**Study Title**:

**The Effects of Project Based Learning in the Intermediate World Language Classroom**

**Principal Investigator Name: Steven Tanner Tucker**

**Faculty Mentor Name: Dr. Suha Tamim**

**SPECIFIC AIMS**

**The acquisition of world languages has proven itself as an essential component in educational curricula in the United States. With a curricular framework that requires competencies of 21st century learners, it is increasingly important to prepare students for a global workforce by understanding second or multiple languages, and to also foster the understanding of cultures and societies that may not share the same views. Despite its apparent need, the acquisition of world languages has not proven to be an easy task for secondary students. On essential problem that students face is the lack of ability to produce the spoken language, even after years of coursework and instruction. With a traditional emphasis on writing, vocabulary memorization, and grammar construction, the development of oral communication skills is often neglected. Certain social and constructivist techniques, however, have proven beneficial to the study and practice of the target language. The process behind which this takes place remains an acute area of study and, despite its challenges, it is arguable that, even with a limited amount of world language instruction, students can effectively maneuver through a target language in social situations.**

**The purpose of this action research study is to further examine the reluctance of intermediate language learners in speaking production in their second language. Additionally, with emerging strategies such as project based learning, the study will explore the efficacy of this strategy, specifically in terms of the students’ volition and motivation to produce the spoken language in class. The goal is to assist educators in discovering new social and constructivist techniques that could potentially foster student language acquisition, especially in regard to speaking competencies in the target language. Based on key findings, recommendations will be made to assist world language instructors in their attempts to further enhance the world language curriculum by implementing strategies that could potentially lead to further advancements in language acquisition.**

**SIGNIFICANCE**

**Project based learning and world language acquisition have assumed many roles in the production of 21st century learners. Project based learning has proven positive effects in terms of fostering skills associated with motivation, and has proven beneficial to students by affording them the opportunity of constructing their own understanding through a goal-directed process of inquiry, knowledge building, and problem resolution (Witte & Rogge, 2016; Thomas, 2000; Buck Institute (2013). As the evolution of constructivist strategies in the classroom had led to an active participation among learners, and has significantly shifted the teacher’s role, further suggesting that the students, through a variety of developed skills of inquiry, discovery, and reflection, construct individualized meaning and personalized understanding (Grant, 2011). In terms of language, despite an apparent gap in the research of acquisition and constructivist techniques, requires the elements instigated by the study of a culturally-infused curriculum that allows for self-discovery through cultural comparisons and the establishment of identity (McCay, 2003).**

**Despite numerous studies that portray the reluctance of teachers to implement PjBL in the classroom (Lui et al., 2012; MacMath, Sivia & Britton, 2017), the potential gains involved in the technique’s implementation undoubtedly merits further investigation. After years of change and adaptations within the world language curriculum, there continues to be a need for further research in the domain of language acquisition. Consequently, there is an apparent need to promote language learning, to discover and align techniques, and to provide students with the competencies necessary to be successful in a 21st century global workforce.**

**This action research study, therefore, is significant to language learning, as it will explore and analyze pedagogical methods that are somewhat neglected in the world language classroom. This work, therefore, could hold potential relevance to all language instructors who are interested in exploring and implementing alternative teaching models. The study will utilize, as a foundation, research behind project based learning, most notably social and cultural constructivist techniques involved in second language acquisition. The results of this action research study could have an impact on the overall curriculum of world language courses that constantly endure an evolving framework based on cultural and communicative competencies. Furthermore, this study could further disrupt some of the essentialist pedagogical methods that have been labeled as antiquated and minimally effective.**

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

**This study will take place at James Island Charter High School in Charleston, SC. The school is a public converted-charter high school. Although maintaining a charter board as its governing body, the school is a public school serving a designated constituent district. The school caters primarily to students in the geographic location, but is also comprised of students from various other areas in the district. A large component of the school is its International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, which serves over 200 students who are either seeking an IB course certificate or the full IB diploma.**

**With the goal of collecting rich, descriptive, and insightful data, I am choosing a variety of data collection tools that will reveal the students’ realities. The quantitative component will include post-implementation assessment scores based on an interactive speaking production rubric. Additionally, throughout the inquiry I will observe daily and note recordings in an educator’s journal with the goal of better understanding interaction and receptive skills throughout the course of the intervention. This will allow me to gain a more comprehensive view of the classroom during the implementation of the activities. Following the intervention, a focus group will take place using open-ended questioning, as the students will be invited to construct narratives and discuss motivational factors related to the study.**

**As performance-based assessments will be the primary data collection method for this inquiry, students will undergo a minimum of three formative evaluations in addition to a summative evaluation. The scores collected from the formative assessments as well as from the summative assessments will be analyzed, and will serve as data to determine the impact of project-based learning on interactive speaking skills. The scores from the formative speaking assignments and summative speaking assignment will be analyzed by mean and mode.**

**The research will take place in December of 2019 and will continue for 8-10 days, the general length of an instructional unit on a 4x4 block schedule with 90-minute courses.**

TARGET POPULATION:

**Participants in this student will include eight of the twelve students enrolled in the Honors French Culture and Civilization class at James Island Charter High School Participants will be deliberately chosen based their demonstration of a wide range of characteristics. Therefore, the eight participants were selected as participants based on their previous experience with the language as well as the students’ volition to electively continue language study, as they noted in a pre-course survey that they did not enroll to simply meet the language requirement to attend a four-year university.**

**The demographics of the participants are as follows:**

**Student Gender Race Free or Reduced Lunch**

**Student A Male White No**

**Student B Female Mixed-Race No**

**Student C Female White Yes**

**Student D Male African-American Yes**

**Student E Female White No**

**Student F Male White No**

**Student G Female White Yes**

**Student H Female White No**

CONSENT/ASSENT:

**The researcher will obtain consent forms from parents for the five participants who are between the ages of 15-17, as well as assent forms from each student. The remaining three students, being 18 years of age, will be given and will sign consent forms. The consent and assent forms explain the research process, its purpose, all procedures, and the goal of the study. Equally, the assent and consent forms highlight the voluntary nature** **of the study, emphasize the potential benefits, and note the very minimal risks involved. The parents and students are also aware that the researcher is available at any time to discuss any questions or concerns regarding participation in the research.**

POTENTIAL RISKS:

**This project is voluntary and is designed to collect data for better understanding teaching practice and language acquisition. As such, this project presents minimal risk to participants, however, consent forms will still be acquired from students and parents. No identifying information will be collected about the students. Confidentiality is protected. Participation is voluntary and students will be aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time during the process.**

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

**Students will benefit from participation in that they will be able to provide honest feedback about the series of learning activities facilitated in class. Such feedback will help to improve future instruction thus enhancing learning experiences for students.**

CONFIDENTIALITY

**All research subjects will be assured in the invitation e-mail and consent form prior to the research that their participation is strictly voluntary and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. They will also be assured that I will be the sole researcher, and that only I have access to their individual responses. The data will be protected by a password and all notes will be properly secured. The subjects will be aware that should questions arise, they may contact the researcher at any time. Additionally, all subjects will be assured that information that could potentially link them to their responses will be kept anonymous and pseudonyms will be used in all future publications.**

COMPENSATION:

**No compensation will be given to participants of the study.**

WITHDRAWAL:

**Participants may voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences.**

**F. REFERENCES/LITERATURE CITATIONS**

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MacMath, S., Sivia, A., & Britton, V. (2017). Teacher perceptions of project based learning in the

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Thomas, J. W. (2000). A review of research on project-based learning. San Rafael, CA: Autodesk

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APPENDIX A

**Criterion A: Interactive Speaking Skills**

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To what extent does the student understand and demonstrate an ability to interact during activities and in conversations?

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How well can the student express ideas and opinions?

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How well can the student maintain a conversation?

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**SCORE: 0**

The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors.

**SCORE: 1**

Simple ideas are understood with great difficulty and interaction is very limited.

Simple ideas and opinions are presented incoherently.

The conversation is disjointed.

**SCORE: 2**

Simple ideas are understood with difficulty and interaction is limited.

Simple ideas and opinions are presented with difficulty, sometimes incoherently.

The conversation does not flow coherently.

**SCORE: 3**

Simple ideas are understood fairly well and interaction is adequate.

Simple ideas and opinions are generally presented clearly.

The conversation flows coherently at times but with some lapses.

**SCORE: 4**

Simple ideas are understood well and interaction is good.

Simple ideas and opinions are presented clearly and coherently; there is some difficulty with complex ideas.

The conversation generally flows coherently.

**SCORE: 5**

Complex ideas are understood well and interaction is very good.

Both simple and complex ideas and opinions are generally presented clearly, coherently and effectively.

The conversation flows coherently.

APPENDIX B

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| Student Motivation Descriptors |

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| --- | --- |
| **Attitude towards PjBL activities** | Level of Agreement of the selection of topic |
| **Engagement** | Students’ perceptions of how often they participated in group discussions, interacted with their peers, helped a peer understand course material, and worked diligently throughout the project |
| **Feeling of success throughout the project** | Feelings of progressing and succeeding throughout the project.  |

APPENDIX C FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

1. You all have spent ten days navigating through a series of project-based learning activities. How did you feel as you maneuvered through the activities?
2. Can you describe the attitudes of your other classmates as you worked through the unit?
3. What do you think you learned through this experience that you may not have learned through other lessons?
4. In what ways did this experience have on your ability to speak the language?

5. What were the most comfortable components of these activities? Which components did you find the most challenging?

APPENDIX D FIELD NOTES/OBSERVATION FORM

Observation Number \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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PARTICPANTS’ TRAITS

RECONSTRUCTION OF INTERACTIONS / DIALOGUE

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NOTED BEHAVIORS/ATTITUDES

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RESEACHER’S REFLECTION

**Invitation Letter:**

Dear \_\_\_,

My name is Tanner Tucker and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying the effects on diverse teaching strategies and how they contribute to second language acquisition. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to continue the class in its normal routine and answer some questions about your experiences throughout the unit.

In particular, you will be asked questions about how the activity affected your motivation and interactive speaking abilities. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The research will take place during normal class hours. Following the study, you may be asked to participate in a small focus group that will be audio recorded and used for research purposes only. The recordings will only be reviewed by me and the members of the research team. No one else will have access to these files.

As this study is simply examining teaching techniques, there is no associated risk. Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the research site (James Island Charter High School. If asked to participate in the focus group*,* others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way. If you begin the study and later decide to withdraw, you will still receive classroom credit for all associated activities.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at school at any time, or reach me by e-mail. Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may also request more information at the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-6670.

If you are willing to participate, please sign the associated document and return it to me as soon as possible. Thank you again for your consideration.

With kind regards,

S. Tanner Tucker

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