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What Do Students Think? University Spanish Students' Experience Communicating Online with Native Spanish Speakers

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ABSTRACT

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Modern technology has provided foreign language teachers with several methods of connecting their classes and students to native speakers of target languages. Much of the existing research about these online conversations is focused on changes in students' proficiency or cultural sensitivity. Although valuable, the research is lacking in understanding students' experience online including positive and negative feelings, challenges, and students' overall opinion of the exchanges' usefulness. This study was conducted in an effort to better understand students' experience communicating online with native speakers. A third semester Spanish class at Brigham Young University consisting of 18 students was selected as a sample. These students were required to speak online with native Spanish speakers for at least 20 minutes in Spanish each week. Students completed weekly surveys, a final survey, and three students were selected for a semi-structured interview. This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative data. The data revealed common struggles that students faced during online exchanges, methods students used for coping with these difficulties, areas of perceived growth as a result of the exchanges, and social factors that had significant impact on students' experience. The study concludes with recommendations of what foreign language educators can do to support their own classes in similar online exchanges. Areas of further investigation regarding online exchanges with native speakers are also recommended.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the field of second language teaching in the past several decades, it has been stressed that students should receive authentic input, be given opportunities to produce output, and be able to interact in the target language (ACTFL, 2012; Krashen, 1985; Long & Porter, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Additionally, it is important for students to have regular, authentic contact with the target culture in order to gain cultural sensitivity and understanding. Students should be given opportunities to compare their culture to others, make connections with that culture, and take part in global communities (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2013).

Technology evolves faster each day. For years now, foreign language (FL) teachers have had the option of connecting their students with native speakers of the target language using modern technology. This contact can be asynchronous, utilizing text-based communication, or synchronous, utilizing audio or video-based communication (Chen & Lee, 2011; Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Teachers can use these online exchanges to help their students learn more about the target culture and practice the target language in a meaningful context (Belz, 2007; King & Ellis, 2009). Given the opportunity to connect FL students to native speakers, the need to understand the use and benefit of these online exchanges is essential.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of the research on these online exchanges focuses on the linguistic and cultural benefits available to students who communicate online with native speakers (Belz, 2002; Belz, 2007; Cunningham, Beers Fägersten, & Homsten, 2010; King & Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2009; Lee & Markey, 2014). Although this research is valuable, it often does not completely describe the experience of students who are participating. Little research exists regarding the student's

overall experience in online exchanges. It is likely that students feel a broad range of emotions and difficulties during online exchanges. Some of these roadblocks can inhibit linguistic gains, making the online exchanges less valuable. It is important that FL educators understand the student experience of online exchanges in order to provide them the support and education they need to make online exchanges as pedagogically valuable as possible. They may even see the process as a waste of time or of little benefit to their learning.

Despite these potential difficulties and negative emotions, the benefits of online exchanges are considerable. Students can practice the target language in an authentic context, and connect in meaningful ways to the target culture. In light of these potential benefits, it is important for educators and researchers to understand online exchanges as well as possible.

The goal of this study will be to understand students' experiences in online exchanges so that FL teachers can implement these programs in their classrooms and utilize modern technology to help students increase in proficiency and in cultural understanding. A mixed methods approach will be taken to adequately describe this experience, although most of the data will be qualitative in nature.

Research Questions

Primary research question: How do students describe the experience of communicating with native speakers of Spanish online?

Additional questions:

1. Do students feel that the experience is beneficial?

2. What positive or negative emotions do students feel during this process?

3. What difficulties are students presented with during this experience?

4. How do students react to these emotional/linguistic difficulties?

5. Which communicative strategies are most useful for dealing with such difficulties?

6. Which strategies do students use most often?

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

A Common Goal

Language teachers and researchers continually seek out opportunities for their students to communicate with native speakers and develop essential language skills (Lee & Markey, 2014). In recent years, educators and researchers have taken advantage of modern technology for enriching language education. This technology can include blogs, social media platforms, podcasts, and video and audio chats. For the purpose of our discussion, interactions between students and native speakers of the target language (TL) through the use of internet technologies will be defined as online exchanges.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) recommends that teachers and students speak and interact in the target language for at least 90% of each class session in order to support students in developing oral communicative competence in the target language (ACTFL, 2012). Experienced language teachers often provide opportunities for students to use the target language in class. Although valuable, this interaction is limited because students normally communicate with each other rather than with native speakers. Speaking with one's peers can be helpful practice, but it is no substitute for interaction with native speakers. This idea is supported by Goh and Burns (2012): "Merely speaking the language . . . is inadequate for acquisition to occur . . . even though [students] may become increasingly fluent, their language does not necessarily increase in accuracy" (pp. 18-19). When communicating with native speakers through current technology, students must negotiate meaning on every level. A second language (L2) classroom, by itself, is seldom enough for students to sufficiently develop the ability to negotiate meaning in intercultural exchanges.

Oral language proficiency is not the only goal language educators have when utilizing technology to connect their students to native Spanish speakers, but is often one of many. ACTFL encourages educators to focus on the five C's of language learning: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and community (ACTFL, 2013). Through online exchanges with real native speakers, language learners can develop skills that encompass all five goal areas. For example, while students develop skills in interpersonal communication under the umbrella of "communication," they are also learning about the similarities and differences between the native speaker's culture and their own, as well as working toward becoming lifelong learners of the target language by learning outside of class and finding enjoyment in the process.

Given the opportunity to meet so many important language-learning standards, the potential value in online exchanges cannot be overestimated. At the same time, connecting with native speakers with modern technology can present logistical difficulties for educators and myriad challenges for learners. It is important for researchers and educators to fully understand not only the benefits but also the potential difficulties associated with online exchanges. As educators better understand learners' experiences with online exchanges, they will be better prepared to support and motivate their students.

Theoretical Support for the use of Online Exchanges

The input hypothesis. Many language learning theories have surfaced in the last century. Many of these theories may disagree with each other on some points, but many support the contact of learners with native speakers in L2 learning. The input hypothesis, championed by Krashen (1985), states that learners acquire language through consistent comprehensible input. Krashen explains that caretakers, teachers, and foreigners provide comprehensible input by altering their own speech to assist their less-experienced interlocutor to understand their intended

message. Krashen argues that true language acquisition can only occur by receiving this input. Online exchanges provide opportunities for students to receive meaningful, comprehensible input, since many native speakers are able to adjust their language to match the skill level of their interlocutor

The output hypothesis. According to Swain's output hypothesis (Swain & Lapkin, 1995), L2 learning occurs as learners attempt to formulate their own speech in comprehensible ways. They explain,

> In producing an L2, learners will on occasion become aware of (i.e. notice) a linguistic problem. Noticing a problem can 'push' learners to modify their output. . . . Thus, output sets 'noticing' in train, triggering mental processes that lead to modified output. What goes on between the original output and its reprocessed form, it is suggested, is part of the process of second language learning. (p. 371)

Comprehensible output can improve language use in three ways: learners notice mistakes or gaps between input and output, make and test hypotheses about target language use, and think critically about their language use (metalinguistic functioning). These claims have been supported by a number of researchers (Alsulami, 2016; Goh & Burns, 2012; Russell, 2014). As students attempt to express themselves in the target language, learning can certainly take place. Online exchanges with native speakers provide opportunities for students to produce output in an authentic context, allowing them to "notice" and alter their output as necessary. Output in online exchanges can take the form of spoken or written language, depending on the medium of communication.

The interaction hypothesis. In his research regarding interaction, Long and Porter (1985) claim that students make corrections and language gains as a more experienced

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interlocutor provides feedback on their language use. Learners give attention to their own language use, connecting that usage to the input and output associated with the interaction. Gass (2003) supports this claim and explains that conversation is where learning happens, not just practice. Additionally, Lee (2009) asserts that interaction is essential to second language acquisition. She emphasizes face-to-face interaction saying that it can increase proficiency and motivation to learn one's L2.

Benefits of Contact with Native Speakers

      Increases in proficiency. Much of the research regarding online exchanges has been dedicated to understanding the pedagogical benefits to students and to gains in cultural awareness or sensitivity (Belz, 2002; Lee & Markey, 2014). This research makes clear that this online contact can yield rich academic benefits in foreign language classrooms. Yamada (2009) explains that students who used computer-mediated communication often improved academically compared to their peers. Those who used synchronous communication techniques (video and audio chats) improved in overall communication skill and communication strategies. Those students who used asynchronous methods (text-based communication) improved with regard to self-confidence with the language and grammar in particular.

      Cultural sensitivity and awareness. The potential benefits of online exchanges with native speakers are not limited to linguistic proficiency. Contact with native speakers can increase students' cultural awareness and sensitivity (Lee, 2009; Lee & Markey, 2014; Ware, 2005). Intercultural exchanges provide students with opportunities to make authentic contact with the target culture and experience meaningful language use. Martinsen (2011) states that "the idea that interaction with members of the target culture increases cultural sensitivity seems logical, inasmuch as students without any contact with people outside of their own culture would

simply have no opportunity to experience cultural difference personally" (p. 125). Additionally, studies by Wilkinson (1998) and Twombly (1995) demonstrate that contact with the target culture will often increase cultural sensitivity and awareness. These contacts with the target culture traditionally are done through study abroad programs. However, these programs are costly and not available to all language classes as readily as technology that can facilitate online exchanges.

While investigating learners' perceptions of online intercultural exchanges, Lee and Markey (2014) found that "students viewed the online exchanges as a superb venue for intercultural communication with native speakers. Through social engagements, students not only gained cultural knowledge but also became more aware of their own beliefs and attitudes toward their own culture" (p. 281). Belz (2007) concluded that intercultural competence is something that cannot be taught in a classroom, but must be experienced and developed firsthand through contact with the target culture.

Motivation. It is worth mentioning here the potential to increase learner motivation through online exchanges. Dörnyei and Csizér (2016) developed a list of techniques that teachers can use to motivate language learners called the "Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners." Having learners engage in online exchanges with native speakers can meet the expectations of several of these "commandments" including increasing learners' linguistic self-confidence, making the class interesting, promoting learner autonomy, personalizing the learning experience, and especially familiarizing learners with the target language culture.

Communicating with native speakers online can help students take charge of their learning and do it in a unique way. It provides an opportunity for them to have success with the target language, to increase motivation (Yamada, 2009), to better understand the target culture,

and to feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment after successfully communicating in the target language with a native speaker (Belz, 2002).

Potential Difficulties Faced in Online Exchanges

"Success in telecollaborative exchanges is far from guaranteed," (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006, p. 624). As many bilingual people know, speaking with a native speaker in one's L2 can be a difficult experience. For many, feelings of nervousness, anxiety, and frustration may come to mind. Online exchanges are not exempt from these elements. In addition to affective factors that may influence the experience, technology and classroom procedures can also have negative consequences in online exchanges. These negative elements can come from linguistic or cultural differences between speaking partners, or from anxiety or apprehension felt by the language learner.

Cultural and linguistic tension. Researchers often report students' overall opinion of their experience in online exchanges rather than a detailed description. Most students describe their experience as beneficial to their learning and cultural understanding (Hampel & Stickler, 2012; Lee, 2009), but this is not always the case. Some students report mixed opinions when asked about their overall feelings about the online exchanges. Belz (2002) conducted a study of German-American telecollaboration in a language class in which students worked with just a few speaking partners through the duration of the class. Students in the United States completed projects in conjunction with their German peers. Belz found that although most of her students enjoyed the process, some just wanted to end it altogether. This could be due to the fact that students' grades were tied to their performance in these collaborations. Students had to complete projects and meet deadlines all while relying on a partner living across the ocean. Many American students were frustrated by the German students' supposed lack of interest in grades

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received, while German students often perceived the Americans' frustration as rudeness. These results produce important questions about the way students experience and perceive online exchanges. It is possible that the added pressure of grades and assignments may have detracted from these students' experience culturally and linguistically.

Cultural differences were found to affect students' experience in another study by Ware (2005). She identifies three sources of tension that occurred during a study on German-American telecollaboration. These tensions included differences in expectations, meaning that one speaking partner did not take some tasks as seriously as the other; logistical constraints regarding times to meet and exchange information; and finally, social factors. These factors included cultural misunderstandings and simply not getting along. Ware, however, insists that these social factors are essential for developing cultural understanding. Although most researchers would probably agree, it is unclear whether or not these tensions have a negative impact on students' experience with online exchanges.

Foreign language anxiety. Perhaps the most obvious challenge faced by language learners in online exchanges would be anxiety or feelings of nervousness or inadequacy. The social pressure of communicating with a previously unknown person can be tremendous. This pressure is added to the ever-present foreign language anxiety experienced by many students. Von Worde (2003) investigated the anxiety of a group of fifteen foreign language students. He found that 73% of the sample would be considered anxious learners and 34% of those would be considered highly anxious. Though this sample was small, it demonstrates how common foreign language anxiety is among language students. Matsuda and Gobel (2004) explain that although some anxiety can be facilitative, is can also be detrimental to language proficiency and classroom performance. They explain that "teachers need to reduce anxiety and enhance self-

confidence by encouraging students' involvement in classroom activities and creating a comfortable atmosphere" (p. 32). Online exchanges present a unique challenge to language teachers because students will often communicate with L2 speakers in an environment uncontrolled and in some cases unmonitored by the teacher. This presents the possibility of an increase in anxiety that could be detrimental for students' learning.

Learner Adaptations in Online Exchanges

      Communication Strategies. Inevitably, students participating in online exchanges with native speakers will come in contact with one or many of the difficulties outlined previously. The difficulties students are likely to encounter can be linguistic or cultural in nature. When students struggle to express themselves or understand their speaking partner, students will often adapt their speech or ask their partner for help in some way. These attempts to bridge the language barrier are often referred to as communication strategies (Hsieh, 2014; Lee, 2001; Long & Porter, 1985). These strategies can vary in type and usage, and many have been identified by researchers in the past (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Nakatani, 2006; Varadi, 1980). Some examples of communication strategies are asking for repetition, altering message to elicit better understanding, or message abandonment. These strategies assist language learners in bridging the language barrier while speaking the TL.

      Many researchers assert that these strategies are used unconsciously (Khan & Victor, 2011) while others insist that they are planned quickly during interaction (Hsieh, 2014). This being said, some claim that communication strategies can and should be taught in foreign language classrooms in order to improve students' ability to communicate with interlocutors in L2 (Dörnyei, 1995).

Despite the wealth of research on these strategies and their utility, L2 learners are seldom taught to employ them when speaking in the target language. It is, however, important for educators who wish to employ online exchanges in their classrooms to know which communication strategies are used by students to ensure that valuable interaction is occurring and that the experience is enjoyable and beneficial to students.

Cultural Sensitivity. It is important to recognize cultural differences while considering online exchanges and address these with students. If not, the experience may lose its usefulness and becomes an exercise that reinforces, rather than eliminates, cultural misunderstandings. More is required of learners who are tasked with making themselves known to someone of a different background than simply speaking; they must also constantly negotiate meaning. Many learners may be quite competent linguistically in the target language but be unable to truly negotiate meaning with native speakers of the target language without sufficient cultural sensitivity (Jenkins, 2002). Several researchers have noted cultural differences arising and having negative effects on students' experiences with native speakers (Belz, 2002; Lee & Markey, 2014; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). It is important for educators to take cultural differences into account when facilitating intercultural exchanges for their students. Researchers express the need for better understanding of how students and exchange partners bridge linguistic and cultural gaps (Lee, 2001, O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). This information is important when considering what pedagogical strategies must be used to encourage an environment of cooperation and acceptance in online exchanges.

Purpose of the Current Study

Most research on online exchanges focuses on learners' changes in proficiency and cultural sensitivity after conducting online exchanges with native speakers. Although these

aspects are arguably our primary pedagogical concerns as language educators, more must be understood. It is important to understand learners' perspectives when tasked with communicating in a second language with a native speaker. It is likely that learners experience both benefits and challenges in these exchanges. Difficulties in communicating with native speakers could potentially send an incorrect message to learners that they may be unable to learn the target language (Tallon, 2004). Additionally, when students are presented with difficult or frustrating learning experiences, however beneficial these experiences may be pedagogically, they may be likely to experience a decline in motivation (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2016) and even decide to cease their study of the language. This is, of course, something language educators want to avoid.

Despite these potential pitfalls, many researchers would support the use of online exchanges in foreign language classrooms. These experiences have the potential to help students increase in proficiency, motivation, and in cultural understanding. Cunningham et al. (2010) experimented with several modes of communication used to facilitate online intercultural exchanges and concluded that

> The problems experienced by learners . . . are both exacerbated and ameliorated by the computer-mediated channels open to learners and teachers . . . however, the multimodality offered by the software enables students and teachers to compensate for these problems in a way that more than makes up for the disadvantages. (p. 174)

Although students may feel anxiety or discomfort, the benefits of communicating with a real native speaker through an online exchange may outweigh these concerns. If the experience is truly beneficial, it is advisable for educators to help prevent any unnecessary difficulties.

The current study endeavors to understand exactly what students experience as they engage in online exchanges with native speakers. The learner perspective will likely include

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aspects they consider positive or negative, as well as what strategies they use to better communicate with their speaking partner and deal with difficulties and challenges that arise. Understanding the perspective of language learners in online exchanges will better prepare educators to implement them in their classrooms and help support learners as they communicate with native TL speakers. These efforts have the potential to reduce anxiety (Chen & Lee, 2011) and increase overall enjoyment. It is hoped that this knowledge will assist future educators in creating and maintaining online exchange programs in their own classrooms.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Sample and Participants

The participants in this study were eighteen university students enrolled in my Spanish 105 class. Spanish 105 is a class designed for high beginners, students who have had experience learning Spanish in high school or middle school, or who have previously completed the Spanish 101 and Spanish 102 classes on campus. The class is intended for the continued development of grammar, cultural understanding, reading, writing, and conversational skills as introduced in foundational courses. Students who perform well in this course are expected to attain an *Intermediate-Mid* proficiency level on the ACTFL language proficiency scale. I selected a class at the 105 level in an attempt to partially ameliorate the anxiety that novice speakers would have experienced communicating with native Spanish speakers in the target language. These students all had experience with the Spanish language and eight had used online tools to meet native Spanish speakers before.

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25. All were native English speakers, with one exception, Isaiah, an international student from Sweden. All students were informed of the study at the beginning of the semester and agreed to participate in the investigation. A copy of this consent form is included in Appendix B. All students' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Online Exchange Assignment

In order to meet native Spanish speakers, students were instructed to use an online social platform called WeSpeke. This service matches up language learners from around the world with complementary language goals. In this case, a native English-speaking student attempting to learn Spanish is matched with a native Spanish-speaker who is attempting to learn English.

Many conversations on WeSpeke begin with an asynchronous or text-based chat after which participants can choose to connect with the audio or video conferencing software available on the website.

Students were required to complete twelve conversations online with native speakers throughout the semester beginning in the third week of class. Students were allowed a window of one week for each conversation. Students were to report the completed conversation to me by the following Monday evening using a weekly survey online. I also required them to take a screenshot of their conversation in order to prove its authenticity.

Students were required to find a speaking partner through the WeSpeke website and to speak with them for at least 20 minutes in Spanish. Students were encouraged to also speak in English for 20 minutes in order to provide their speaking partner with opportunities to practice. All conversations were required to be done either through audio or video chats. Students were allowed to use other software (such as Skype or Whatsapp, both of which facilitate online synchronous conversation) to conduct the conversation, but were encouraged to find their speaking partner using WeSpeke.

Students were provided with a list of guiding questions for each conversation in an effort to encourage them to practice the themes and skills being covered in the curriculum, as well as to give them ideas of conversation topics to use while speaking. These guiding questions were provided as a support to students and did not count as part of the assignment. Many students used these guiding questions only occasionally.

The online exchange assignment counted for 10% of students' final grade. No extra credit was offered, but students could receive partial credit for conversations completed late. This happened only rarely throughout the semester.

Sources of Information

In this section, I will explain the methods I used to collect my data. I used multiple methods of data collection in an effort to increase the validity of my interpretations through triangulation. The sources of information used to collect data are each explained in this section.

Weekly surveys. As part of their online exchange assignment, students completed a weekly survey designed to gather information about their experience speaking with native speakers online. The survey consisted of two Likert scale questions asking them how much they enjoyed their experience that week as well as how much they enjoyed the assignment overall. The remaining questions were open-ended and attempted to elicit as much information as possible from students concerning their experience communicating with native speakers that week. This survey is found in Appendix C.

Final survey. During the final week of the semester, after completing all twelve of their required weekly conversations, students were asked to complete a final survey discussing their experience with online exchanges throughout the semester. The final survey was developed using the responses provided in the weekly surveys by students and consisted of six sections: enjoyment, weekly tasks, perceived learning, speaking partners, communication strategies, and miscellaneous questions. This survey is found in Appendix D.

Interviews. I selected three students for interviewing based on their responses to the weekly and final surveys. These students included one student who greatly enjoyed the experience, one who did not enjoy it, and one whose opinion had changed from negative to positive over the course of the semester. These participants provided a variety of viewpoints and opinions on the experience of speaking with native speakers online. I believe that each of their

unique opinions have provided important insight into university students' experience communicating with native Spanish speakers in online exchanges.

An interview protocol was created based on these students responses to the weekly and final surveys. The protocol can be found in Appendix E. I took care to address not only overall themes that emerged from the entire data pool but also experiences unique to each interviewee.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis. Quantitative data were gathered investigating students' weekly and overall enjoyment, their perceived learning in speaking, listening, and cultural understanding, and their opinions about the usefulness of certain communication strategies. In each weekly survey, students answered two Likert scale questions regarding their enjoyment in online exchanges. These questions were "How much did you enjoy your experience with WeSpeke this week?" and "How much do you enjoy using WeSpeke overall?" Students answered on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means "not at all" and 7 means "very much".

In the final survey, students were asked to describe how much they learned speaking online with native speakers. They were asked to answer three Likert scale questions asking them to describe how much they had improved in speaking, listening, and in cultural understanding. These questions were also on a Likert scale.

Each week students were asked what they and their speaking partners did when they had trouble understanding each other during the online exchanges. From these answers a list of the ten most often mentioned strategies was formed. On the final survey, students were asked to rank these ten strategies in order of usefulness. In this case, a 1 was assigned to the most useful strategy and a 10 to the least useful strategy. Students were also asked to describe how useful the weekly prompts were to them during their conversations.

Qualitative data analysis. A qualitative analysis was used to interpret students'

responses to all open-ended questions both in the weekly surveys and in the final survey.

Throughout the semester, these responses were read and analyzed in order to select three

students for interviews at the end of the semester. I selected Ashlynn because her experience

with online exchanges was extremely positive, Maddie because her experience was very

negative, and Skyler because his experience was very negative at first, and then became very

positive halfway through the study. All interview questions were developed based on all

students' responses to the weekly and final surveys. I recorded and transcribed each interview

carefully.

Students' responses to open-ended questions from the weekly and final surveys, as well

as the transcriptions from each interview, were collected and analyzed using WeftQDA software.

I used the constant comparative method throughout the study to adequately describe the

qualitative data (Glaser, 1965). I present each theme in detail in chapter 4 together with

supporting quotes from students' surveys and interviews.

Researcher Biases

Before continuing, it would be best to discuss any biases I may hold as the primary

researcher of this study. My first extensive experiences interacting with native Spanish speakers

occurred while living in Guatemala City from 2008 to 2010. Based on my experience living

there, I hold a strong belief that contact and interaction with native speakers in the target

language is undeniably beneficial for language learners. It provides opportunities for

intermingling of cultures and negotiation of meaning in the target language.

My first experiences as a teacher requiring students to speak with native speakers

occurred when I began employment with Brigham Young University in 2015. Many classes

required their students to be in regular contact with native speakers either through an online resource or through in person conversation labs held on campus. In time, I learned that many students preferred the conversation labs over using online resources to communicate with native speakers. Some students expressed frustration with the online experience due to a number of factors including technological difficulties and feelings of apprehension or anxiety at the prospect of using a language with which they were unfamiliar. On the other hand, many students enjoyed the experience very much. All of these experiences led me to want to better understand what my students thought about communicating with native speakers online.

My own experience with WeSpeke has been generally positive. I have been able to connect quickly with several people and have valuable conversations with each of them. These experiences will likely influence my interpretation of the data collected in this investigation; however, I have attempted to consider multiple perspectives in my analysis.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Introduction

In this section, I present the quantitative data collected during this study. These data describe students' enjoyment levels during the online exchanges. They will also describe the extent to which students believe the online exchanges were beneficial to their learning and how effective students considered the weekly prompts to be. Finally, the data describe which communication strategies students used most often as well as which strategies they considered most useful in order to better communicate with their speaking partner.

Students' Enjoyment of Online Exchanges

Weekly enjoyment. In the weekly survey, students were asked "How much did you enjoy your experience with WeSpeke this week?" Students responded with a value on a Likert scale in which a 1 means "I did not enjoy the experience at all," and a 7 means "I enjoyed the experience very much." Table 1 illustrates students' responses to this question regarding weekly enjoyment. Table 2 reports each student's average enjoyment based on the data in Table 1.

Table 1

Students' Reported Weekly Enjoyment Values.

Student	Week 1	Week 3	Week 5	Week 7	Week 9	Week 11
Abigail	3	4	-	-	-	-
Ashlynn	6	7	7	7	7	7
Charlotte	4	5	7	6	4	6
Chloe	-	-	6	-	-	-
Ellie	-	6	-	5	-	5
Emily	4	2	5	5	4	-
Grace	4	-	7	4	5	3
Heather	-	6	-	-	7	-
Isaiah	7	-	-	-	-	-
Jacob	7	6	-	7	7	7
Jessica	4	6	1	6	5	4
Maddie	2	1	2	2	1	3

Student						
Melissa	-	5	1	4	5	6
Rachel	-	2	1	1	1	2
Samantha	5	5	4	4	4	4
Skyler	3	-	7	5	5	6
Victoria	5	6	5	5	5	5
Zach	-	-	5	4	1	3
Mean	4.50	4.69	4.46	4.64	4.36	4.69
Median	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Mode	4.00	6.00	7.00	5.00	5.00	6.00
SD	1.57	1.89	2.44	1.69	2.10	1.65

Table 2

Students' Mean Reported Weekly Enjoyment.

Student	Mean Weekly Enjoyment
Abigail	3.50
Ashlynn	6.83
Charlotte	5.33
Chloe	6.00
Ellie	5.33
Emily	4.00
Grace	4.60
Heather	6.50
Isaiah	7.00
Jacob	6.80
Jessica	4.33
Maddie	1.83
Melissa	4.20
Rachel	1.40
Samantha	4.33
Skyler	5.20
Victoria	5.17
Zach	3.25
Mean	4.76
Median	4.60
Mode	5.33
SD	1.56

The gaps in Table 1 indicate weeks during which that particular student did not complete the survey. These blank spaces, in many cases, provide insight into students' overall enjoyment of online exchanges. Although some students perhaps simply ran out of time or became too busy to complete the assignment, it is clear that others avoided the assignment altogether. Isaiah

completed the assignment only once. In his survey responses, he indicated that he talked to someone that he knew the first week, and that he experienced too much anxiety to complete the assignment after that point. It is curious that he would rate the experience as a 7 (highly enjoyable) and then abandon the experience all together. Abigail had a similar experience. She completed the assignment for the first three weeks, but ultimately ceased her participation despite reporting moderate enjoyment. These blank spaces indicate that some students experience such anxiety that they would rather receive zero points than speak with a person they do not know online for any amount of time.

A *t*-test was used to compare students' responses from Week 1 to those from Week 11. Although students' enjoyment seemed to increase slightly over the course of the semester, by only .19, a *t*-test yielded a value of $p = 0.25$ indicating a lack of statistical significance. Similarly, a t-test comparing the first half of the semester to the last half yielded a value of $p = 0.39$. Based on these values, it is evident that, on average, students' enjoyment did not increase substantially throughout the semester. Whereas this may be true for the class as a whole, some students, such as Skyler and Melissa, enjoyed the assignment more by the end of the semester whereas others, such as Grace, enjoyed it less. Several students' enjoyment levels, such as Jacob and Rachel, did not change substantially throughout the semester.

The median enjoyment for each week remained at a value of 5.00 throughout the semester with the exception of Week 1 with a value of 4.00. The mode, however, indicates that the most common answer in Week 5 was 7.00, meaning high enjoyment. Some students assigned a 7 to their enjoyment that week and others assigned low scores, leaving the mean at 4.46. The mode returned to a value of 5.00 for Weeks 7 and 9, and then rose again to 6.00 in Week 11.

The highest reported mean enjoyment by the class occurred in Weeks 3 and 11, while the lowest occurred in Week 9. The average enjoyment rose and fell during the semester rather than showing steady upward growth. As indicated in Table 1 and Table 2, many students' responses were consistent. Students generally would report similar levels of enjoyment each week, with few exceptions. Maddie and Rachel, for example, never listed their enjoyment on a given week as higher than a 3. Ashlynn and Jacob were consistent as well, giving all 7's with one exception. Charlotte, Jacob, and Victoria never gave ratings lower than a 4.

Occasionally students broke their patterns of consistency during a particular week. Grace reported moderate enjoyment each week, but gave the experience a rating of 7 in Week 5. According to her survey, she spoke with someone she knew that week rather than looking for a new speaking partner. This is a clear indicator that familiarity with the speaking partner can increase students' enjoyment in online exchanges. Jessica reported high numbers most weeks, but assigned a 1 in Week 5. In her explanation, she stated:

> *Jessica:* My partner was very uneasy and argumentative. He wouldn't answer any of my questions but would get upset when I asked clarifying questions. (Week 5)

Despite these outliers, the mean enjoyment of the class stayed consistent throughout the semester. Despite some positive comments from students, it appears that their enjoyment during online exchanges did not increase on a weekly basis.

Overall enjoyment. Each week students were also asked the question "how much do you enjoy using WeSpeke overall?" Students responded with a value on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means "I do not enjoy the experience at all" and 7 means "I enjoy the experience very much." Table 3 illustrates students' responses to this question. Table 4 indicates the mean overall enjoyment for each student based on the data from Table 3.

Table 3

Students' Reported Overall Enjoyment Values.

Student	Week 1	Week 3	Week 5	Week 7	Week 9	Week 11
Abigail	3	3	-	-	-	-
Ashlynn	5	6	7	7	7	7
Charlotte	4	5	5	5	6	5
Chloe	-	-	4	-	-	-
Ellie	-	5	-	5	-	5
Emily	3	2	4	4	4	-
Grace	5	-	5	5	4	6
Heather	-	6	-	-	6	-
Isaiah	1	-	-	-	-	-
Jacob	7	7	-	7	7	7
Jessica	2	3	2	3	2	1
Maddie	2	1	1	1	1	1
Melissa	-	3	6	5	6	5
Rachel	-	1	1	1	1	1
Samantha	4	4	4	4	4	4
Skyler	4	-	5	5	5	5
Victoria	5	5	6	5	5	6
Zach	-	-	4	4	1	2
Mean	3.75	3.92	4.15	4.36	4.21	4.23
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.50	5.00
Mode	5.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	5.00
SD	1.66	1.93	1.86	1.78	2.19	2.24

Table 4

Students' Mean Reported Overall Enjoyment.

Student	Mean Overall Enjoyment
Abigail	3.00
Ashlynn	6.50
Charlotte	5.00
Chloe	4.00
Ellie	5.00
Emily	3.40
Grace	5.00
Heather	6.00
Isaiah	1.00
Jacob	7.00
Jessica	2.17
Maddie	1.17
Melissa	5.00
Rachel	1.00
Samantha	4.00

Skyler	4.80
Victoria	5.33
Zach	2.75
Mean	4.01
Median	4.00
Mode	5.00
SD	1.74

A *t*-test comparing values from Week 1 with Week 11 yielded a value of $p = 0.22$. A *t*-test comparing students responses from the first half of the semester with the last half yielded a value of $p = 0.16$. Based on these values, a statistically significant increase in overall enjoyment did not occur. Students were generally more consistent regarding the values assigned to their overall enjoyment each week. This suggests that when they experienced a particularly difficult or enjoyable week, their overall impression of the assignment did not change drastically. For example, Melissa reported a 1 for her enjoyment of Week 5, but a 6 for her overall enjoyment at the time.

Isaiah, Maddie, and Rachel reported only very low opinions of the experience. Each of these students mentioned anxiety playing a large role in their lack of enjoyment during online exchanges. It is interesting to note that Rachel and Maddie continued completing the assignment, while Isaiah decided to stop.

Figure 1 compares the average (mean) enjoyment, both weekly and overall, reported by the class over the course of the semester.
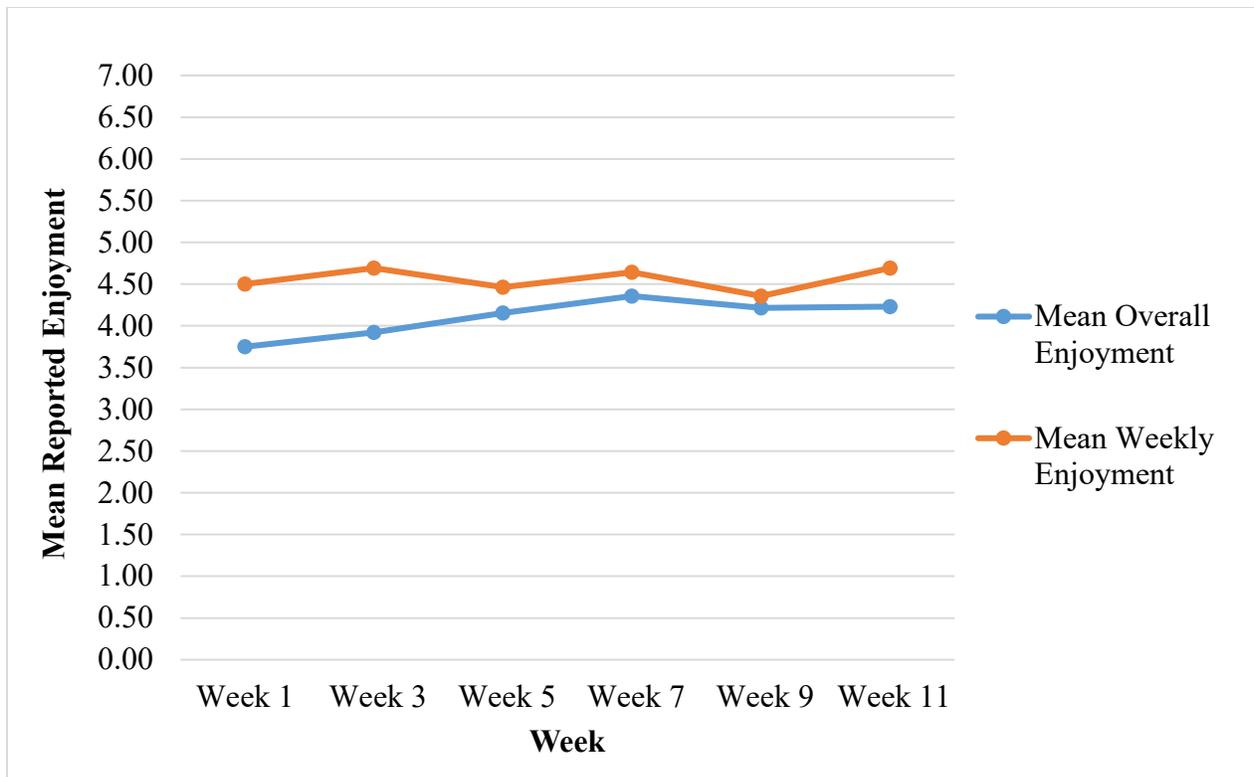
Figure 1. A Comparison of Students' Mean Reported Weekly and Overall Enjoyment.

The students' mean enjoyment scores, both weekly and overall, indicate that students enjoy individual weeks more than they enjoy the overall experience. It is likely that when students think about their overall experience, they remember the negative aspects of the assignment more readily than the positive or enjoyable aspects. For this reason, students' overall enjoyment values are lower than the weekly enjoyment values. In general, students' overall enjoyment rose steadily throughout the semester, with a slight decline starting in Week 9. Students' weekly enjoyment seems to oscillate from week to week, ending at the high score of 4.69. It is interesting to note that in Week 5, a week with a low average weekly enjoyment score indicated a rise in overall enjoyment despite whatever factors influenced students' weekly experiences that week. However, Week 9 indicates a drop in both scores.

Enjoyment summary. Based on these data, we see that a significant change in mean enjoyment did not occur over the course of the semester despite focusing on individual weeks and on students' overall impressions. Despite the lack of statistical significance, we have been able to gain some insight into factors that influence students' enjoyment of online exchanges. Several students reported experiencing great amounts of anxiety, leading them to abandon the assignment all together. Based on students' survey responses, we can hypothesize that the greatest anxiety felt by these students is due to the prospect of speaking with an unfamiliar speaking partner.

Perceived Learning

In their final survey, students were asked to indicate to what extent they felt that they had improved in speaking, listening, and in cultural understanding because of their experience speaking with native speakers online. Students indicated their perceived learning in each area on a Likert scale from 1 to 7. Assigning a 1 meant that students did not think they had improved in that area, a 7 indicated that students felt they had improved greatly. Figures 2, 3, and 4 indicate student responses to these questions. The x-axis lists the possible values students could choose. The y-axis represents the number of students who selected each response.
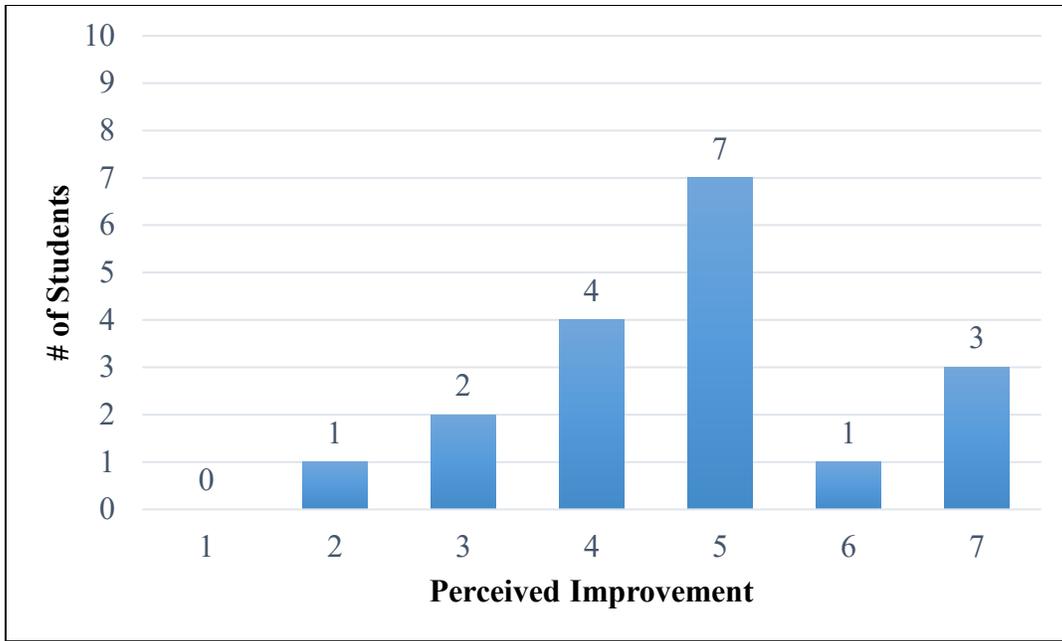
Figure 2. Students' Perceived Improvement in Speaking.
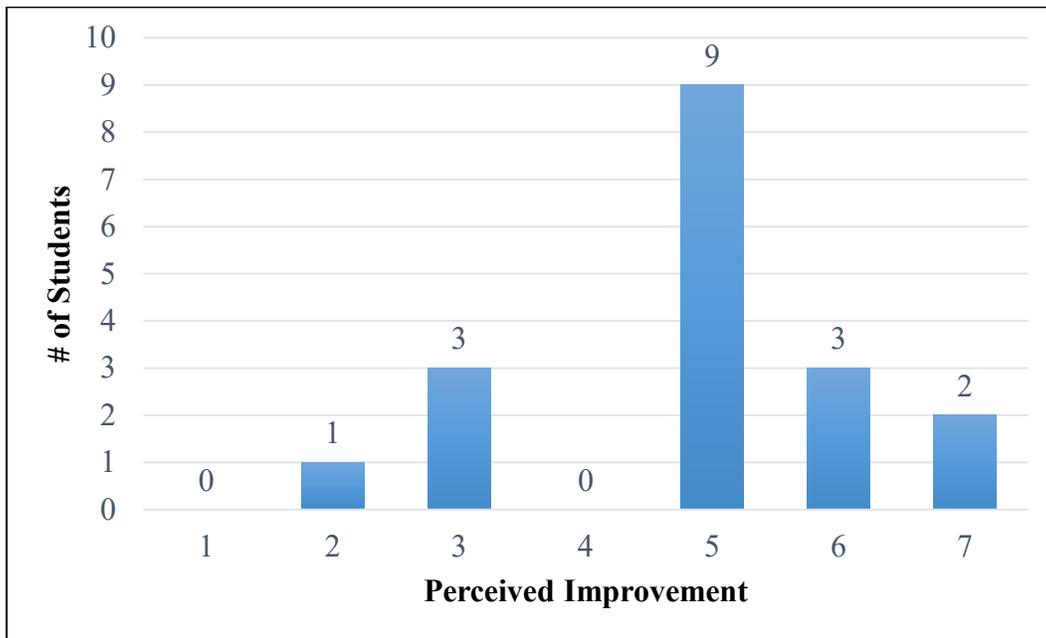
Figure 3. Students' Perceived Improvement in Listening.
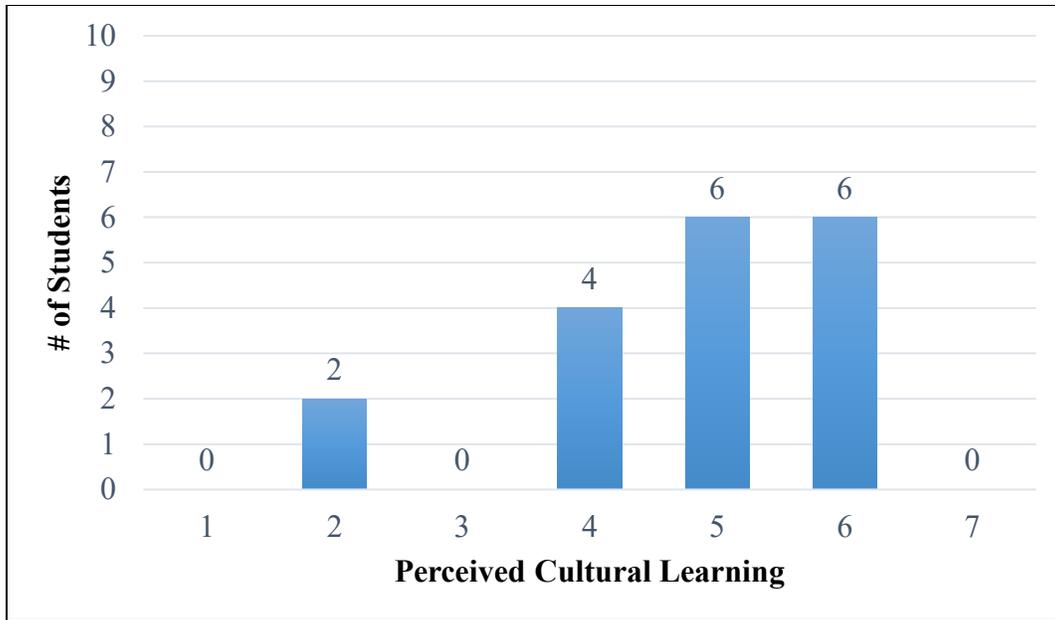
Figure 4. Students' Perceived Improvement in Cultural Understanding.

Speaking. These data show us that the vast majority of students felt that they had improved at least moderately with regard to speaking ability. Eleven students rated their perceived speaking skill increase as a 5 or above. In their survey responses, almost all students indicated that the online conversations were good practice and that they had been able to improve in some way. Several students mentioned specifically being able to speak more spontaneously and authentically:

Skyler: My confidence in speaking improved dramatically. (Final survey)

Grace: I feel a lot more comfortable speaking now than I have in the past. (Final survey)

Listening. Four students indicated that they improved only slightly in listening, though none of the students indicated no growth. The other fourteen students all indicated a perception of at least moderate growth, choosing a 5 or above. A few students mentioned that they were not able to communicate perfectly, but that they were able to understand more of what their speaking partners said:

Zach: I speak a little better now but I understand more. (Final survey)

Ashlynn: It helped me with my listening both because I practiced a lot of listening and because I am less worried about how to respond while I should be listening. (Final survey)

Emily: My listening improved because I actually had to listen to what they were saying in order to respond in the right way (Final survey)

Cultural understanding. In this section, only two students chose a number below a 4, while the rest of the class indicated moderate to high levels of cultural learning. In their survey responses, the majority of students indicated learning things about their speaking partners' countries:

Skyler: This was one of my favorite things about the assignment. I feel like I got a good understanding of different countries. (Final survey)

Emily: I was able to learn so much more about their culture and their different traditions and customs. (Final survey)

Jacob: It definitely increased my cultural understanding because I was able to see how things differed in different Latin American countries as I talked to different people. (Final survey)

Some students did not feel that the experience helped them to learn more about culture:

Isaiah: For being an activity to increase cultural understanding it really only depended on if the native person wanted to give more than a one-word answer to questions, the activity itself did nothing to contribute. (Final survey)

Melissa: I learned a little more about the culture but not as much as I would have liked. (Final survey)

It should be noted here that these data do not indicate actual learning or improvement but rather perceived learning. Based on these data, it is clear that most students felt that learning was taking place in each of these areas during online exchanges.

Usefulness of Prompts

In their final survey, students were asked, "Each week you were provided with a list of guiding questions to use in your conversation. How helpful were these questions to you?" Students responded on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 in which 1 means "The questions were not helpful at all to me" and 7 means "The questions were extremely useful to me." Figure 5 shows students responses to this question.
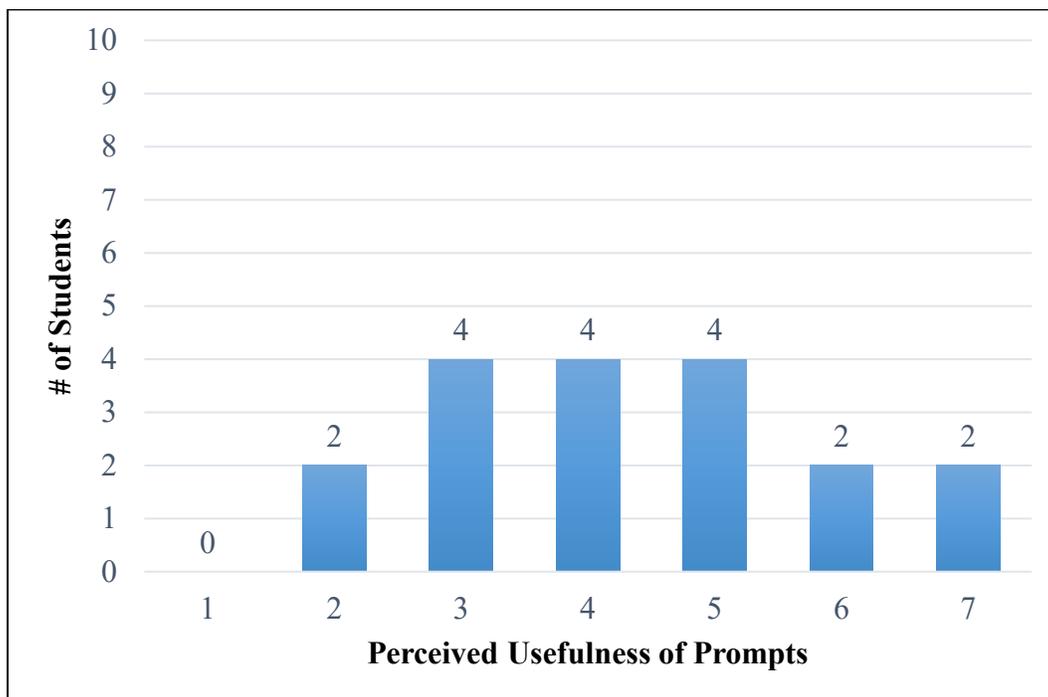
Figure 5. Students' Perceived Usefulness of Prompts.

Based on these data, students seemed rather ambivalent about the guiding questions. This could indicate that the questions were useful to some students but not others. Some students said that the questions were not needed:

Charlotte: Honestly, I didn't use them towards the end because I actually knew the people I was talking to. (Final survey)

Victoria: I never really used them. (Final survey)

Others indicated that the prompts were useful in guiding the conversation:

Chloe: They always helped guide my conversations. They provided different themes and ideas to talk about in a conversation to take it to the next level and give it purpose. (Final survey)

Emily: They would help when you weren't sure what to talk about any more. (Final survey)

Finally, some students seemed to forget that the questions were available to them:

Rachel: Some weeks I would just forget to use them but most of the time it helped me think of things to say. (Final survey)

Communication Strategies

In each of their weekly surveys, students were asked to indicate what they and their speaking partner did when they had trouble understanding each other. These weekly responses were analyzed in order to generate a list of the ten most commonly used communication strategies. The list was generated based on the strategies that students indicated using the most often. In their final survey, students were asked to rank each of these strategies in order of usefulness. Students were instructed to assign a 1 to the most useful strategy, and a 10 to the least useful strategy. They were to number the rest of the strategies as well, using numbers 1-10 each once.

Table 5 shows each communication strategy along with the number of students who chose each number for that strategy. For example, "asking questions to clarify" received 4 votes

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for being the most useful, 2 votes for being second-most useful, and so on. The final column in

Table 5 represents the average weighted usefulness assigned to each strategy. This was

calculated by multiplying each value by its position or rating, adding these up, and dividing the

result by the total number of students (18). Since the most useful strategies were assigned low

numbers, the lower the score is in this column, the more useful students considered that strategy

to be. The strategies are listed in order of most useful to least useful.

Table 5

Communication Strategies - Rankings of Usefulness

Communication Strategy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Usefulness (weighted mean)
Asking questions to clarify	4	2	1	6	2	1	1	0	1	0	3.72
Typing out words/phrases	4	2	0	4	4	1	1	0	2	0	4.17
Rewording or simplifying	4	1	3	0	4	4	1	0	1	0	4.17
Repeating/ask for repetition	2	6	0	2	3	2	1	0	0	2	4.22
Reducing rate of speech	2	2	4	3	2	0	3	1	1	0	4.33
Looking up words	0	4	5	2	1	1	0	3	0	2	4.78
Switch language temporarily	3	1	0	3	2	3	2	4	0	0	5.06
Check for understanding	0	1	1	0	4	5	0	4	2	0	6.22
Correcting partner mistakes	1	1	3	1	1	0	4	1	4	2	6.28
Sending pictures/media	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	11	8.94

Students' opinions about the usefulness of each strategy were well distributed, with a few

exceptions. For example, "switching languages temporarily" was listed as the seventh most-

useful strategy, but it has values in seven out of ten rankings. This indicates that some students

saw this strategy as extremely useful, while others did not. "Looking up words in a

dictionary/Google" did not receive any votes for most-useful, but half of students (nine) voted it

in the top three most-useful strategies. Based on these data, it is clear that students' opinions

about the usefulness of these strategies varied greatly. Some strategies may have been very

useful to some students but hardly ever used by others.

The last strategy, "sending pictures or other media," received the highest score, meaning

that it was the least-useful strategy. Eleven students assigned this strategy a score of ten.

Although this strategy was used often enough to make the list originally, it seems that many students did not consider it useful.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Introduction

The qualitative data in this study included students' responses to open-ended questions in each weekly survey as well as in the final survey. Transcripts from all three interviews were also included. As stated in Chapter 3, the three interviewees were selected based on their responses in their weekly and final surveys. Maddie was selected based on her very low opinion of online exchanges, Skyler was selected because he began the semester with a low opinion of online exchanges but later expressed higher levels of satisfaction, and Ashlynn was selected because of her very high opinion. The interviews were semi-structured. A copy of the weekly and final surveys as well as the interview protocol and questions are located in Appendices C, D, and E, respectively.

All data were read carefully as they were collected throughout the course of the study and coded using WeftQDA software. As the data were analyzed, several important themes presented themselves. The constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) was used throughout the qualitative analysis to ensure that these themes adequately described students' experience communicating with native speakers in online exchanges. The data were then coded into four comprehensive themes, each with a number of subthemes. These themes encompass students' struggles, how they coped with those struggles, their perceived growth, and other social factors affecting their experience exchanges. These themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Table 6. In this section, I will outline each of these themes and sub-themes. The names of all students as well their native speaking partners have all been replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 6

Students' Experience Speaking with Native Speakers Online – Qualitative Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Struggles and Challenges	Technological Difficulties
	Finding Speaking Partners
	Nervousness and Anxiety
	Finding Conversation Topics
	Language Barrier Issues
Methods for Coping with Struggles	Alternate Technologies
	Emotional Coping Strategies
	Communication Strategies
Perceived Growth	Grammar and Vocabulary
	Communicative Competence
	Cultural Understanding
	Enjoyment Increase over Time
Social Factors Affecting Students' Experience	Helpful Speaking Partner Attributes
	Unhelpful Speaking Partner Attributes
	Developing Relationships
	Sense of Authentic Contact

Theme 1: Struggles and Challenges

All students expressed some struggles or challenges that occurred during their experience in these online exchanges. These challenges were mentioned frequently by some students, and only rarely by others, depending on their individual experiences. The challenges faced by students are summarized in the sections that follow.

Technological difficulties. The majority of students mentioned problems with technology on a regular basis. For most, the technological issues were associated with the WeSpeke website itself, however, some problems related to the internet connection, or the hardware available to their speaking partner. The following quotes are representative of students' experiences:

Jessica: The [WeSpeke] website had lots of problems with the audio which made it difficult. (Week 1)

Melissa: WeSpeke was kind of glitchy and was hard to use. (Week 3)

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Jessica: The audio was very weak on the website so I could hardly hear the other person most of the time. (Final survey)

Charlotte: A lot of people don't have the right technology to video or audio chat so it becomes quite a challenge to actually communicate with them. (Final survey)

Fortunately, for a few students, technological difficulties were the biggest challenge they faced and they were able to enjoy their experience nevertheless. Ashlynn was the participant who indicated the most enjoyment during online exchanges, having created an important friendship in the process. Her greatest challenge was technological in nature:

Ashlynn: The most negative thing about the conversations was the buffering or technical difficulties. (Final survey)

Finding speaking partners. With one exception, all students in the class mentioned having problems finding speaking partners. This was the most frustrating part of the online exchange experience for at least ten students. These frustrations seem to have a variety of causes, as expressed in student responses. Eight students were frustrated because many of the people they would meet online were unwilling to begin an audio/video-based conversation:

Ellie: It was really frustrating trying to find someone to talk to when they kept cancelling. (Final survey)

Maddie: I had a really hard time finding speaking partners. It was okay until I asked if the person I was talking to wanted to audio chat with me. After that, a lot of times, they would stop responding or just say no for whatever reason. (Final survey)

Fortunately, some participants had no trouble finding a speaking partner.

Emily: It was easy to find my partner and we were able to communicate easily. (Week 5)

Because of the difficulties faced by students in identifying a speaking partner, many students lost lots of time unnecessarily in the process. This caused frustration because students were forced to spend much more time than expected completing their assignment for class. In some cases, this 30-40 minute assignment actually took several hours because of this issue:

Maddie: I found at times I was looking for a speaking partner for a good half an hour to an hour before I found someone willing to talk with me. (Final survey)

Skyler: The first week, I was online for 2 hours or more before I found someone who was willing to have a discussion with audio. I think a lot of people that are on WeSpeke just want to chat/send IM's. (Final survey)

Nervousness and anxiety. At least eleven students experienced anxiety or feelings of nervousness or self-doubt while learning. These feelings can inhibit students' progress in gaining proficiency in the target language. In these data, it is clear that the affective filter was a significant factor in students' overall experience.

With two exceptions, all participants in this study indicated that upon learning about this requirement as part of the course, they felt nervous, intimidated, or fearful. Even Ashlynn, who loved the experience overall, did not feel good about it initially:

Ashlynn: I was terrified, honestly. All I did outwardly was groan, but I was a mess on the inside because I was so scared to speak to anyone in Spanish, let alone a native speaker. I even (however briefly) entertained the thought of dropping the class. (Final survey)

Maddie had a particularly difficult experience. Her comments illustrated that some students actually felt unsafe speaking with native speakers online. This is unfortunate, as feeling safe is an important part of moving past affective barriers and experiencing true language growth and learning:

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Maddie: WeSpeke is very hard. It's very intimidating to speak with strangers on the internet. (Week 3)

Maddie: I felt even more nervous and uneasy using WeSpeke because I did not feel like the website was a super safe place for me to practice my Spanish and a place for me to make mistakes as I went. (Final survey)

When asked in her interview why she felt unsafe, Maddie spoke at length about her first experience on WeSpeke. The conversation experienced several technical difficulties, and at one moment in particular Maddie had great trouble understanding her speaking partner. Rather than being patient and helping Maddie, the speaking partner teased her for not being able to understand his Spanish. After that first conversation, Maddie was always afraid to use WeSpeke due to the possibility of a similar experience.

Some students, like Maddie, felt frustrated or unhappy with the online exchanges throughout the entire process. Despite having weeks to become accustomed to the process and find ways to enjoy it, some simply did not enjoy the experience at all. Abigail was one of these students. Her comments suggest that her discomfort was caused by the unfamiliarity of her speaking partner in the target language:

Abigail: Every single week was frustrating. I was not comfortable talking to a complete stranger somewhere in the world. (Final survey)

Finding conversation topics. Students were provided with a prompt each week for them to use in their conversation with a native speaker. This prompt sheet consisted of a main theme and list of possible questions that could be asked in order to provide a rich discussion if needed. The prompt was provided in hope that students would be able to practice vocabulary and grammar related to classroom work, but also to give them things to talk about with their speaking

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partner. Despite the existence of these prompts, many students struggled having interesting or engaging conversations with their speaking partners. Ten students indicated that they were simply unsure of what to say or talk about with their speaking partner, leading to awkward pauses or uncomfortable situations:

> *Grace:* The conversation went ok, but I wasn't sure what to talk about. (Skyler, Week 1)
>
> It was hard to come up with things to talk about. (Week 7)
>
> *Samantha:* I had some pauses where I didn't know what to ask her after I used the topics on the conversation prompt. (Week 3)

A common problem faced by students was that they would find new speaking partners quite regularly, which caused most conversations to consist of mostly get-to-know-you questions and themes. Although any practice in the target language with a native speaker is likely valuable, three students expressed frustration with this because they were unable to make relevant connections to their speaking partners and/or practice material in class:

> *Maddie:* I feel like each week I have the same conversations with people so even though it is good practice of the basics, I don't feel like it's helpful beyond that. (Week 5)
>
> *Rachel:* I had to find a new partner because my normal speaking buddy wasn't replying so it was just the basic getting to know you stuff again. (Week 3)

Some students indicated that they used the prompts, but that they were not very useful to them:

> *Maddie:* Most of the time, I felt that it was hard to steer the conversation in the direction of the topics in the guiding questions. The first few weeks I tried hard to incorporate the guiding questions, but after that, I just went with the conversation wherever it went. (Final survey)

Ashlynn provides a contrary example of this struggle, having expressed little to no trouble finding things to discuss with her speaking partner:

Ashlynn: Miguel has been my speaking partner since week one. Since we've gotten past many of the formalities and awkward things of talking to a stranger, we're able to learn more and have more fun and flexibility in the conversation. We actually video chatted for two and a half hours, so we went through a lot of topics (music, books, animals, school, general conference, etc.). (Week 3)

Language barrier issues. Surprisingly, when asked about what difficulties they faced during online exchanges, students mentioned the language barrier less often than the struggles previously mentioned. However, some students did mention struggling to understand their native speaking partner. This was usually attributed to their own lack of Spanish proficiency, or the nature of their speaking partner's speech:

Skyler: It was just hard. When I didn't know any Spanish whatsoever it just seemed like words ran together, I am sure other people feel the same way about English, but I wasn't sure like where one word began and where one ended. (Interview)

Charlotte: My listening skills are still pretty bad, and often I can't understand my conversation partner. (Final survey)

Jacob: I found myself nodding at what she was saying even though I couldn't understand. It was [a negative experience] because even when she repeated what she was saying slower, I still have a hard time understanding. (Final survey)

Theme 2: Methods for Coping with Struggles

All students experienced one or more of the preceding struggles. Students needed to adapt to these challenges in whatever way seemed best to them. The coping methods outlined in

this section were not prescribed for students before or during the study; rather, they were used instinctively. As part of my research question referred to the ways in which students would adapt to challenges, I will discuss these methods at length.

Alternate technologies. As explained previously, most students were met with technological difficulties as they engaged in these online exchanges. Most problems stemmed from the use of the WeSpeke website itself. Students were forced to search out other means of communication with their speaking partners in order to successfully complete their assignment.

These alternate technologies took a variety of forms. Some students used an audio notes function on the WeSpeke website. Audio notes are micro recordings that user can record and send to each other. Other students exchanges Skype usernames and preferred to use that software instead. Finally, some students used a service called WhatsApp. This service allows students to use an internet connection to conduct a phone call. Each of these seemed to resolve the issues students faced with technology:

Maddie: This week, I had a lot of trouble using WeSpeke so my partner and I had to use audio notes to communicate. (Week 5)

Jacob: Using Skype made hearing easier than using WeSpeke's video interface (it had really bad feedback). (Week 1)

Abigail: We stopped using the WeSpeke Website and used WhatsApp. (Week 3)

Emotional coping strategies. As addressed previously, approximately eleven students experienced high levels of anxiety or apprehension while participating in online exchanges. In order to discover how they dealt with some of the challenges they faced, the final survey included the question: "What advice would you give me if I were starting the class and was about to do this assignment for the first time?" Many of the responses to this question are

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included in this section. Most students indicated some kind of technique for avoiding the stress or apprehension inherent in online exchanges. Four students suggested "toughing it out" or persevering:

Ashlynn: Grades matter, just keep doing it. . . . I just think persistence is something that made the fears go away because when I kept doing it, it wasn't scary anymore. (Interview)

Maddie: Don't get discouraged, it's ok to not understand everything. (Interview)

Additionally, three students suggested being proactive in order to avoid the stress of a fast-approaching deadline:

Rachel: Just get it done earlier in the week instead of putting it off until Monday because it will be easier. (Final survey)

Chloe: Don't skip any weeks of WeSpeke because you're too nervous to do the assignment; it's not that bad. (Final survey)

Some students, in order to avoid the emotional troubles of online exchanges, elected simply not to complete the assignment. In Abigail's case, she completed the first three conversations and decided not to complete any more:

Abigail: Although I haven't done [all of] the WeSpeke assignments, I was constantly talking to people in Spanish. (Final survey)

Communication strategies. Although this portion of the data was largely explained in the quantitative data analysis, it is still valuable to note comments that students made concerning the communication strategies they would use during online exchanges. When presented with the list of communication strategies used most often by the class, a handful of students expressed how these strategies helped enhance their learning. Some of the strategies that were mentioned

most often by students were repetition, asking clarifying questions, or checking for understanding:

> *Grace:* Repeating what was said, asking for clarification, and simplifying. These were all really helpful. (Final survey)

> *Victoria:* I felt like asking questions gave me the opportunity to find out what I didn't know instead of just being told. (Final survey)

> *Ashlynn:* If Miguel said something I didn't understand, he would usually try to say it in a simpler way, but still in Spanish, and I think that helped me understand a lot more than if he had simply translated it for me. (Final survey)

Two students commented on the value of their favorite communication strategy. They indicated that asking clarifying questions in the target language was most valuable because it helped them stay in the target language rather than having to rely on their native language of English:

> *Abigail:* It allows you to continue the conversation and learn to decipher what is being said without defaulting back to the native language. (Final survey)

> *Samantha:* It is a quick option and you stay within the language, instead of switching around. (Final survey)

Students had a variety of opinions about some strategies. For example, whereas some students considered repetition to be helpful, Maddie considered it to be of little use.

> *Maddie:* For the most part just hearing them say it over and over again was just so frustrating because I was like "I still don't know what you're saying." It didn't matter how many times I heard them, it still didn't make any sense. (Interview)

One student, Samantha, said that one strategy, typing words out, was too much of a safety net. This suggests that she had a desire to challenge herself in order to help her proficiency increase:

> *Samantha:* Sometimes we would type to get a message across while we were talking, which was nice but it was too much of a safety net. (Week 5)

Theme 3: Perceived Growth

Despite the struggles explained previously, 14 out of 18 students' responses indicated that they believed the experience of speaking to native speakers online to be a beneficial one. This section will summarize student comments that indicated growth.

Grammar and vocabulary. Thirteen students specifically indicated perceived growth with regard to vocabulary size and grammar use. Students focus on these topics naturally as they are exposed to them daily in the classroom. It is certainly understandable that they would indicate these areas as they considered the benefits of online exchanges.

Several students indicated the benefits of being able to practice vocabulary and grammar learned in the classroom:

> *Jacob:* I feel that [online exchanges] were very helpful in being able to apply what I have learned in grammar and vocabulary in a real conversation. (Final survey)

> *Jessica:* I was able to practice future, present, and past tenses. (Week 11)

> *Charlotte:* Conjugations started to come more naturally to me. (Final survey)

Skyler frequently indicated that he would use the opportunity to practice for an upcoming exam:

> *Skyler:* I kind of . . . focused on practicing preterit/imperfect since I'm taking the test tomorrow. (Week 5)

> *Skyler:* If I had an oral exam coming up or if I had a lot of questions about something we were learning grammatically [my speaking partner] would practice with me or give me

examples. . . . We would just practice something that was applicable or a grammar rule that we had just learned [in class]. (Interview)

Communicative competence. Among the kinds of growth that students saw during this experience, a prevalent one is communicative competence. Students began to feel that they could really use the Spanish language and communicate with their speaking partners.

Before the online exchanges, many students had never had any significant opportunities to communicate with native speakers in any context. Having the opportunity to communicate with native speakers weekly provided valuable experience for students:

Ashlynn: I had never really had much reason to speak Spanish aloud for any extended period of time, so I didn't. So it makes sense that I couldn't speak whenever the time came that I wanted or needed to. But speaking Spanish for what turned out to be more like a couple of hours (because it was so fun) each week with Miguel and his family really helped me to think on my feet, to solidify things that I learned in class, and to develop my accent. It helped me with my listening both because I practiced a lot of listening and because I am less worried about how to respond while I should be listening. (Final survey)

Emily: I was able to form sentences and questions faster than I had before and my listening improved because I actually had to listen to what they were saying in order to respond in the right way. (Final survey)

Jacob: WeSpeke definitely helped me improve my speaking and listening skills by pairing me with native speakers. (Final survey)

Two students described their ability to better speak "on the fly," or in a more spontaneous manner.

Emily: I feel that it really helped me to better develop my ability to speak on the fly and not only being able to recite things. (Final survey)

Victoria: Over the semester I have found small improvements in the fluidity of my sentences and my ability to understand even rapid speakers. (Final survey)

Finally, five students indicated that they believed that the struggle to understand native speakers was beneficial to them.

Melissa: It helped my listening ability talking to a native because they talked with a pure accent and it was hard to understand sometimes so I really had to try. (Final survey)

Cultural understanding. The majority of students mentioned an increase in cultural learning or understanding at some point during the study. Often, students mentioned culture along with positive feelings and impressions from the experience. In FL education, cultural learning is often expressed with the three P's. These P's include the products, practices, and perspectives of the target culture being studied. FL educators are encouraged to help their students understand the perspectives of the target culture rather than focusing solely on their products and practices. Approximately half of the cultural learning mentioned by students in their surveys centered around cultural products and practices:

Isaiah: [We] talked about Spanish food, famous places. (Week 1)

Grace: We just talked about . . . Halloween and Día de Los Muertos because he is from Mexico. (Week 7)

Rachel: My speaking partner was living in Lima, Peru. I asked him about his favorite food and favorite places to eat. He showed me his favorite dish (Week 7)

Charlotte: We compared holiday traditions in our countries. (Week 11)

Other students learned about the target culture's perspectives or identity. Ashlynn seemed to be making valuable connections and comparisons between her speaking partner's culture and her own:

> *Ashlynn:* I definitely feel like I have only scratched the surface, but I still think that these conversations have helped my cultural understanding. For example, since Miguel is from Chile but recently moved to Brazil, I learned a lot about the differences between the two countries and languages and foods and cultures. Plus there were a lot of cultural differences from American culture that I had to get used to, like when we would be messaging each other, and he would say "besos," that weirded me out at first, but I guess that's more normal in South America. (Final survey)

Interestingly, Jessica's earlier surveys indicated learning mostly about products and practice whereas her later comments show that she focused on perspectives and comparisons:

> *Jessica:* My partner [this week] was a university student from Peru. We talked about Peru, its climate and tourist attractions, its diversity and landmarks. We talked about food and hobbies. (Week 3)

> *Jessica:* My speaking partner [this week] was from Venezuela. We talked about his last trip and his favorite hobbies. We vaguely talked about his culture. (Week 5)

> *Jessica:* [My speaking partner this week] was from Colombia and we had talked before. We talked about cultural identities and the Spanish language. (Week 7)

> *Jessica:* We talked about the difficulties of paying for school and having jobs. (Week 9)

> *Jessica:* My speaking partner and I talked a lot about her culture so I definitely feel like I understand her culture far better than before I started this class. (Final survey)

Six students mentioned discovering similarities between their speaking partner's culture and their own:

> *Ashlynn:* It is cool to meet people from other countries that have similar interests as me. (Week 9)

> *Samantha:* I met a lot of people from different parts of the world that had a lot of similar interests with me. It was cool to make connections with people who initially seem so different. (Final survey)

Finally, approximately half of students expressed very positive feelings that came from learning about the target culture. These comments indicate that students greatly enjoy this aspect of online exchanges:

> *Maddie:* This was the part of WeSpeke that I enjoyed the most. I feel like I learned a lot from my speaking partners about their countries and why they love where they are from. I have definitely added some destinations to my bucket list! (Final survey)

> *Emily:* I liked getting to learn about how their cultures were so different from ours and the friendly people that I talked to were what made it enjoyable. (Final survey)

Enjoyment increase over time. As mentioned previously, many students experienced a variety of negative feelings that impeded their ability to enjoy the online exchanges and possibly impeded their learning. However, approximately half of the class expressed initial discomfort with online exchanges but later indicated higher levels of enjoyment. At least nine students said that they felt better about the experience at the end of the semester than they did early in the semester. Each of the following students indicated frustration or apprehension at the beginning of the semester whereas their later comments reflect more enjoyment and learning:

Ashlynn: It's been really fun in my experience. At first it was pretty scary because I wasn't really confident in my abilities and I was just scared to talk to anyone in Spanish because I was embarrassed, so I thought that native speakers would think I was especially dumb. But, even the first time that I talked to the native speakers online, they were really nice, and it was just fun. (Interview)

Skyler: It was frustrating at first, but looking back now I'm glad that we've done it. (Interview)

Zach: It's getting easier to speak with others. (Week 5)

Chloe: I feel a bit better about WeSpeke now. (Final survey)

Other students felt glad that they had done online exchanges, as it had helped them learn the language and do well in the course:

Melissa: It became so easy to talk every week! (Final survey)

Victoria: They are actually fun opportunities to meet new people and practice my speaking and communication skills in general. (Final survey)

Theme 4: Social Factors Affecting Students' Experience

Among the comments provided by participants, several socially significant factors arose which directly affected participants' experiences. These factors included speaking partners' attributes, developing relationships with speaking partners, and conversations having a sense of reality or authenticity. These social factors are summarized apart from students' struggles and students' perceived growth in order to highlight their significance. Given the highly social nature of online exchanges, it seems appropriate to analyze these data separately.

Helpful speaking partner attributes. Many students reported communicating with kind and helpful speaking partners. Based on students' responses, it is evident that students preferred

some characteristics to others. These helpful partner characteristics are fairly intuitive, but it is valuable to see what students consider to be "helpful." For example, students preferred speaking partners that were forgiving of the mistakes that students made and were not judgmental of the students' skill with Spanish. An important part of this was being able to correct students' mistakes kindly to avoid making the student feel inadequate:

> *Jessica:* I was able to talk to a lady from Colombia who was very easy to talk with. She was very forgiving when I made mistakes but she helped to correct me. (Final survey)

> *Ashlynn:* I learned a lot from him because he wasn't afraid to tell me when I made a mistake, but he was also nice about it and we would always laugh and have a good time. (Final survey)

> *Samantha:* My partner was good at politely correcting my Spanish so that I could communicate better. (Week 11)

Another important attribute for good speaking partners is that they be willing to hold regular, quality conversations with the student, and be willing to focus on themes that are helpful to the student:

> *Chloe:* The woman I talked to was nice and willing to carry on the conversation with me; instead of just answering my questions, she would ask me some back, and our conversation extended to more than what I had planned. (Final survey)

> *Jessica:* My speaking partner was really nice and willing to help me and I was able to help her too. (Week 7)

Six students indicated that they enjoyed the process more if their speaking partner possessed a relatively high level of English proficiency. This facilitated their experience and made things go more smoothly:

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Heather: Fue bueno! I'm finding it helps to talk to someone who knows a decent amount of English. (Week 3)

Victoria: My partner, Hilda, was very helpful and also very good at English. (Week 5)

Heather: Yeah it's very helpful to talk to my partner David because he talks in both English and Spanish and helps me with words I don't know. (Week 9)

Finally, students preferred speaking partners who spoke slowly and clearly:

Victoria: I think that Evelyn was very talented at speaking slowly and clearly in order for me to understand. (Week 3)

Unhelpful speaking partner attributes. Just as speaking partners possessed helpful attributes, there were also several unhelpful ones. These negative speaking partner aspects often detracted from students' enjoyment of the conversation itself. Some speaking partners would speak very quickly, making it more difficult for the student to understand what they were saying:

Jacob: One speaker I talked with was from Peru. She talked so fast it was hard to understand. I found myself nodding at what she was saying even though I couldn't understand. It was negative because even when she repeated what she was saying slower, I still have a hard time understanding. (Final survey)

Samantha: My partner spoke really quickly, so sometimes I didn't understand all that she was saying. (Week 1)

Some speaking partners had trouble staying on task. This could mean that they wanted to discuss other things, or that they simply did not want to practice the language with the student:

Melissa: He just wanted to sing to me and not practice. (Week 3)

Some speaking partners, unfortunately, teased or belittled students during the online exchanges. These speaking partners would have very little patience or understanding for any

linguistic shortcomings. These students often reported very low levels of enjoyment at the end of the semester:

>*Grace:* They made fun of me the whole conversation for something I said wrong at the beginning, so there is no chance I'll ever make that mistake again. (Week 11)

>*Jessica:* I've been laughed at because I said something incorrectly and I don't enjoy doing WeSpeke in the first place so it only made me feel worse about it. (Final survey)

>*Isaiah:* People frustrated with poor ability in Spanish, not willing to actually use microphone, [make a] very awkward environment. (Final survey)

>*Grace:* At times I felt my speaking partner would get little frustrated if I didn't understand what they were saying or didn't know how to say something to them. (Final survey)

Unfortunately, some students had a number of speaking partners who were not using the WeSpeke service to practice a language, but rather to meet members of the opposite sex. Most female participants mentioned this happening to them, but none of the male participants reported it happening to them:

>*Samantha:* There were a lot of people that would message me and try to talk to me that were creepy and it was sometimes hard to tell who would be a good partner with the intentions to practice a language. (Final survey)

>*Abigail:* There's a lot of weirdos that just try and message me the whole time. (Week 3)

Although this was mentioned by most female participants, the data are unclear as to how much this affected their overall enjoyment. It is likely that many of these students reported lower enjoyment based on this factor, but it is not clear how large the effect was.

Developing relationships. The aspect that many students enjoyed the most about online exchanges was developing real friendships with their speaking partners. Students would speak with the same speaking partner several times, sometimes leading to conversations that were not required as part of the class:

> *Victoria:* I made a friend named Elena, it was positive because I had the opportunity to talk to her a few times and actually get to know her well. (Final survey)

> *Grace:* I was able to meet new people and make new friends actually. (Final survey)

Ashlynn and Skyler had particularly interesting experiences with making friends. Each of them was able to speak with a partner consistently and spoke beyond the required time limits:

> *Ashlynn:* A brand-new friendship actually formed from this, and after a 90-minute video call, we began messaging each other every day, which is really fun. (Week 1)

> *Skyler:* After I found a consistent speaking partner, I enjoyed the WeSpeke assignment. I would usually talk to my friend for an hour or more a week. (Final survey)

Often these friendships were based on a desire or ability to help each other. When students and speaking partners realized that they had similar learning goals, they were able to better relate to each other and create valuable relationships.

> *Victoria:* I was able to help Evelyn with her English as much as she helped me with my Spanish. (Week 3)

Sense of authentic contact. During weekly conversations, ten students said that they felt they were using Spanish in realistic, authentic, and valuable situations. Students were able to practice concepts learned in class in realistic situations, and be understood by their speaking partners:

Samantha: It was helpful to practice speaking on the spot, instead of looking at a book and trying to construct well thought out sentences. (Week 1)

Samantha: It was helpful to practice speaking naturally, without thinking too much or looking at a textbook for reference. (Week 9)

Jacob: Yes, it was really great to be able to have practice applying the vocabulary we are learning in a real-world conversation. (Week 3)

This sense of authenticity was very important to several students as it gave them a great sense of accomplishment and learning:

Jacob: When I was talking to somebody and I found I was able to communicate my ideas so they could understand. This happened many times, and it was positive because I felt like I was really starting to communicate using Spanish in a real way. (Final survey)

Ashlynn: I understood a tiny bit of what [my partner's] mom said this time! I will know I am fluent the day I can have a real conversation with her. (Week 3)

Summary

In this section, I have summarized the qualitative data taken from the data received from weekly surveys, the final survey, and interviews. I coded these data using WeftQDA software resulting in four themes and sixteen sub-themes. Each of these themes is supported by quotes directly from students. Students usually experienced at least one of the struggles outlined here. These struggles included technological difficulties, finding speaking partners, nervousness or anxiety, finding conversation topics, and dealing with the language barrier. In an effort to alleviate these struggles, students were forced to cope in some way. Students used alternative technology, coped emotionally, and used communication strategies in order to better communicate with speaking partners.

Despite these struggles, students' responses indicate perceived growth with grammar and vocabulary, communicative competence, and cultural understanding. Several students also indicated an increase in enjoyment over the course of the study. Finally, many students discussed social factors that affected their overall experience. These factors included attributes held by their speaking partner, developing relationships or friendships with speaking partners, and feeling a sense of authentic contact with the speaking partner.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of the quantitative and qualitative data collected during this study. The text is organized according to my original research questions. My primary research question, "How do students describe the experience of speaking with native Spanish speakers online?" encompasses each of my secondary research questions. For this reason, I will discuss each secondary research question first in an attempt to provide the reader with a clear image of what students experience in these online exchanges with native speakers. I will follow with a summary in an attempt to answer my primary research question. I will also discuss the pedagogical implications and the limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for further research.

Secondary Research Question 1: Do Students Feel that Online Exchanges are Beneficial?

Previous research has focused on the linguistic and cultural benefits of online exchanges. In a study investigating the social dimensions of online exchanges, Belz (2002) found that her U.S. students "tended to perceive that both their linguistic and cultural knowledge improved over the course of the partnership." My data seem to support this conclusion, as most students indicated perceived growth linguistically, culturally, or both.

Perceived linguistic growth. Whereas the data do not prove growth, they do indicate that students believe that online exchanges help them improve their L2 skills, perform better on exams, and hold realistic conversations in the target language. The majority of students believed that participation in online exchanges benefitted them linguistically. Thirteen students indicated growth in classroom skills including grammar and vocabulary use and at least five mentioned practicing these skills specifically in preparation for an upcoming oral or written exam.

Additionally, the majority of students indicated an increase in communicative competence, or the ability to hold conversations with a native speaker. Ten students made comments about their conversations feeling natural and realistic.

According to the quantitative data, eleven students, or 61% of the class felt they had improved at least moderately or more with regard to speaking ability and fourteen, 78%, felt they had improved at least moderately or more in listening. Moderate improvement, in this case, means that they chose a 5 or above on a 1-7 Likert scale to describe their improvement in each area over the course of the semester.

The data support previous research in second language acquisition, as students receive input, produce output, and interact with their interlocutor during online exchanges. These elements of online exchanges support theories set forth by Krashen (1985), Swain (1995), and Long (1985).

This perception of learning also likely increases students' motivation to learn Spanish. In their "Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners," Dörnyei and Csizér (2016) indicate "increasing learners' linguistic self-confidence" and "personalizing the learning process" as two ways to increase language learners' motivation. Online exchanges seem to comply with both of these. Students often commented on an increase in confidence with the target language and commented on having realistic conversations with their speaking partners. An increase in motivation is likely another benefit to students from participating in online exchanges.

Perceived growth in cultural understanding. Similar to the data regarding speaking and listening, students reported a perceived increase in cultural understanding as well. Twelve students, or 67% of the class, reported at least moderate growth in cultural understanding from

online exchanges. Only two students, 11% of the class, reported low growth in cultural understanding. In the qualitative data, students often reported positive feelings when commenting on their speaking partners' culture. Maddie, who did not enjoy the online exchanges overall, mentioned in her final survey that the cultural learning was her favorite part of the process.

Given the high number of students who indicated an increase in cultural understanding, it is possible that the ability to discuss whatever they chose, together with the absence of having to produce something that would be graded, provided a richer opportunity for the development of cultural understanding. Belz (2007) conducted an investigation of intercultural competence which was by similar to mine with several key differences. One important difference was that Belz' students were required to complete projects and other assignments with their German speaking partners over the course of the semester, while my students were required to simply hold a conversation in the target language. In her study, Belz concluded that the logistics of the assignments and projects made it more difficult to develop cultural sensitivity during the exchanges.

Although cultural learning is always valuable in the FL classroom, some cultural learning is often superficial, focusing on a culture's products and practices rather than on perspectives or identity. Approximately half of students' cultural learning, as indicated in students' survey responses, seemed to be largely superficial. Students would comment about learning about holidays, food, or tourist attractions. Several students, however, indicated learning more about their speaking partner's cultural perspectives or identities. Two students who represent particularly interesting cases are Jessica and Ashlynn. In their early survey responses, Jessica and Ashlynn mention learning about tourist attractions, food, holidays, weather, and hobbies. Later in

the semester, they discuss learning about cultural identity and better understanding their speaking partners. Both Jessica and Ashlynn were able to establish friendships with speaking partners during the course of the semester. It seems that over time and with a consistent speaking partner, students are able to learn more significant things about the target culture. It is likely that after learning about the "basics", students begin to really try to understand her speaking partner, leading to more sophisticated cultural learning.

These data are very promising as they indicate a relationship between the amount of time students are exposed to other cultures and speaking partners, and their increase in cultural understanding. Ashlynn even commented in her final survey that she believed that she had only "scratched the surface" when it comes to the target culture. In eleven weeks, Jessica and Ashlynn were able to learn not only facts about the target culture, but also connect and understand that culture better. It seems logical that this would happen with other students as well, especially if they continued using online exchanges for longer periods of time and were able to overcome feelings of anxiousness or nervousness with their speaking partners.

Secondary Research Questions 2 and 3: Students' Emotions, Struggles, and Difficulties

Students felt and expressed a variety of feelings about online exchanges throughout the study. Some students expressed high levels of enjoyment and fun, while others expressed feelings of nervousness or anxiety. Many of the struggles that students dealt with throughout the study contributed to feelings of frustration and anxiety. Several students mentioned making new friends or establishing valuable relationships. In this section, I will discuss students' feelings of enjoyment followed by feelings of anxiety. I will then discuss the social elements that contributed to students' emotions during online exchanges.

Enjoyment. The answer to whether or not students enjoy online exchanges is a complicated one. Based solely on the quantitative data in Tables 1 through 4, it would appear that students' opinion of online exchanges did not improve significantly over the course of the semester. Regarding weekly enjoyment, the class's mean enjoyment rose and fell week by week, ending at an all-time high, though not a statistically significant one having never dropped below 4.36 and having never risen past 4.69. This indicates that the class's mean weekly enjoyment remained consistent throughout the study. This is not to say, however, that each student had consistent feelings each week. Often, a student would have a particularly difficult week or a particularly enjoyable one.

In each occurrence of a major decrease in enjoyment, students reported speaking with a new speaking partner. For example, Jessica reported generally high enjoyment until Week 5, when she reported a 1. Based on her qualitative responses that week, her speaking partner that week was less kind and helpful than others had been. Similarly, Zach had a bad week in Week 9 for similar reasons, also indicating a 1 for enjoyment. As will be discussed later, finding speaking partners, and their unique attributes, had a tremendous effect on students' experience.

Along with weekly enjoyment values, students also reported their overall enjoyment in online exchanges each week. Although the mean overall enjoyment of the class did improve slightly most weeks, the change was also not statistically significant. Despite this, these data do show us something important. As shown in Figure 1, the mean overall enjoyment was always lower than the mean weekly enjoyment. In other words, students reported higher enjoyment each individual week (on average) than they did on overall enjoyment. It is possible that when considering the process overall, many students did not have a high opinion of the experience. However, after just having completed a conversation, they were more likely to say that that week

was at least somewhat enjoyable. It is also possible that students began the semester with pre-conceived notions about how these conversations would feel, and were unable to break through these notions later on.

Whereas the quantitative data indicated little change in students' opinions of online exchanges, the qualitative data do not necessarily agree. In their final survey, a number of students reported a much higher opinion of using online exchanges than they did initially. In the final survey, seventeen students, or 94%, reported that when they found out about the assignment they were unhappy, anxious, or nervous. Only one student was excited. When asked how they felt about online exchanges at the end of the semester, nine students indicated enjoying the experience, three reported being "O.K." with it, and four reported still feeling anxious and unhappy. Additionally, many students' comments in the weekly survey became increasingly more optimistic. Although the quantitative data indicate little growth, students' qualitative responses strongly indicate that students feel much better about online exchanges over time. Interestingly, two out of the four students who reported still feeling unhappy with online exchanges at the end of the semester, were Isaiah and Abigail. Isaiah only completed the assignment once, and Abigail stopped completing the assignment after week 3. It is possible that if these students had kept trying to complete the assignment, they would have had better opinions of online exchanges by the end of the semester.

Nervousness and anxiety. One element of online exchanges that likely lowered many students' overall opinions was anxiety. As mentioned previously, all but one student reported feeling nervous, anxious, or unhappy about the online exchanges initially. These initial causes of anxiety mentioned by students include fear of the prospect of using the target language with a native speaker, fear of speaking with someone they don't know, or both. These fears are, of

course, very understandable. Many language students experience foreign language anxiety and the prospect of communicating with native speakers in unfamiliar contexts certainly increased that anxiety. It is important for FL educators to find ways to reduce anxiety in their classroom in order to facilitate learning. Identifying some of the sources of anxiety in online exchanges can assist in reducing that anxiety in the future.

One major source of anxiety for students seemed to be the nature of communicating synchronously, through audio or video-based communication. In a study focused on intercultural sensitivity, participants communicated asynchronously, or through text-based chats and blog posts (Lee and Markey 2014). The study found that its participants seldom experienced high levels of anxiety. The asynchronous nature of the exchanges likely lowered students' anxiety considerably.

Students in the current study usually did not feel high levels of anxiety for the entire semester. Fortunately, for about half of them, feelings of anxiety diminished as they continued having conversations with native speakers. The most commonly mentioned sources for anxiety or frustration after the initial feelings are reflected in the student struggles outlined in Table 6. These struggles include technological difficulties, finding speaking partners, finding conversation topics, and dealing with the language barrier. Interestingly, other researchers have identified these struggles as well. Ware (2005) identified several tensions that arose between her U.S. students and their German-speaking partners. One tension identified by Ware was a difference in expectation or motivation. In the current study, many students used WeSpeke in order to have an audio or video chat, whereas many indicated difficulty in finding speaking partners because they would only be willing to have text-based conversations. Another tension identified by Ware was a difference in interactional purpose. In the current study, many of the

female participants found themselves being contacted by people only trying to talk with members of the opposite sex rather than practice their language use. It is clear that these two tensions existed not only in Ware's study but in this one as well.

Anxiety is uncomfortable, but it is not always debilitative. Previous research has shown that there exist two types of anxiety (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Often, anxiety can facilitate greater learning and progress while in other cases it can be debilitating and unhelpful. Based on the data presented here, it would seem that many students were able to overcome their anxiety and use online exchanges as an opportunity to learn the target language and better understand the target culture. This suggest that much of the anxiety these students felt was facilitative rather than debilitative. On the other hand, two students, Isaiah and Abigail, experienced anxiety that caused them to give up and not attempt the assignment further.

When implementing online exchanges in the foreign language classroom, it will be important for language educators to attempt to lower students' anxiety. In so doing, students will make more gains in cultural sensitivity, language growth, and overall enjoyment.

Developing relationships. One way students were able to conquer their original apprehension and anxiety in online exchanges was establishing relationships with their speaking partners. These students often made comments about making friends and establishing relationships with their speaking partners. When asked to describe how they felt about online exchanges at the end of the semester, six students, 33%, mentioned specifically that making new friends made the experience more enjoyable. In their weekly surveys, many students also mention working together with their speaking partner so that they could both learn their respective target language. This cooperation creates a sense of community between students and their speaking partners. It also signals the end of frustrations associated with finding quality

speaking partners, because students know who they will most likely be speaking with in upcoming weeks.

Beyond creating friendships, many students commented on the sense of authentic contact that these conversations would bring. Students felt that they were not just having contrived or scripted conversations in the target language, but real, meaningful conversations. In these conversations, language learners must negotiate meaning with their interlocutors, making themselves understood, and understanding the message of their partner. These experiences taught students an invaluable truth about language learning – that they could really use the language.

It seems clear based on these data that having a shared goal and establishing meaningful relationships with speaking partners helped many students enjoy the online exchanges more, or at least consider them to be valuable.

Secondary Research Question 4: Students' Reactions to Emotional and Linguistic Difficulties

Thus far, we have explored the difficulties that students are presented with in online exchanges. We have also discussed the fact that many students were able to move past feelings of nervousness or anxiety in order to enjoy online conversations more. In this section, we explore methods that students used in order to avoid or deal with the struggles they faced.

Alternate technologies. One of the common challenges faced by students was technological in nature. Students commented on the "glitchy" nature of the WeSpeke website, and the need to explore other online tools to communicate with their speaking partners. Some of these alternate tools included Skype or WhatsApp. Skype allows students to communicate with audio or video, while WhatsApp allows them to make a phone call using the internet. Based on

the data collected, it seems that these alternate technologies were sufficient for students to overcome technological challenges during their online conversations.

In future educational settings, it would be advisable for language instructors to research and educate their students on alternate forms of online communication. The tools listed here are valuable, and with today's technology, it is likely that many others exist with which students may communicate clearly and without risk of losing private information.

Emotional coping. As explained previously, seventeen out of eighteen students reported feeling nervous or anxious upon learning that they would be required to conduct conversations online with native speakers as part of the requirements of their course. More than half of the class was able to change their opinions about the assignment by the end of the semester. These students often mentioned making friends or learning about culture to be some of the reasons they began to enjoy the assignment more.

Those who did not change their opinions by the end of the semester, continuing to feel nervous and anxious, can be separated into two groups. The first group decided to "tough it out" and complete the assignment because their grade would be affected if they did not. Students who fall into this group include Maddie, Chloe, and Rachel. When asked what advice they would give someone who was beginning the course and would be required to conduct online exchanges, they recommended getting it done early in order to avoid stress. These students had relatively low overall opinions about the assignment. The second group decided to stop participating in order to avoid the anxiety and stress involved. This group includes Isaiah, Abigail, and possibly others. Isaiah only completed the assignment once. Abigail completed the assignment for the first three weeks, and then decided to stop.

Based on these data, it would be important for language educators to provide alternative assignments or support to students in one of these groups. It is important that students practice the target language and progress in their study, but high levels of anxiety can prevent meaningful learning.

Communication strategies. In order to adapt to the language barrier that students unavoidably faced during this assignment, students were obliged to use communication strategies. These strategies allowed students to better communicate with their speaking partners. They also helped students to negotiate meaning in the TL. These strategies are explained in more detail in the following section.

Secondary Research Questions 5 and 6: Usefulness and Frequency of Communicative Strategies

Students' opinions about the usefulness of communication strategies vary from student to student. The communication strategies investigated in this study came from students' responses to the weekly survey when asked what they did in order to overcome linguistic barriers with their speaking partner. This list seems valid as it shares similarities with communication strategy inventories developed by other researchers (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Nakatani, 2006). According to the weighted mean, the strategies the class considered most useful were asking clarifying questions, typing out words and phrases, ad re-wording or simplifying messages. Those considered least useful were checking for understanding, correcting each other's mistakes, and sending pictures and other media. It seems that the class preferred receiving simpler versions of the messages they received, or receiving it in other forms to resorting to correcting each other.

Whereas the data indicated preference for some strategies over others, it became clear that each student's opinion was distinct from the others'. Four students considered asking

clarifying questions most useful, but four students each also considered typing out words and rewording to be most useful. Additionally, switching languages temporarily was listed as the sixth most useful strategy, but three students considered it most useful nevertheless.

The data indicate that different communication strategies work better for different students. Many considered repetition to be a useful strategy, but two voted it as least useful. Additionally, the class considered sending pictures and other media least useful, but Ashlynn discussed considering it helpful and enjoyable in her conversations.

It would seem advisable to teach students to use these strategies before instructing them to participate in online exchanges because at least one student considered each of the strategies identified in these data to be useful. Dörnyei (1995) investigated whether or not communication strategies could be taught to students. Many researchers expressed concerns that it would be a waste of instructional time or that these strategies are mostly used subconsciously and cannot be learned. He concluded that teaching communication strategies to language students was not only possible but was beneficial to them as they attempted to learn and use the target language. Dörnyei recommends teaching a variety of strategies to students in order to give them several tools to use. My data would support this idea because each student had a different opinion about which communication strategies were useful and which were not.

Primary Research Question: How do Students Describe the Experience of Communicating with Native Speakers of Spanish Online?

Based on the data from this investigation, it would seem obvious to say that each student has his or her own distinct experience communicating with native speakers online. Some students enjoyed the process from the beginning. These were able to, at least mostly, overcome or avoid the struggles and challenges of online exchanges. These students were able to find a

helpful speaking partner quickly and communicate successfully. The student who best represents this group is Ashlynn. In Week 1 of the online exchanges, Ashlynn met her speaking partner, Miguel, and they became fast friends. They discussed school and other similarities between their two lives. Ashlynn's comments throughout the semester, as well as the quantitative data she provided, indicate that she enjoyed the exchanges and felt that she learned a lot from the experience. Ashlynn would often speak with Miguel longer than the required twenty minutes in Spanish, often conversing for up to two hours at a time, sometimes multiple times a week and Ashlynn reported high levels of enjoyment each week. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of students establishing relationships with their speaking partners. Although Ashlynn was an outlier, she represents an important aspect of the social nature of languages. Relationships with others provide motivation to use and develop linguistic abilities.

Other students had a positive experience with online exchanges, but perhaps not as enjoyable as Ashlynn. Skyler reported low or moderate enjoyment in the first week of the exchanges. According to his interview, Skyler was not able to find a speaking partner that he could connect with. After making a new friend in Week 5, Skyler reported high levels of enjoyment each week (5 and above). In the qualitative data, he often mentions the academic benefits that he enjoyed from the online exchanges. He would take advantage of the opportunity to prepare for an upcoming test or to go over an important assignment. He also mentions learning a significant amount about his friend's culture.

Unfortunately, some students did not enjoy the online exchange experience. Maddie is representative of this group. She reported consistently low levels of enjoyment throughout the semester. In Week 1, she had a particularly difficult experience being teased by her speaking partner because of her inability to understand something he said. That conversation set the tone

for Maddie for the rest of the semester. She would be anxious and nervous leading up to each conversation, and often waited until the last day to complete each assignment. There was one week in which Maddie met a member of her own faith who was planning on visiting Utah. Maddie was able to connect with her speaking partner that week because of their similar beliefs and priorities. Unfortunately, she was not able to speak with the same speaking partner again. Despite having such low opinions of online exchanges, Maddie did mention the benefits of the process. She explains in her interview that she was able to learn a lot about culture from her conversations, but never had the time or opportunity to understand her speaking partners' culture in a deeper way.

The data do indicate that students generally believed the experience to be beneficial. As shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4, the majority of students indicated at least moderate perceived growth in speaking ability, listening ability, and in cultural understanding. Beyond that, most students mentioned learning new vocabulary words and improving their ability to use grammatical structures learning in class. Students also indicate feeling that the experience is authentic, showing them that they can use the target language and successfully communicate with native speakers. This, of course, is the goal of any language classroom.

The challenges students face in online exchanges can be substantial. Technological difficulties are often overcome by using other free online technologies or apps. Again, the findings of Beers Fägersten, Cunningham, and Holmsten (2010) seem relevant here:

> The problems experienced by learners … are both exacerbated and ameliorated by the computer-mediated channels open to learners and teachers. However, the multimodality offered by the software enables students and teachers to compensate for these problems in a way that more than makes up for the disadvantages. (p. 174)

Many female participants indicated the presence of "creepers" or men looking to find women on WeSpeke in order to establish romantic relationships. While unfortunate, these people can be blocked with the push of a button. A few students mentioned that it was hard to find things to talk about with their speaking partner. Students can solve this problem by planning ahead of time, or by better utilizing the prompts provided each week. Some difficulties are harder to overcome. Many students spoke with unkind speaking partners or were not able to find a speaking partner at all. Using a more organized tutoring service may help assuage these difficulties as they can match students with professional tutors who are held accountable for holding regular conversations.

Students' experiences communicating with native Spanish speakers online vary greatly. Each of them face difficulties that they need to overcome in order to enjoy the experience and feel any possible benefits from doing so. It is likely that students with different personality types will function distinctly from one another in online exchanges. Students who are outgoing will likely create relationships and enjoy the social aspect of online exchanges, likely leading to increased cultural understanding and linguistic benefit. Timid students tend to feel more anxiety, which is later compounded by technological problems and the difficulties of finding speaking partners. However, as many students' opinions of the online conversations improved overtime (according to the qualitative data), it is likely that most students will derive benefit from online exchanges if given the opportunity to participate in them regularly.

Pedagogical Implications in the Foreign Language Classroom

Visualizing online exchange success. Students had a variety of experiences during online exchanges with native speakers. It seems, however, that in order for students to be

successful in online exchanges, they must meet certain criteria along the way. Figure 6 is a visualization of students' success, enjoyment, and learning in online exchanges.
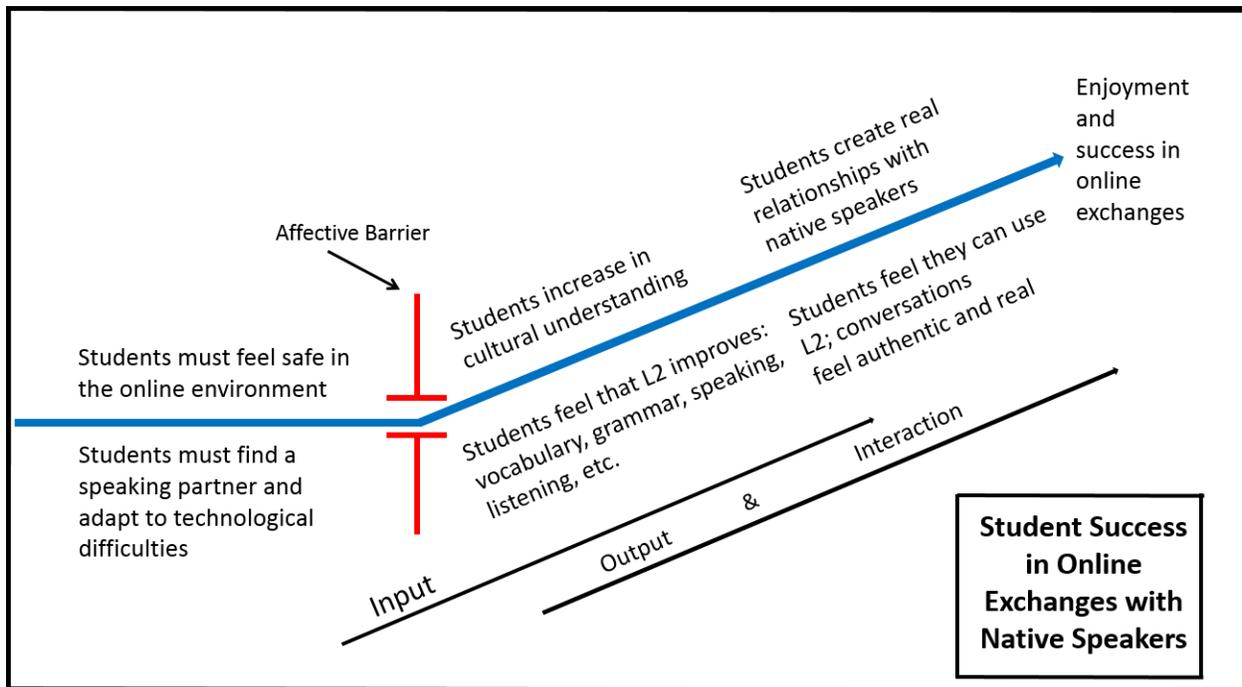
Figure 6. Student Success in Online Exchanges with Native Speakers.

In order for students to feel that online exchanges are beneficial, it is essential that they find a helpful speaking partner, have working technological resources, and feel safe. Once these needs have been met, students begin to feel that they are learning the target language. They also begin to comment on the cultural learning they are gaining and that their conversations feel authentic and realistic. Finally, the students who enjoyed the experience the most commented on making friends and establishing relationships and connections with their speaking partners. These processes can happen in any order once the initial needs have been met.

As stated previously, several students did not enjoy online exchanges. These students often mentioned feelings of anxiety, difficulties in finding speaking partners, or other struggles in their qualitative responses. These students struggled throughout the semester to reach a point in which they would feel comfortable in the online conversations. Students like Maddie, Isaiah,

and Rachel, were seldom able to feel comfortable or find good speaking partners throughout the semester. For that reason, they did not consider the weekly conversations to be very beneficial or enjoyable. During one of her conversations, Maddie was able to find a kind speaking partner with whom she had things in common. This allowed Maddie to feel that she was gaining cultural understanding and other benefits from the experience. If we refer to Figure 6, Maddie was able to cross the affective barrier after finding a good speaking partner and feeling safe in the exchange. Unfortunately, that did not happen for her in future conversations.

Isaiah reported feeling so anxious, that he was only able to complete the assignment one time. He never could feel safe in an online exchange environment. Skyler began the semester struggling to find speaking partners and deal with technological difficulties. In Week 5, however, he found a great speaking partner and was able to focus on the target language. At this point in the semester, Skyler was able to advance to higher levels of enjoyment and success. Ashlynn had initial feelings of nervousness, but was able to find a friendly speaking partner in Week 1. She would consistently comment on the friendship she had formed and the things she was learning.

The language educator's role. When implementing online exchanges in the foreign language classroom, educators must take on the responsibility for moving their students forward through the affective barrier. Educators should educate students on different technological tools, methods for finding quality speaking partners, and how to use useful communication strategies when using the target language. First, it is important to teach students how to use any online tools or software that could help them communicate successfully with native speakers. This may include audio and video communication, online dictionaries, social media platforms, or many others. Students should have a variety of tools to use and be given the freedom to find the ones

that work best for them. It would also be advisable for educators to use any online tools they recommend to their students in advance in order to provide helpful advice for using them.

Students should also be taught how to find quality speaking partners. If funding is available, educators can use paid services that provide online tutors for their students. These tutors are often trained and accustomed to speaking with foreigners learning to speak their language. When this is not possible, educators should teach students about online safety. WeSpeke, as a social media language learning platform, is available to all kinds of people. Educators should teach students how to avoid people who are not on the site to practice their language skills.

Based on data provided by the current study and by Dörnyei (1995), it is also advisable for educators to teach their students a variety of communication strategies. When teaching communication strategies, Dörnyei suggests raising learners' awareness about strategies, providing models, encouraging learners to take risks with communication strategies, and teaching strategies to students directly. Teachers may choose to use the list of communication strategies listed on Table 5, or consult the communication strategy inventories created by Dörnyei and Scott (1997) or Nakatani (2006). Teaching these strategies to students ahead of time, and practicing them in the classroom, may help lower students' anxiety and help them express themselves more effectively in the target language. Educators should also provide quality prompts and conversation topics. While students in this study were given prompts, it appears that several students did find the prompts useful. However, some did not see them as beneficial, perhaps indicating a need for revision.

Despite all of these suggestions, there are always students who have high levels of anxiety. Educators should be sensitive to these students and perhaps give them the opportunity to

conduct asynchronous, or text-based, online exchanges before requiring them to communicate synchronously.

Validity and Limitations of this study

Throughout this study, I have attempted to increase validity and reliability whenever possible. I have attempted to be very clear with all of my interpretations and to defend each claim with data received from students. Much of my conclusions are supported by other research which has been discussed in Chapter 2 and in this chapter. Despite my efforts, it is likely that there are several threats to validity present in my research.

One indication of the internal validity of this study is the list of communication strategies in Table 5. This list was generated based on students' responses when asked what they did when they had trouble communicating with their speaking partner. The list was not taken from other studies, although it does share similarities with some (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Natakani, 2006). The similarities between the studies suggest that this list does represent a valid list of useful communication strategies.

The sample selected was a convenience and purposive sample. I selected a Spanish 105 class in order to avoid any added stress that Spanish 101 or Spanish 102 students may have felt communicating with native speakers at relatively low proficiency levels. The sample was also quite small, consisting of only eighteen students. Although more could have been learned quantitatively from a larger sample, qualitative analysis often benefits from smaller sample sizes.

In the quantitative data analysis of this study, students' perceived growth in speaking, listening, and cultural understanding were shown. A major limitation of this study is that we cannot claim that this growth is real, but merely perceived by the student. Despite this limitation, it is likely that practicing in the target language repeatedly for extended periods did produce

actual growth for students during the course of the study. It would be difficult to attribute extra

gains in students' proficiency solely to online exchanges rather than to their class time,

homework, and class projects. Instrumentation could be another limitation of this study. Students

took the weekly survey eleven times over the course of the semester. Each week, this survey had

the same questions. Although only one student complained about this, many students' responses

did get shorter near the end of the semester, suggesting that they had already said what they

wanted to say in previous surveys. This fatigue likely had an effect on the data received.

A minor threat to validity concerns the communication strategies described in Chapter 4.

All Likert-type questions in the weekly and final surveys used a scale in which a 1 meant a low

score and a 7 meant a high score. Conversely, when ranking the usefulness of the communication

strategies in Table 5, a 1 meant most useful and a 10 meant least useful. While the instructions

for this question were very clear, it is possible that some students may have misinterpreted this

scale when completing the final survey.

Experimenter bias could also be a threat to validity here. I have attempted to outline my

biases in Chapter 3, although it seems appropriate to repeat them briefly here. My opinion is that

online conversations with native speakers are a valuable language learning experience for

students. It provides opportunities for students to interact and use the target language in

meaningful ways. Many students experience high levels of anxiety or nervousness during this

activity, but I believe that the potential benefits of this assignment far outweigh the difficulties.

Recommendations for Further Research

During this investigation, several themes have presented themselves that merit further

investigation in the future. One direction for further research would be the teaching of

communication strategies to students. Although Dörnyei (1995) began research on this topic, an

investigation using modern technological tools may be appropriate. This research could shed light on strategies that may be more useful for students than others, or it may simply support the conclusion made here, that students should learn and use a variety of strategies.

Another direction for research may investigate personality types and their respective success in online exchanges. Perhaps certain kinds of students thrive in online exchanges while others do not. My data certainly hint at this; some students loved the experience right away while others struggled constantly. It might be helpful to identify these students so that educators can better support their students in online exchanges.

Two students, Jessica and Ashlynn, seemed to increase in their cultural understanding throughout the semester. They began by mentioning superficial things such as food and holidays, but later discussed their speaking partner's perspectives and cultural identity. Perhaps longer exposure to online exchanges trains students to inquire about the target culture in ways that are progressively more thoughtful. Further research may help educators better prepare their classes to increase in cultural sensitivity and understanding when communicating with native speakers.

Finally, an obvious route for further research would be improving online exchange programs. These programs are not common outside of the university setting. Secondary education teachers worry, rightly so, about requiring their students to interact with people online. Further research into online connection tools may help provide opportunities for younger classes to participate in online exchanges and for all learning levels to reap greater benefits from the process.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have described the important implications of my quantitative and qualitative data, as well as their pedagogical applications and recommendations for further

investigation. Whereas a large portion of the sample group experienced negative feelings because of participating in online exchanges, it has been made clear that students stand to gain much from this experience. It is important for FL educators to plan carefully and prepare for the elements of online exchanges that cause stress, anxiety and frustration for students. If students' needs are met adequately, they can move past these emotions and enjoy the benefits of regular conversations with native speakers of the target language. These benefits can be increases in proficiency or in cultural understanding. With modern technology making it ever easier to connect with people all over the world, language teaching professionals should carefully consider their potential benefits in the FL classroom.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Script

This script was read by the primary researcher's supervisor, Dr. Greg Thompson, at the beginning of the semester to the potential participants of the study.

As part of this section of Spanish 105, you are being asked to be part of a research study being conducted in our department. As part of the regular requirements of this class, you will be asked to have a weekly conversation with a native Spanish speaker through a website called WeSpeke. You will also complete a survey each week reporting completion of the conversation. These are part of the requirements of class. If you choose to participate in the research project, you are simply giving permission for your survey answers to be used as data in the research project. Additionally, you may be selected for an additional interview with your instructor at the end of the semester to discuss your overall experience with WeSpeke. Your names and any identifying information will be kept confidential and password-protected at all times. In the final research report, your names will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your identity.

Appendix B – Consent Form

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Daniel Bates under the supervision of Rob Martinsen, PhD, at Brigham Young University to better understand students' experience speaking with native Spanish speakers online. You were invited to participate because of your enrollment in Spanish 105 this semester. By signing this form, you give permission to the researcher to use your data as part of the research being conducted.

Procedures
The following will occur as part of your class requirements this semester whether or not you choose to participate in the research study:
- You will communicate online with a native Spanish speaker each week for at least twenty (20) minutes.
- You will complete a weekly survey about your experience which will take approximately ten (10) minutes to complete.
- You will complete a survey at the end of the semester describing your experience communicating with native speakers online. This survey will take approximately twenty (20) minutes to complete.
- Total time commitment will be thirty (30) minutes per week; about seven (7) hours total for the semester.

If you choose to participate in the study, the following may occur:
- You may be selected to participate in a thirty (30) minute interview with the researcher about your overall experience speaking with native speakers online this semester. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements. The interview will take place in the researcher's office at a time convenient for you or it will take place at a time and location convenient for you.
- Your survey responses will be used in the final research report for this study.

Risks/Discomforts
Possible risks involved in this study include:
- Anxiety or nervousness while communicating with native speakers
- Normal risks involved with other social media platforms online

Benefits
There are no guaranteed benefits to participants, however it is hoped that communicating with native speakers online will improve your oral language proficiency and your cultural understanding. It is also hoped that the results of this study will be useful in improving the language education courses taught here at BYU in the future.

Confidentiality
The research data will be kept on a password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in the researcher's locked office. In the final research report,

your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect your identity. Any quotes or data used will be associated with this pseudonym.

Compensation
Participants will receive class credit for completing conversations and surveys as part of the homework assigned in this course. No extra credit will be awarded for participating in this study.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. With the exception of the final interview, you are already required to complete each task described previously as part of your normal curriculum for this course. If you choose not to participate in the research, you will still be required as part of class to complete all assignments given to you, but your information will not be included in the final research. Refusing to sign will not affect your grade in this class. Additionally, you may choose to withdraw at any time without effect on your grade or standing in the class.

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Daniel Bates or Dr. Martinsen for more information.

Daniel Bates   Rob Martinsen, PhD
batesd05@gmail.com   rob.martinsen@byu.edu
801-857-5102   801-422-8466

Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

Statement of Consent
I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed):   Signature: Date:

Appendix C – Weekly Survey

Q: How much did you enjoy your experience with WeSpeke this week?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I didn't enjoy it at all   I enjoyed it very much

    Please explain your answer:

Q: How much do you enjoy using WeSpeke overall?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I don't enjoy it at all   I enjoy it very much

Q: Did you find your task this week to be helpful practice for you? Why or why not?

Q: Tell me about your conversation on WeSpeke this week. (Tell me about your speaking partner, what you talked about, any positive or negative experiences, etc.)

Q: When you or your partner had trouble understanding each other, what did you do? What did your partner do? Be specific.

Q: Is there anything else (that you have not mentioned already) that helped you communicate better with each other?

Q: Is there anything else (that you have not mentioned already) that you want to say about your conversation this week?

Appendix D – Final Survey

Instructions

Please answer the questions in this survey honestly and thoughtfully. While completing the survey is required, your answers will have no effect on your grade or standing in the course. In any future publications regarding this research, your name will be changed in order to protect your identity.

This semester, you have spent lots of time communicating with native Spanish speakers online. This survey will investigate some of your perspectives on this experience as a student.

Q: What is your name?

Enjoyment

Q: How did you feel when you learned that you would be required to speak with native speakers online each week in this class?

Q: How do you feel about these online conversations NOW?

Q: Tell me about a positive/enjoyable experience you've had speaking with native speakers online. What made it positive?

Q: Tell me about a frustrating/difficult experience you've had speaking with native speakers online. What made it negative?

Q: How did you deal with these challenges/difficulties?

Tasks

Q: Each week you were provided with a list of guiding questions to use in your conversation. How helpful were these questions to you?

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Not helpful at all   Extremely helpful

</div>

Q: In what ways did the guiding questions help (or not help) you during your conversations?

Q: How could the guiding questions be more helpful?

Learning

Q: How much do you feel you improved in the following areas because of your experience speaking with native speakers online?

    Speaking

               1   2   3   4   5   6   7

          Not at all   Very much

    Listening

               1   2   3   4   5   6   7

          Not at all   Very much

Explain your answer to the previous two questions:

    Cultural Understanding

               1   2   3   4   5   6   7

          Not at all   Very much

Explain your answer to the previous question:

Speaking Partners

Q: Describe your experience finding speaking partners this semester. What challenges did you face?

Q: Did you speak with the same person more than once?

Q: How did that effect your experience?

Q: What attributes are helpful or not helpful in a speaking partner?

Communication Strategies

      Instructions. When a language barrier exists between two people they use communication strategies in order to understand each other. The weekly survey you have been taking this semester has asked you to describe the strategies you used while talking online with native speakers. The following list of communication strategies has been generated based on you and your classmates' answers.

      Q: Based on your own experience speaking with native Spanish speakers this semester, rank each strategy on the list on a scale of most useful to least useful. For example, you should give the strategy that seems the most useful a 1, and the strategy that seems the least useful should get a 10. You should use each number only ONCE.

Asking questions to clarify

          1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Slowing down, asking partner to slow down

          1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Typing out words or phrases

          1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Sending pictures or other media

          1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Switching languages temporarily

          1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Checking for understanding

          1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Rewording or simplifying sentences

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1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

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Repeating yourself or asking for repetition

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1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

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Correcting each other's mistakes

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1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

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Looking up words in a dictionary/Google

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1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

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Q: Which strategy did you assign a 1? Explain why you consider it to be the MOST useful strategy:

Q: Which strategy did you assign a 10? Explain why you consider it to be the LEAST useful strategy:

Other Questions

Q: What advice would you give me if I were starting the class and was about to do this assignment for the first time?

Q: If you could change something about the online conversation component of the course, what would it be and why?

Appendix E – Interview Protocol

These three interviews were semi-structured. These questions were asked to each interviewee

along with several others that emerged in order to probe interviewees' other responses.

Q: What is it like talking to native speakers online?

Q: What was your experience like with your speaking partners this semester?

Q: What challenges did you face in these conversations?

Q: How did you adapt to those challenges?

Q: What communication strategies did you use? Which ones did you find most useful?

Q: What was the best part of your experience doing this assignment? Why?

Q: Do you think you learned more Spanish from this experience? Why?

Q: Do you think you understand Hispanic culture more because of your experience? Why?

Q: How likely are you to have these conversations online in the future?