the next generation, who was raised with English only. Charlie described the political climate of today as an educational dilemma. He feels that politicians are short sighted by not focusing on foreign language acquisition in schools, considering globalization and its impact on the nations economic future. Charlie sees the need for Washington to establish a system that requires second language classes in high school and college with specific focus on emerging markets and their languages such as Chinese and Indian. “Those are third world countries that are rapidly changing into first world countries and if we are going to have to compete and do business with them we need to be able to communicate.” He acknowledged the difficulties attached to such a plan with at least 27 different dialects in the Chinese language alone but stressed the importance of the involvement of Washington to make second language classes mandatory.

“We are all from other countries and English is our common language. The arrogance of that...” Mark supports learning other languages and feels that priorities in Washington are clearly elsewhere. “Americans have always been thought of as number 1. “We are no longer number 1.” In his view, India is the new up and coming nation and politicians should keep and eye on that. Despite these clear trends, Washington does not seem to be doing anything about this problem. Mark feels that twice as much money should be spent on the education of American children. In his view, great education should not be a privilege of the wealthy.

Christy traces English-only policies back to the culturally diverse immigrants, who lived in divided sections of big cities and had to find common ground to survive.
“Everybody had to learn English no matter where they came from. Leaving their Mother countries was a form of rebellion and letting go of its language signified newfound independence. Christy compared such rebellion with that of teenagers who assert their sovereignty by doing the exact opposite of what is expected of them. Today the nation still has issues with immigration, which in Christy’s view has much to do with how schools are funded. She feels that Washington should invest more money into education and make second language acquisition mandatory much early than high school. She has heard that the pliability of a young child’s brain is much greater. Although, Christy is admittedly not an expert in brain development she, nevertheless, sees support of this through a young child’s ease in picking up languages. “You can start teaching them what verbs are before they even know what a verb is.” Christy believes that continues second language programs throughout primary education will allow every student to proficiently speak another language by the end of high school. Furthermore, she considers the incorporation of foreign language as a useful tool in teaching world geography and social studies to help children connect culture with politics, history, language, and many other relevant issues.

Hakan finds that the diversity in this country has deluded the definition of the individual and created an English-only society. “I don’t think a lot of people learn another language unless they are full-blooded or have a very strong cultural background from their parents.” He did not feel that politics play a role in promoting second language learning in this country. The languages offered in schools seem neutral to him and are of no particular influence on the future of this country. “I have definitely never seen Saudi
taught." In his view, Washington should expose more Americans earlier to a second language and, thus, promote cross-cultural acceptance.

**Motivational Factor**

This section examines expectations placed on the project participants, the timing of their educational experience, and their perceived inherent consequences of learning a second language. Jen supports the teaching of a second language as early in life as possible. She talked about her niece who is learning Spanish in elementary school. "I think that children are just sponges and they have the capacity to learn at such a fast rate; introducing a second language at that time [early age] would be successful in comprehension and long-term retention." She added that children also gain philosophical awareness that the world is bigger than the United States and worth exploring. Jen felt learning French was inhibited by her fear of making mistakes. The lack of exposure to the second language underscored those feelings. "I didn’t know if I was saying it correctly or if I heard the teacher right." Jen did not feel a difference in anxiety levels between troubles experienced in math or science and French. "Anxiety played a role but it was not a key role for me." A much more significant de-motivator in learning French was, in Jen’s view, the lack of expectations to become proficient. French was viewed as an elective that had no real merit on their future. The basic focus of Jen’s French program was the fulfillment of college requirements and basic communication skills. When those limited expectations changed and more was asked of her, she lost interest as French did not have a priority in her life or play a role in her future. "I met my requirement and did
not see the need to put any more into it. I had what I needed to get into college and it was just not a priority.”

Charlie felt that a second language should be taught early in a child’s life. He talked about his friend’s two boys who have a Spanish-speaking nanny and who communicates in Spanish. The 2½-year-old boy is able to speak English to his parents and respond in Spanish to nanny. “His brain is amazing to be able to speak both [languages] at the same time. It is amazing to watch. If you wait until the later years your brain is hard wired into a certain kind of program and it is very hard to disengage from that.” Charlie believes that youth is also connected to motivation. “I am not sure where that goes [motivation].” He feels that with age, anxiety increases, making learning more difficult. In his French class, anxiety was a daily occurrence. “My teacher was a short, little Nazi who walked around with a ruler and snapped it against her leg. There was a lot of anxiety there and she was just so hard and screamed so much.” In fact, he found ways that are more successful outside of the classroom to fulfill his interests in the language. “I went to the library and did exercises with the headphones. I was anxious in her [French teacher] class, scared to sound stupid.” The purpose of Charlie’s French program was to meet college entrance requirements, which was more important than gaining proficiency. “Continued education in college was stressed and, thus, a second language.” With little emphasize on French beyond meeting college requirements, Charlie felt no deep motivation to learn French in class. Another factor pointed out by Charlie was the lack of contact with French speakers. In retrospect, he found that Spanish would have been more
useful having been surrounded by Spanish speakers and having had an opportunity to apply the language.

Mark believes that a second language should be introduced as early as first or second grade. He felt that it would make learning verbs much easier. Mark also considered anxiety as a key factor a second language education. He believes that one should not be called upon nor corrected for the incorrect use of a verb, especially not in the first two years. “I never wanted to be called on. Anxiety was huge for me.” The foreign language program of Mark’s school did not expect proficiency as an outcome; rather, the school viewed second language instruction as a means to provide a balanced education. Expectation to perform was so low that Mark felt no need to do well. “I did not even notice if there was an expectation. For students who wanted to graduate at the top of class, getting a good grade in their foreign language was clearly more important.”

“I don’t think it can be too soon to learn a second language.” Christy referred to a new trend where parents are encouraged to teach infants sign language before the child can speak. She considers high school a poor time to start learning a second language. “You are trying to be cool and you have to stand in front of the room, your mouth makes these funny shapes and noises and you say these words that rhyme with something nasty in English and everybody giggles.” She described her anxiety in her French class while presenting a final project. “I remember that our final test was to write a story, which we had to write in French and deliver in front of the class. I was not a good public speaker anyway.” Christy explained that her program was not designed to guide her to proficiency; rather, it was there to provide basic skills such as ordering from a menu,
knowing directions, and colors. She felt limited not to have been challenged to learn more and become proficient. “I learned everything we were taught but I think we could have been taught more.” Christy did not continue her language studies after high school because it did not seem an important skill to have due to low expectations and an unsatisfying outcome. She reflected on her senior year and a possibility to travel to France, an opportunity that did not materialized because of her a B in English. Her parents felt that an A in French and a B in English does not deserve a reward. Instead of going to France, which she believes would have been an important motivator, she went to college and pursued another educational direction.

Hakan supports the introduction of a second language into a person’s life as early as possible. He feels that the earlier one is introduced to a second language the easier it is to become proficient in it. Hakan did not think that anxiety was a deciding factor in his decision to discontinue French. He depicted a class filled with his best friends who all struggled. The only time anxiety played a role was when he fell behind. Since high school, Hakan has started to learn Turkish and finds his motivation much higher since he is not taking this course for credits only. He wants to learn the language, in contrast to completing a class purely for credits and graduation. In reflection on his high school experience, Hakan identified motivation only early, which dwindled over time, especially, because French was not as applicable as Spanish. “Maybe Spanish was easier or … Mexico is so close and there are a lot of immigrants who speak Spanish.”
Instructional Methodology

The last theme explored specific experiences and factors, which might have had an impact on the subjects’ motivation. Jen described her language classes as different at different times. Since Jen is a visual learner, it was easier for her to learn from the textbook and from movies. When the class shifted to conversational French, Jen started struggling. “The lack of visual enforcement was hard on me.” Another motivational factor for Jen was the reinforcement of culture, which happened early but subsided over time. “My favorite French project was when we read The Little Prince and then we made little finger puppets of all the characters. We did a full finger puppet show in French. Since Jen is very artistic and loves arts and crafts, making the finger puppets connected learning French with another passion. She also felt that teachers who were more passionate about the language were far more interesting. “I was always fascinated by one particular teacher because she was French.” Given that Jen’s French class had more than 20 students, she did not get to talk as much one on one with the teacher, which would have helped her. She did not think that partner work was helpful. Jen’s preferred means to learn a language is one on one tutoring or a class with no more than five students. “In a small class I could be in conversations with the teacher...as I am talking, as I am communicating I could get feedback. The teacher could write down the word so I can see what it looks like and back up from there into the pronunciation.”

“I could probably without trying too hard come up with a better way than I was taught.” Charlie portrayed his French classes as a fear based, repetitious program. “We played no games, we didn’t draw or watched movies.” “I learn best through elaboration
and connection.” Charlie explained that he likes to understand grammar and how a sentence is constructed. He does not feel the need for visual reinforcement but acknowledges that it is helpful. “I prefer to learn with minimal pressure. My brain does not work as fast as some peoples’.” Charlie was taught in a classroom of about 30 kids. “On one hand it was great because you could hide sometimes on the other hand, you did not get the one on one instruction I would have liked.” A fun, relaxed, and open teacher is in Charlie’s view the most helpful in learning a second language. To learn a second language Charlie believes that the cultural interaction is essential. “What they teach in books does not necessarily relate to daily life.”

Mark felt that the teacher was the key to his motivation in French class. “Mr. Foster was harsh. Ms. Platt was more into repetition and more kind. It was easier with her.” Mark explained that his teachers never played games and that watching movies was rare, which would have made learning more interesting and fun. He learns best by doing. “I cannot just sit in class and listen. I like games and visual learning.” Mark’s class was very small, which he considered somewhat of a disadvantage, since he could not hide in the masses. He described an effective teacher as someone who uses relevant materials and incorporates the culture of the country into class. “In my first year of French we did a skit and cooked a French meal. That was great!” Mark would prefer to learn a second language one-on-one rather than sitting in a classroom with other students.

Christy liked the methodical way of her French class. In an attempt to learn Spanish at a local University, she has not found that same system that made learning French as easy as in high school. “You are there for two hours and I am lost the entire
two hours. It is way more than I am used to and I just need to figure out how to make it work.” Christy prefers to be taught through repetition and a lot of writing. “For me writing helps.” She needs to connect with the words; writing them down is a means to accomplish that. She also feels more inspired by a teacher native to the language taught. Her French teacher was from France, which she described as a validating factor. Christy defined an effective teacher as someone she can connect with and who makes learning safe. “I think language is scary and it has to be a safe environment. I have to know that if I say something that sounds ridiculous the class does not erupt in laughter. Christy’s preferred way of learning a second language is through travel. “I would just go wherever it is and immerse myself in the lives of people around me. You have no choice but to learn.”

Hakan had two different teachers. “One of them was a little bit more conservative and the other one showed movies. It surprised us when she showed them. The movies would have a lot of cuss words, nudity, and violence.” Hakan thought that this approach to teaching increased his interest as it featured and addressed relevant materials. The less effective approach was showing charts and using study guides. “The last teacher we had was all by the book and it wasn’t as interesting, which made me feel as if this was all a waste of time.” Consequently, Hakan completed the last year of French with a passing grade in mind not proficiency and did not want to continue his studies. “Both teachers were teaching French but they were teaching it differently and one of them had more of an affect and the other one turned me off.” “I am an audio, visual, tangible learner. I love learning, but I hate school.” Hakan found, a connection to the country, the people, and the
food inspired him. He would prefer to learn a language while traveling. “I am there. I could take French classes taught in English and then I leave and try out what I have learned. I would be forced to do it.”

Chapter Summary

The interviews were conducted either in person or by phone. Each conversation was taped and later transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the content as well as the integrity of Shedivy’s (2004) research approach. Participants were introduced to the six dominating themes and encouraged to add any additional comments, thoughts, or directions. The participants were highly engaged in issues relating to their second language classes in high school and shared experiences and impressions with enthusiasm.

This project served another, unexpected purpose. Some of the interviewees noted that thinking about high school and the issues relating to second language education clarified personal reasons for discontinuing the pursuit of proficiency in a foreign language.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Shedivy’s (2004) research did not arrive at a definite conclusion on the motivational secrets leading to persistence in foreign language education. She could not find incontrovertible evidence for the origin of the mysterious integrative switch, but stated that once the students integrated into the culture, the beauty of the country translated into motivation to learn; something that could not have been accomplished in the classroom (Shedivy, 2004). This study also did not identify a conclusive result on de-motivational implications in foreign language education. However, it did reveal that expectations placed on the student to become proficient, exposure to the language beyond the classroom, timing of language introduction, and methodology of instruction play an important role in students’ interest in a second language.

Shedivy (2004) categorized her participants’ engagement in the foreign language either as instrumental - an inspirational factor - or integrative - a tool to assist with integration of knowledge. Following this process, the researcher of this study divided the identified de-motivational implications according to her interpretation of the perceived impact in Table 3. For example, the expectation to meet minimum requirements is in the view of the researcher instrumental as it identifies rudimentary problems in educational motivation.
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Integrative</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Jen</td>
<td>• Late introduction to second language.</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Expectations to meet minimum requirement</td>
<td>• Lack of cultural interaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Poor funding</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Poor integration of kinesthetic and visual activities</td>
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<td>Charlie</td>
<td>• Late introduction to second language.</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
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<td>• Fear-based learning</td>
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<td>Mark</td>
<td>• Late introduction to second language.</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Expectations to complete school requirement.</td>
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<td>• Lack of interesting and fun activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>• Late introduction to second language.</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
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<td>• Expectations to meet minimum requirement</td>
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<td>• Underperformance due to low expectations in the classroom</td>
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<td>Hakan</td>
<td>• Late introduction to second language.</td>
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<td>• Expectations to meet minimum requirement</td>
<td>• Lack of usefulness of the language</td>
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<td>• Lack of interesting and fun activities particularly in the last year</td>
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Shedivy (2004) identified the desire “to blend in” as a key motivator for her research participants. She cited Gardner (1985) who identified the interest of meeting and conversing with members of a chosen culture as an important factor in learning. Although this study did not investigate the theme “to blend in” it does correlate with the outcome. All but one of the interviewees identified a certain amount of anxiety to speak in a foreign language. This anxiety can be tied to a high school student’s focus to fit in and not stand out by “…standing in front of the room, your mouth making these funny shapes and noises and you say these words that rhyme with something nasty in English and everybody giggles” (Christy, 2007).

Dörnyei (2000, as cited in Shedivy, 2004) describes it as an action control mechanism. At this stage, the individual is in the process of fine-tuning the strategies and tasks in order to reach a set goal (Dörnyei, 2000, as cited in Shedivy, 2004). In the life of a high school student, this often translates into being cool, especially, during personal expression. The timing of introduction to a second language should therefore be put in question and thoroughly evaluated. All subjects agreed that second language education should start as early as possible, not only, to circumvent personal embarrassment during later years but also to build a solid educational foundation and nourish an expectation to become a proficient speaker.

The lack of expectation to reach proficiency in the target language was another important point in the motivational equation. All research participants viewed the second language class as a means to an end. The goal was to fulfill college requirements or school policies. The inherent culture of such low expectations created language classes that sought nothing else but a passing grade. Furthermore, it shed light on the lack of
national priority placed on such programs. The interviewed feel the U.S. government does not support second language acquisition the way it should. A lack of funding has created a lack of priority in their view and, thus, a lack of motivation.

It also appears that the missing interaction with the target language outside the classroom has influenced students' interest level. None of the interviewed traveled to a French speaking country or was involved in an exchange program during their high school years, bringing them in touch with native speakers and their culture. The lack of crucial interaction brings to light further questions on the usefulness of a second language and its pragmatic implication. Charlie admitted that learning Spanish would have been much more useful, then and now.

Without such applicability, motivation to reach proficiency becomes more of a passion than a practical quest. Granted, it is difficult to predict the future but certain trends are apparent. During post-WWII romantic, Germanic languages were dominant due to the U.S.' involvement in Europe. Latin used to be a prerequisite for medical school, a requirement no longer needed. The economic and political future of the United States lies in the Middle East and Asia, a shift that should find its way into the school curriculum.

Additional reasons for lack of motivation are apparent in the instructional approach. The research participants identified problems with the instructional methodology and expressed decreasing interest in the language due to fear-based instruction, lack of relevancy, and lack of consideration of multi-intelligences. Hakan, for example, did not pursue proficiency in French because a teacher who did not address his needs or inspire interest in the subject defined his senior year.
This study also unveiled questions on the purpose of learning a second language education. Second language acquisition seems to be more of a personal choice, supported by the public domain only peripherally. Connecting expectation and purpose to the study of a subject is just as important as utilizing effective teaching strategies. It is common knowledge that reading, writing, and math are essential tools for an individual living in a modern world. Consequently, emphasis is placed on developing competency in those subjects.

Sharing this same priority with critically needed foreign languages might create change in motivation by providing purpose for students. This shift coupled with effective teaching strategies should form a successful learning environment. Shedivy’s (2004) findings in her study support this conclusion since she identified heightened interest in proficiency through study programs abroad.

Limitations of Study

Although this study identified motivational patterns, paralleling prior empirical and qualitative research, its scope was still too wide to obtain a reliable picture. The researcher found interviewing five subjects provides insight too limited to identify possible patterns. An additional limitation of this study was its process. Applying the method of phenomenology and personal interviews allowed themes to develop and feelings to be expressed. However, the possibility for the researcher to interject personal hypotheses or preconceived notions still existed.

Furthermore, the qualifier for research participants requires reconsideration. This study viewed a population between the ages of 18 and 40, tapping into some experiences that might no longer be relevant or current. Some of the interviewed had a difficult time
to recalling experiences in their foreign language classes and thus were not able to answer all questions.

Recommendations for Further Research

To broaden the understanding of the issue, a statistically significant number of participants should be involved in a survey to investigate the connection between expectation, applicability, and resulting motivational implications. Future research should be quantitative, limiting the age group to 18 to 20. With No Child Left Behind and other educational reforms, especially, in the last seven-years, a more clear picture of instructional methodology from a younger survey group might emerge.

Conclusion

Although de-motivational factors in second language students have not been clearly identified, the interviewed felt that a late start, anxiety, a lack of interaction with the target culture, applicability of the language, poor instructional application, and, most importantly, lack of expectation to become proficient impacted their decision to discontinue their foreign language study.

Students’ introduction to a second language often occurs at a time when life seems already complicated. High school students in general have a difficult time dealing with personal expression, often avoiding or dismissing situations that put them in a compromising position such as a foreign language class. Additionally, most programs evaluated in this research showed a deficiency in interactions with native speakers of the target language. This lack has created a loose bond between the language student and the language, since there were no significant cultural cornerstones. A trip to a French-
speaking nation or interaction with native speakers would have made a difference for all research participants. Tying in with this theme of methodology, evaluating instructional approaches and choosing a model that not only incorporates culture but also considers the introduction of knowledge in a relevant, interesting manner has revealed itself as important.

The most prominent revelation of this research, however, was the lack of expectation placed on students to gain proficiency. All research subjects agreed that a higher focus on learning a second language, combined with appropriate exposure to culture and people of the target language, would have encouraged the continuation in foreign language education. This researcher assumes such priority on second languages would result in reconsiderations of languages offered. Since foreign language has been the proverbial stepchild of education, many of the programs available have only served as a prerequisite to higher education or as a tool for brain development, lacking applicability in personal or professional areas.

Since the solution lies with a shift in national consciousness, spanning across the political plain, major changes in second language education will take time. Until then, the responsibility falls on the student, parent, and school to seek out the most useful and applicable language choice, supported by strong instructional strategies, incorporating as much target culture as possible to create relevance and interest in life long learning.
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APPENDIX A

Research Questions
Research Questionnaire on
Motivational Implication in Language Acquisition
by Gabriele Seffert (2007)

General
1. What language did you study?
2. How long did you study it?
3. Why did you choose this language?

Travel
1. Have you traveled to other countries?
2. If so, to where did you travel and did it inspire interest in learning a second language?
3. If not, which country would you like to travel and would you like to be able to communicate in the target language?

Initial Spark
1. Did you ever feel interest in learning a second language?
2. If so, who or what inspired your interest?
3. If not, what were contributing factors?

Pragmatic Application
1. What do you believe are the benefits to speaking a second language?
2. Do you think you could use the knowledge of a second language?
3. Why or why not?
Historic-political Implications

1. How do you think history has influenced the lack of focus on second language acquisition in the United States?
2. What role do you think politics plays in this matter today?
3. What do you think Washington should do on the matter of second language learning in this country?

Other Motivational Factors

1. When do you think second language should be taught?
2. What role do you think anxiety plays in second language learning?
3. Were you expected to become proficient in a second language?
4. What impact did the expectation to learn a second language have on your interest?
5. How did your interest in learning a second language change over time?

Instructional Methodology

1. What impact did second language instruction have on your interest to learn a second language?
2. How were you taught?
3. How do you learn best?
4. What was good? What was not so good?
5. How big were the classes?
6. What importance has the teacher in second language acquisition?
7. What does a good language teacher have to do to inspire interest?
8. How would you prefer to learn a second language?