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A First Look at Language Contributions: 20 Years of Study Abroad in Spain and France

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Abstract in English

In a unique learning context, language-positive environments outside the classroom, not enclosed instruction on U.S. campuses, education abroad foreign language instructors develop distinct teaching practices. Education abroad researchers have accounted for informal learning opportunities, yet few have attended to onsite language instruction. This article is a novel attempt to build understanding of transatlantic foreign language space with interviews (N = 14) of seasoned instructors (+20 years) of French and Spanish. Both are commonly taught foreign languages, with France and Spain being top education abroad destinations and offering a 'state of the art' view. Focusing on past training (U.S. or EU), innovations, intergenerational challenges, and complexities in assessment, we establish a basis for future research. We find that while U.S. degree-holders are more familiar with U.S. grading, it remains solely an institutional practice. Furthermore, enlisting foreign language instructor input, U.S. institutions may improve training, co-creating pedagogical guidelines with this qualified group.

Abstract in French

Dans un contexte d'apprentissage unique, un environnement d'apprentissages linguistiques propice en dehors les murs, et non un enseignement en salle de classe sur le campus américain, les professeurs de langues étrangères des

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étudiants américains mobiles développent des pratiques pédagogiques distinctes. Les chercheurs de la mobilité académique ont pris en compte les opportunités d'apprentissage informel, mais peu d'entre eux ont mis en lumière l'enseignement linguistique sur place. Cet article est une tentative inédite de développer la compréhension de l'espace transatlantique de l'apprentissage des langues étrangères à partir d'entretiens (N = 14) avec des professeurs chevronnés (+20 ans) de français et d'espagnol. Puisque ces deux langues étrangères sont les plus enseignées aux États-Unis et la France et l'Espagne restent les principales destinations d'enseignement à l'étranger, ceci offre une vision « de l'état de l'art ». En nous concentrant sur les formations antérieures (aux États-Unis ou dans l'Union européenne), les innovations, les défis intergénérationnels et les complexités de l'évaluation, nous établissons une base pour les recherches futures. Nous constatons que même si les diplômés américains sont plus familiers avec la notation américaine, celle-ci reste uniquement une pratique institutionnelle. En outre, en faisant appel à des formateurs de langues étrangères, les établissements américains pourraient améliorer l'offre du cours et collaborer davantage sur des directives pédagogiques avec ce groupe qualifié.

Abstract in Spanish

En un contexto de aprendizaje único, entornos lingüísticos positivos fuera del aula, y una instrucción no cerrada en los campus de EE.UU., los profesores de lenguas extranjeras en el extranjero desarrollan prácticas docentes distintas. Los investigadores de la educación en el extranjero han tenido en cuenta las oportunidades de aprendizaje informal, pero pocos se han ocupado de la enseñanza de idiomas in situ. Este artículo es un intento novedoso de comprender el espacio transatlántico de las lenguas extranjeras mediante entrevistas a 14 profesores de español y francés, con más de 20 años de experiencia. Ambas son lenguas extranjeras que se enseñan habitualmente, siendo Francia y España los principales destinos educativos en el extranjero y ofreciendo una visión de «vanguardia». Centrándonos en la formación anterior (EE.UU. o UE), las innovaciones, los retos intergeneracionales y las complejidades de la evaluación, establecemos una base para futuras investigaciones. Descubrimos que, aunque los licenciados estadounidenses están más familiarizados con la calificación estadounidense, ésta sigue siendo únicamente una práctica institucional. Además, al contar con la aportación de los profesores de lenguas extranjeras, las instituciones estadounidenses pueden mejorar la formación, co-creando directrices pedagógicas con este cualificado grupo de docentes.

Keywords

Assessment; education abroad; intercultural skills; L2 language and teaching; student identities

1. Introduction

U.S. higher education outcomes are more and more preoccupied with job-readiness and pragmatic career orientation. As English becomes an international professional lingua franca, rationalizing university-level study is yet again a pressing issue. Over the past century, key world events such as financial crises, geopolitical conflicts and shifting demographics have directly shaped its place in the curriculum. Language acquisition scholars decry that amidst the rampant globalization of the 21st century, the field is still obliged to justify the educational merit of its discipline, demonstrating why foreign language expertise matters and what are best practices in language learning (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001).

Education abroad (EA) is seen as a high-impact practice (HIP) (Kuh & Kinzie, 2018) where intellectual skills are enhanced by new cultural learning–and in decreasing numbers–language acquisition. Insofar as foreign language acquisition (L2) knowledge is concerned, there is a traditional expectation of higher gain during education abroad (EA). When abroad, L2 students are thought to gain greater proficiency via contextualized learning environments and access to native speech as well as authentic socio-cultural behaviors. This should lead to significant learning and identity-changing experiences. Nonetheless, absence of control group testing (in favor of less unwieldy pre- and post- sojourn testing), means there is insufficient data to wholly support such a claim (Kinginger, 2009). In fact, when controlling for study abroad as opposed to classroom L2 learning, some research controversially shows insignificant L2 gain in study abroad. When Magnan and Back (2007) examined students abroad in France, the common belief that students abroad improve their language skills due to living situations combined with contact to authentic media was not upheld. Cross checking against student backgrounds (age, gender, grade point average, etc.), it was revealed that only prior coursework in L2 correlated strongly with gains in proficiency while abroad. In a 2010 study in Spain, social behavior and language contact in Spanish and English were amassed in order to explain L2 acquisition outcomes. The findings suggested that no significant difference existed between language gains on a U.S. campus and those abroad; and even more striking, that social behavior and language contact abroad have minimal influence on acquisition rate (Isabelli-García, 2010). Nonetheless, we know that ample L2 learning is taking place internationally, yet more research on where, with whom, and how it takes shape will benefit the field. However, replicating studies solely focused on students as a unit of measure; their

motivations, output, socializing and etc., may miss other key variables (Kinginger, 2009; Mas-Alcolea & Llanes, 2022). It is understood that data gathered to depict multivariate impacts in the host learning context may more accurately contribute to our understanding of the EA L2 learning arena (Bacon, 2002; Perrefort, 2008). Indeed, despite our vibrant research environment, there is little discussion for the moment on how local language specialists/instructors and/or practitioners (here, L2 teachers are referred to as "lecturers" due to their unique status in each country and contract limitations) intervene and interact in L2 learning dynamics on site. Given the expectation, realistic or not, that EA experiences help students improve language skills, a gap exists in the literature about their lecturers, who they are and what their pedagogical role is. This article presents data from 14 extensive interviews with seasoned lecturers (+20 years) in Spain and France, investigating the following questions: What are their backgrounds? How do they perceive their students and the evolution of teaching L2? How do they articulate their difficulties? What gaps do they experience in their training? and how can their input help improve EA overall?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Language Learning During EA

Given the mosaic of academic backgrounds underscoring EA in U.S. higher education where Residential Directors may hold degrees in international education, literature, social studies, international relations, second language acquisition (SLA) training among others, it is not surprising that commonly shared theoretical frameworks in the 'EA field' are somewhat rare (Robinson et al., 2020). That said, trained linguists focused on language acquisition abroad have provided serious research contributions in the form of 'product-oriented' output as well as input and process research attempting to answer the question of what, if any, L2 gains are students making while learning abroad? With such provocative articles as "What makes us think that students who study abroad become fluent?" (Freed, 1995), a challenge was leveled to the existing bias regarding language acquisition in EA. Although they rarely attain fluency, it seems that students have been learning many things while abroad and the research about their distinct experience is expanding. In terms of research design, one benchmark publication called for, among others, more diverse study-sample populations, careful respect for measures such as elements of language, sojourn length, and methods ever watchful of the lack of control groups (Kinginger, 2009). Additionally, there is an appeal to shift perspective

away from student focused, result-based research design that tends to ignore student accountability and deeper socio-historical context locally. Further adding to the methodological discussion (Block, 2014; Isabelli-García et al., 2018), prominent EA L2 researchers clarified the challenges involved in documenting intricate layers involved in learning contexts onsite. They found high individual variability among students, with data being often elusive for quantitative approaches. More recently, EU-based colleagues with strong foundations in applied linguistics offered a thorough review of L2 research aimed at the savant world of grammaticians and pragmatics experts as well EA language practitioners (Pérez-Vidal & Sanz, 2023). This methodological manual (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method) presents innovative study design from multiple perspectives and populations. It is proof of how we are reframing the core L2 research from a 'before and after' student fluency measure to account for more complexity.

Wary of overstating the L2 gains propelled by a certain 'myth' of superior accessible language environment in the host country for all students, we will restate the relevant findings. Research dating back 25 years or more, before the widespread use of the Internet and social media, suggested that even at that time U.S. students were not systematically socially "immersed" in a welcoming native speech community (Coleman, 1997). Although they are intended to provide positive language environments, homestay experiences were not necessarily more favorable for local integration than other living arrangements (Wilkinson, 1995). Lastly, some students did not engage in the target language, nor did they participate in the local culture as we may have hoped based on lofty ideals of greater world peace and understanding (Pellegrino, 1998). It is now widely accepted that socio-cultural realities outside the classroom contribute to how we understand and measure student learning. Yet, further research shows that host cultures do not always present positive learning environments, nor are they readily accessible to all. Important studies have identified intervening variables that may impede students' experience such as a host culture's perceptions of a students' gender and racialized physical presentation practices (Anya, 2011; Bingham & Mitchell, 2023; Kinginger & Whitworth, 2005). Lastly, structural host country factors, be they historical, legal, or cultural, still may present insurmountable obstacles for otherwise well-prepared, motivated L2 learners (Carnine, 2014). Such local prejudices impacting learning potential underscore discrete or possibly discriminatory practices that may or may not be transmitted onto students, as well as from students towards their surroundings. Indeed, over more than two decades of EA research we must accept that

sojourns abroad do not uniformly increase L2 learning, and that there is merit in fully exploring more aspects involved such as particular relationships and spaces to explore new pedagogical strategies.

2.2. Social Networks focus on L2 Learning Abroad

Overwhelmingly, EA research agrees that both formal and informal relationships that students create abroad often serve as buffers and facilitators of socio-cultural and linguistic lessons. Yet, who are they and what exactly do they contribute to the EA experience? In which type of language do they speak and how often? Are these relationships socially codified (hosts) institutionalized (teachers, administrators), or casual (peers)? L2 acquisition research has more recently benefited from Social Network Analysis (SNA) mapping specific relationships of student involvement in host context with native speakers (Carnine, 2018; Dewey et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2023). As in any social situation, success in building such networks is not equal for all learners. Studying oral communication development during EA, one study listed the openness, ability, and persistence at making oneself socially salient and tolerance for unmodified input as determinant variables for increased proficiency (Isabelli-García, 2003). While truly valuable for setting learning goals for their sojourn abroad, it is self-evident that few students entering adulthood possess all of these characteristics upon departure. Moreover, these are developmental variables ever elusive to common measures and metrics. Indeed, most of this particular SNA research design focuses on types and frequencies of student reported relationships, omitting the mutually constituted nature of network relationships. Local perceptions, be they from hosts, teachers or friends of students are in fact essential analytical features that balance student self-report claims. Widely understood in SNA, the scope and depth each party contributes to such human connections are essential analytical features for increased understanding of two-way relational, not simply one-way dynamics (Grossetti et al., 2011). Only recently has L2 EA research begun to recognize this key oversight (Mas-Alcolea & Llanes, 2022).

Nevertheless, we cannot deny the importance of studies focused squarely on student attitude, agency and previous experience, and its overall influence on L2 increases and experience abroad. In their time sojourning in France, despite hardships some of which are mentioned above, successful L2 learners shared characteristics such as a multilingual sense of self, resilience, flexibility, and emotional engagement in relationships (Kinginger, 2004; Mitchell & Tracy-Ventura, 2021). Likewise, in another EU study, students possessing past

experiences of mobility or 'mobility capital' and relatively more diverse linguistic social environments also increase language proficiency (Murphy-Lejeune, 2000). Nonetheless, any of these factors plus strong motivation may not completely determine students' linguistic gains abroad. Research agrees that measuring the effects of co-curricular, non-classroom social contexts abroad all the while mitigated by individual student variation generate important research contributions. Yet, possibly due to its more traditional scholastic role, not the 'authentic' L2 'language positive' local context, classroom language learning remains overlooked in the EA literature. Certain scholars want us to be more inquisitive about the particulars of such teacher action and input, i.e., the educational circumstances contributing to L2 learning when reporting outcomes (Plews & Misfeldt, 2018). Whereas language teachers remain pivotal actors to the pedagogical foundation of most U.S. EA, we know little about their roles and pedagogical challenges when teaching U.S. students.

2.3. Language Specialists as Contributors to Shifts in L2 and EA Learning

There is a limited body of research on how studying abroad impacts instructors, much less how they themselves contribute to the L2 pedagogy while abroad. Studies focus largely on U.S. faculty-led short-term programs and their pre-sojourn intercultural training and mentoring (Anderson et al., 2016; Niehaus et al., 2018). Additionally, positive impacts of study abroad are demonstrated for experienced U.S. Spanish and French language teachers, mirroring the benefits students may gain from local context learning (Allen, 2010; Thompson, 2002; Wilbur, 2007). While teacher training is a key factor when discussing academic approaches of EA, the above research does not examine L2 instructors onsite, nor their roles as language trainers and facilitators of education abroad. In EA, L2 instructors are hired and work in settings abroad and their credit-bearing courses are built into undergraduate foreign language programs whose degrees are conferred on U.S. campuses. While bridging such high stakes institutional and transnational gaps, many such language professionals are confronted with new academic trends and practices; however, they, as actors in the field, are simply understudied.

Indeed, over the past 25 years, U.S. L2 language classrooms have undergone interdisciplinary shifts, not to mention those embattled institutions struggling to simply maintain language department programming and funding. Inspired by sociocultural theory and sociocultural linguistics, the interrelation between language and thought as well as between language, culture, and

society, there has been increased focus on the 'what' of the curriculum (Cammarata, 2010; Snow et al., 1989). Content Based Instruction (CBI) in curricula, balancing language and cultural content instruction, has fueled a movement in the Second Language Acquisition field, yet not without debate. A language course may account for greater cultural context, yet how are mastery of grammar tools, vocabulary and other basics attended to? How to emphasize content, while taking into account learner language level at each stage, avoiding potential "sudden jumps" in difficulty (Bragger & Rice, 1999). Concurrent developments in the L2 teaching field involve theoretical approaches further integrating aspects of social sciences. Scholars point to intellectual and pedagogical traditions that have shaped intercultural language education, citing ethnography, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies (Corbett, 2022; Phipps & Guilherme, 2004).

To further complexify their pedagogical role, we know teaching is informed by national definitions as well as historical struggles between dominant and resistant language practices. In France, the 'Académie française' has long served as the gatekeeping force approving legitimate French. Another, current example in multilingual Spain—where official Spanish coexists with Basque, Catalan, Galician, and other regional languages—language politics are entwined with historical tensions. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) comparable to CBI (Cenoz, 2015) has gained ground for L2 teaching in Spanish compulsory education. Spanish researchers reveal challenges and complications for achieving language proficiency (Lorenzo, 2007), and they note substantial implementational discrepancies emerging between content-oriented and language-oriented teachers (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). In a region with historical language inequality, how are language and content negotiated equitably with sound results? Where are Spanish teachers to situate their classroom objectives relative to these debates and trends? In the case of Spanish and French lecturers in EA they exist in a multi-faceted professional world where teaching methods are often 'imported' from the U.S. Nevertheless, these are multilingual teaching contexts imbued with complicated history where instructors adhere to U.S. defined methods while facing highly individuated students learning abroad. Here we ask: How such pedagogical orientation and assessment updates in the forms of teacher training may occur? How do they perceive themselves as contributors? In what ways do they engage their students?

3. Methods

The majority of U.S. EA scholarship has focused on student participants, excluding key roles of local persons and communities, their perceptions, and various influences. Such oversight puts us at risk of a mono-cultural perspective, whereas including them in future research can only further expand our understanding of complex EA learning environments (Haeger et al., 2024). It has been suggested that further research expands to consider all of the relational stakeholders in EA programs: teachers, administrators, host families, and others who also interact with learners (Trentman & Dao, 2015). Future directions include a call to diversify voices represented in research while placing greater emphasis on their reflexivity, including their own understanding of the learning process (Shively, 2023). Such inclusive holistic ethics are similarly laid out in current best practices as in the Forum on Education Abroad's (2023) *Standards of Good Practice*, "Our work with learners, host communities, and internal stakeholders at our institutions and external partners is grounded in reciprocity" (p .51).

A modest answer to this call, our paper attempts to shed light solely on L2 language lecturers as frequent actors in student worlds and active contributors to EA goals. This qualitative, interview-based study strives to increase understanding of their roles and relationships in a highly unique L2 acquisition context during sojourns abroad. Examining this understudied component of education abroad is key as English lingua franca continues to supplant local language in Western Europe, renewing the importance of the L2-only classroom as a sort of 'island' of learning (Trentman & Dao, 2015). As explained previously, we have chosen to refer to the study's language-teaching professional subjects as 'lecturers' as their status in each country and labor contracts for each institution defy both U.S. and EU restrictive labor categories; leaving them somewhere in between. The very fact of their professional limbo reinforces our central questions: How do these lecturers operate between different local and institutional pedagogical protocols? How can their views enhance our understanding of educational practices, goals, and assessment tools as they are dispensed abroad for U.S. Higher Education?

Time constraints and the authors' roles as scholar practitioners predicated our methodological scope. No additional funding was sought to complete this work, however each author had ample access to L2 language lecturers in the field and knowledge acquired from more than 50 years of combined teaching and directing for U.S. institutions abroad located in study

centers adjacent to host universities. In order to approximate a state of the art, longitudinal view, we opted for a modified selective biographical approach drawing from one-on-one interviews with seasoned L2 language lecturers (20 years or more of teaching) in either Spanish or French. Biographical approaches study a single individual and their experiences as told to the researcher or as found in the documents and archival materials (Denzin, 1989; Creswell, 1998) and informed by interactive ethnography inclusive of space and language (Blommaert, 2013), in this study we focus on self-narrated replies to semi-structured questions. Our queries derived from critical observations of L2 teaching trends and U.S. EA shifts over more than twenty years of teaching U.S. students abroad in Spain and France. In broader studies, biographical researchers investigate the life of one individual, often collecting data primarily through interviews and documents of many types (e.g., diaries, family histories) (McCaslin & Wilson Scott, 2003). In this exploratory contribution we explore a small sample of 14, in their own words, revealing and analyzing complexities, contradictions, and even epiphanies through five Zoom calls and nine face-to-face interviews. The respondents, nine female and five male, work for 12 very selective U.S. institutions of higher education in urban France and Spain (four in Paris, one in Aix-Marseille, and nine in Madrid). Our corpus of data contains over 18 hours of recorded interviews, email correspondence and when available, original course materials. We coded the data for common experience and international contrasts allowing for several themes to emerge as salient replies to our queries.

Despite our efforts and enthusiasm, there are many limits to our approach. Namely, as scholar practitioners ourselves we are involved in ‘participant observation’ in our own classrooms and programs, creating a greater risk of bias. As is the case for many directors and lecturers in U.S. EA, our job descriptions rarely indicate time allotted for research, and resources are scarce, further reducing its scope (Robinson, Doughty, et al., 2025). Although the population sample is composed of senior lecturers offering deep insights from years of formative experience, the finite sample size (n = 14) is in no way representative of all lecturers in Spain and France today, rather an exploration to aid in establishing an agenda for further research. Moreover, our respondents were self-appointed; already willing to share extra time to discuss their work thus, their professional zeal may not speak for other colleagues.

4. Findings

4.1. Background and Training

Consistent with higher educational hiring practice, all of the respondents held advanced degrees, such as master's and/or doctoral degrees, with five or more years of advanced study. Nonetheless, there were country-based differences (Table 1).

TABLE (1)

INTERVIEWEES' ADVANCED DEGREES BY COUNTRY AND ADVANCED DEGREE

	SPAIN	FRANCE
ADVANCED DEGREE EARNED IN THE U.S.	7	0
ADVANCED DEGREE EARNED IN THE EU	2	5
TOTAL	9	5

In the Spain sample, seven out of nine attained higher degrees in U.S. institutions, and of those who did not hold advanced degrees from the U.S., they held at least a Master of teaching Spanish as a L2 in addition to a bachelor's degree. Those trained in the U.S. completed coursework on comparative methodologies where techniques for approaching certain linguistic, grammatical, or lexical issues were discussed and critiqued. Notwithstanding, in the French sample, all respondents completed their advanced degrees in France. This difference is likely due to the U.S. student demand for Spanish, thus creating greater job prospects for Spanish language instruction in U.S. campuses. Among the French interviewees, like their Spanish neighbors, they held master's degrees in teaching L2 French, some with minors in methodology and, in one case, a doctorate in linguistics. The longer length of time spent on U.S. campuses for Spanish respondents remains an important aspect of the study, it is reasonable to assume that for those instructors with deeper familiarity in U.S. cultural practices and assessment types, they share a more nuanced understanding of academic activities and expectations than their colleagues who did not experience U.S. campus life immersion as graduate students and/or instructors in a first-hand, high stakes manner.

Given the nature of employment for U.S. institutions located abroad, a complex reality discussed more at length in accompanying articles (Ficarra, 2025; Robinson, Doughty, et al., 2025), lecturers in this study often occupy adjunct teaching positions and thus have multiple U.S. employers located in

either Madrid, Paris, or Aix-Marseille. Their roles are therefore stretched beyond simply transatlantic labor discrepancies; they include differences between language departments in distinct institutions and the approach of teaching culture. This variability plays out professionally and begs the question: What gaps do they experience in their training?

Currently employed by U.S. institutions, all 14 lecturers received some type of specialized training in dealing specifically with the U.S. student population, specifically around socio-cultural issues. Such additional instruction was more or less formal depending on the employer and has slightly increased over two decades. In one case, a U.S. institution included in our sample conducts summer programs where their French and Spanish lecturers may be invited to teach. During their campus workshops, ample advising in regard to their student population, as well as ongoing dialogue around content and cultural misunderstandings were offered.

Starting in 2019, three of the 12 institutions represented here established an active training approach for their lecturers. Spanish online institutional workshops focused on topics closer to the traditionally understood EA teaching duties yet only partially touching on language training per se. Sample titles include Heritage Language Teaching to Intercultural Learning and Global Citizenship, and Reevaluating what we do in class: Teaching Spanish Culture. This ongoing professional guidance, albeit rare in Spain, was virtually absent among the French respondents.

Shortly after in 2020-21, COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns and the subsequent Black Lives Matter inspired reckonings also provided for major shifts in training. With student travel shut down, several U.S. programs laid off lecturers for financial reasons. However, even in this difficult climate, one Spanish institution, an employer of lecturers in the study, moved their ongoing EU contractual obligation to lecturers into an online seminar course for curriculum development. Another U.S. institution in Spain invited lecturers to participate in online trainings about diversity with topics on dealing with problems in the classroom, e.g., Stop Bias and Hate (DEI) and Anti-Racist Pedagogies. The choice of topics for these rare moments of guidance is notable, not only was this U.S. institution positioning themselves politically, reacting to domestic injustice, they were centering their pedagogical coaching around crucial U.S. socio-cultural unrest. At this unprecedented juncture, when international travel was halted, a unique window was created for HR creativity, and greater connection and community reflection in the EA field. While proof

that creative training is possible with institutional will, nevertheless, such opportunities remain scarce, unrepresentative of the past 20 years of employment in our respondent pool.

In all 14 cases, Resident Directors (RD) were almost entirely responsible for onsite academic guidance. A pre-session planning meeting is an established norm, during which the RD introduces and discusses learning goals, classroom logistics as well as academic accommodation and specific professor´s rules. Some institutions have also introduced in their pre-session planning student identity issues such as gender, D.E.I. (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) approaches and academic accommodations. Yet the scope of the multi-purpose RD role is distinct from that of the language specialists, as discussed in depth in a paper in this special issue (Robinson, Doughty, et al., 2025). More than 50% of RD's in Europe supervise local faculty (regardless of discipline) and 25% report spending a major part of their time doing so. That said, RD's overwhelmingly reported this under the category of tasks reported "not well prepared for"' where RD's admit to lacking expertise (Robinson et al., 2020). In contrast, several lecturers discussed fruitful, collaborative meetings with RD's developing and adapting curriculum to contemporary issues, increasing diversity of themes, and using more audio-visual content. In one French case, the lecturer described frequent curriculum adaptation in consultation with the RD, directly responding to student course evaluations. "I was told students were reluctant to enroll in a course entitled 'Grammar'". Similarly, in Spanish cases, RD's transmit institutions' emphasis on active language learning through conversation as well as increasing student-centered interactive methods.

The size of programs can also determine training capacity. With higher enrollments in Spain than in France, in the early 2000's two separate institutions in Madrid created an academic and/or a specific language coordinator position working onsite with lecturers in a role more specialized than that of RD, and a third is following suit. This added leadership was appreciated by the concerned interviewees, not only for its ease in scheduling and providing materials, but also as an advocate vis-à-vis the U.S. language department, discussing key pragmatic issues of curriculum and contentious practices such as grading. Very possibly due to lower student numbers, language coordinators were not ever mentioned in the French group, and their ongoing guidance remained solely from their RD.

It is essential to mention here that independent of U.S. institutions, a majority of interviewees mentioned their active national professional

membership funded associations such as Association de Programmes Universitaires Américaines (APUAF) in France and Asociación de Programas Universitarios Norteamericanos en España (APUNE) in Spain, along with European Association of Study Abroad (EUASA) have fulfilled some, but not all, ongoing training needs.

4.2. Academic Accommodations

Caught between cultures and institutions at times lacking specific guidance, lecturers must navigate situations fraught with high stakes issues such as students' personal medical conditions–at times used by students to dispute their grades. What are lecturers to do with this additional student-provided data? Such individualized, personal information is rarely shared by a student to their instructor in the French and Spanish university context. It begs the question of overall equity for students and when to make exceptions in the multicultural classroom, a subject increasingly visited in research (Aguado et al., 2003). Given that we are discussing U.S. study-center courses, when and to what degree are lecturer's adapting to their U.S. student expectations for accommodations and when are they resisting, maintaining practices closer to their local context, especially when it comes to high stakes practices like grading (Ficarra, 2025).

In France and Spain, all lecturers remarked on the increase in the number of students arriving with certified medical documentation for academic accommodations that may justify absences for required quizzes or exams and create differential treatment for students who do attend class and those absent. According to all 14 reports, the biggest change in their over 20 years careers is that students are increasingly forthcoming about medical diagnoses revealing their conditions via self-initiated conversations with lecturers early in the term. Oftentimes students provide lecturers copies of, or refer directly to, their English language documentation at their U.S. campus student services or learning center. On many occasions, students further explained to lecturers the exact academic accommodations afforded to them in their U.S. classrooms. Despite this open and explicit mode of presentation on the part of students, more often than not, lecturers were unclear and/or uneasy about the exact application of the accommodations. Further complicating matters, religious accommodations granting justified absences on holy days for observation are quite common on a U.S. campus, and less frequent in civil society Spain and France, much less at their universities. One Spanish lecturer shared how a student who was granted both medical accommodations and religious exemption from class early in the

term justified their absence from one class as follows: "Well, if we can't say it's a medical excuse, we can say it's for religious reasons." Such ambiguous behavior leads to confusion and potential misuse. Higher education in Spain and France is a publicly funded enterprise, and as such, is preoccupied with the ethics of any marked differential treatment for students' participation and evaluation. Although lectures mentioned how allocating extra testing time has become a common practice and is currently gaining credence in Spanish and French universities, lecturers shared many adjacent concerns and gray areas. How are they to fairly implement individual accommodations when there are common learning goals? What is the equitable practice relative to other students without any accommodations?

4.3. Grading

One key finding is that all lecturers reported their discomfort for graded assessment of their students with accommodations. Like her colleagues, one French lecturer observed that more of her students begin the term by openly sharing their diagnosis and subsequent academic accommodations afforded in the U.S. Yet, she went on to say that not all students used them during testing and seemed to apply their accommodations based on personal choice. She wondered out loud, "maybe with guaranteed extra-time, students are trying to reduce their own stress about possible bad grades?" With guaranteed extra testing-time, students begin the term with an explicit framework for accommodations thus allowing them to pursue L2 coursework with more reassurance.

Based on this sample, institutional guidance for accommodations may vary. However, all lecturers are ultimately obliged to submit grades for courses taught in the study-center. However, grading systems are quite different in appearance and practice; U.S. higher education most often uses letters, while the EU employs numbered systems; the scale in Spain is 1-10 and in France 1-20. International discrepancies in assessment are widely understood and governmental agencies explicitly name their differences. Fulbright España and Education USA point out that Spanish/U.S., "… differ significantly from each other… It is important to be aware that in general, very high grades are given less frequently in Spain than in the U.S, especially at the university level" (Fulbright Espagña, 2024). Likewise, in France "French students are rarely awarded grades higher than 16. The French educational system prizes strictness in grading. The passing grade for students is generally 10, though a grade of 8 or 9 is also considered satisfactory" (France Education, 2024). Moreover, grades

represent high stakes outcomes directly impacting students' academic standing and at times their capacity to finance their studies. Many lecturers agreed that grading is possibly their most important practice, yet few are satisfied due to the opacity of their task and their practices vary greatly.

In this sample, grading systems are split by country lines. All Spanish lecturers use U.S. letter grades while their French counterparts use a combination of traditional French grades on a 0-20 scale first, then provide a final grade using the U.S. letter grade equivalency. Given that seven of the Spanish interviewees received U.S. advanced degrees, does their assessment practice stem from their U.S. background training? Although it could seem that the Spanish U.S. might be inclined to do so, the 14 interviews reveal that grade type is solely a matter of U.S. institutional conformity. Indeed, it is logical that courses taught in their study-center use some form of U.S. or equivalency table provided by their institution given they are the school of record and provide transcripts. Then why do these nine Spanish lecturers U.S. letter grades while their five French counterpoints combine the two? What is the deeper context displayed in these contrasting culturally based practices?

Two Parisian lecturers shared how they specifically provided lessons on the culture of grading in France, explicitly teaching the French cultural foundations of this ritual. In fact, they began class by presenting the U.S. and French grade equivalency tables to elicit their differences. By confronting the French system of grading 0-20 points (not 100) with the letter grades in the U.S., one lecturer attempted using humor and intercultural analysis during class time, repeating the age-old French saying: “20 is for God, 19 for the teacher”. She was demonstrating how in the French system, the highest grade possible was generally an 18, meaning that 20/20 (A+ equivalent) is quite rare. Furthermore, she initiated a discussion about cultural values and beliefs of perfection and performance, as well as adversity and challenge in the classroom; the emphasis was on cultural learning regarding different approaches to assessment. Building such student awareness was especially important to those lectures whose program models included direct enrollment in local universities. In fact, all lecturers described how they were involved in some form of overt intercultural adaptability in their classrooms. Lastly, there was individual variability amongst lecturers with no consistent country specific grading practices between Spanish and French lecturers. Some found themselves adapting to a more ‘personal development’ oriented U.S. overall evaluation style. Lecturers from both countries used many variables and rubrics, measuring student’s individual

progress over the course of the term, as well as make-up tests for absences. Yet still, others who attempted, when possible, to privilege local systems of grading based on class averages, and one-time evaluations often seen as "strict and severe" in the EU model. Overall, the final grades contributing to students' GPA conformed to U.S. standards.

4.4. Course Innovations

Beyond contentious assessment questions, we found enthusiastic innovations and adaptations to U.S. practices figuring prominently in L2 course content. This was unexpected given the lack of specific training for these lecturers in CBI/CLIL inspired pedagogies. Understood as influential "High Impact Practice" and touted as enriching learning abroad, L2 language courses for U.S. institutions are expected to be dynamic, using unique local and cultural context as course content. Lecturers interviewed here eagerly explained how they created original lessons, combining language acquisition with locally sourced materials and intentionally featuring learning opportunities non-replicable on their U.S. campus. Whenever possible, lecturers constructed language-positive classroom environments, encouraging students to stretch themselves and their comfort zones. They also acted as active facilitators out of the classroom, engaging in local encounters for the students to try out their language skills and experiment with grammar and lexical forms. One Madrid-based lecturer regularly took her students out of class "interviewing locals about their concerns raised by rampant tourism and gentrification in a downtown neighborhood of Madrid, understanding Madrid's history of the city by visiting Prado Museum or the Banco de España." Further, this lecturer did not shy away from contemporary debates and traveled on "... a one-day trip to the Valley of the Fallen, a very controversial Franquist monument that still divides Spanish society politically." For such class visits, student feedback is often glowing, citing active learning about the place while employing new language. Likewise, in one French example, a difficult text by Nobel laureate Annie Erneaux was assigned to an advanced intermediate class. Although it was challenging for students, the lecturer planned an evening class to hear Mme. Erneaux speak at a Parisian university. The lecturer recounted how, "Students were quite doubtful…it was a dark and rainy trip to that suburban campus … and yet it turned into a magical experience." Focusing on resources available in their city, these instructors attempt to energize students by putting content forward and facilitating local L2 learning potential.

4.5. Adapting to New Generations and Student Identities Over Time

When adjusting to U.S. institutional needs beyond accommodations, grading and content-based cultural learning, lectures pointed to another trend emerging over the past 20 years: The central importance of student social identities in their classes. As discussed above, students tend to share their sexual orientations, desired use of pronouns, concerns about diet relative to religious/moral beliefs and ethnic heritage much more frequently in class. Conversely cultural norms in a Spanish or French classroom one would not automatically discuss such seemingly 'private' questions and concerns, much less reveal their own. Nevertheless, based on our interviews, it has become a default practice in their U.S. classroom style in study-centers abroad to do so. Again, this begs the question as to which set of institutional, and/or cultural beliefs should prevail in these distinct teaching spaces, or which compromises are made to set precedent for sound teaching practice.

Moreover, some shared that in past experiences colleagues had been targeted by angry U.S. students due to perceived misuse of 'appropriate' terminology describing identities. Although understandable given increased polarization and complicated debates on U.S. campuses today, misinterpretations on the part of students have at times created hostile climates for those lecturers not versed in current U.S. parlance. Further complicating L2 acquisition courses, actual terms used to describe certain identity differences may not sound correct to U.S. anglophone student ears. Referring to dark skinned people using 'black' (pronounced in French) not 'noir' is widely understood in France as a contemporary slang, not at all a racial slur (Warner & Mputubwele, 2020). Similarly, 'negro' in Spanish refers to a color, as well as potentially referring to a dark skinned male or masculine noun. Such qualifiers were referred to as hot topics by this sample of lecturers in their L2 classrooms abroad. Indeed, a classroom environment abroad devoid of prejudice is a delicate creation and requires expertise in the matter.

Lastly, it was apparent to some lecturers that students who maintain a strong link through social media to their home campus socio-political issues while abroad experience evermore heightened sensitivities as they may continue to view local realities through their U.S. lens (Bohan et al., 2025). In one case, a lecturer reported that a particular university had suffered a rash of racist acts on the home campus, increasing student sensitivity about xenophobia and

skin-color discrimination. Social media portrayals of campus reactions impacted students abroad and thus their L2 classroom environments in Spain. However, being unaware of the facts, the lecturers unintentionally appeared ignorant or and seemingly indifferent to the students' struggles.

In these examples, beyond attending to L2 language acquisition, lecturers sought out intercultural skills–ones that seem necessary in their sometimes volatile content-based classrooms in which misunderstandings occur. As complex differences exist between European and U.S. views of heritage and diversity, they also inform distinct socio-political realities onsite. One Spanish interviewee shared how student expectations of automatically belonging to 'their' group in Madrid produced frustration and revealed student bias: "As 'Latinos' or 'Veganos'…they (students) may perceive their way of doing things is always better than the host culture. Part of our work as cultural instructors is to make them understand that it is not better or worse; it's different." To counter such intolerance, and drawing from her U.S. institutional training, she developed more content-driven coursework in Spain to include a unit on racism in local football (U.S. soccer) as well as an historical comparison of colonization of Spain and the U.S. In so doing she gained in self-reflexivity, stating that "my country is simply not approaching facts regarding their historical links to African slave trade." This was new awareness that she had not previously held. This lecturer spoke highly of the institutional support provided and the success of these new course themes. Nonetheless, she had a unique experience, conferring intercultural expertise and new curriculum design are only rarely available to this sample of lecturers.

Given the long careers over two decades of our interviewees, the question of student changes over time was quite revealing. A majority remarked that students were less ashamed and more open about seemingly 'personal issues' as discussed above, and also in terms of identity (sexual orientation, racial or ethnic background and even medical diagnosis linked to accommodations), but also about their psychological states and even medications. When attempting to explain this gradual change, answers varied, pointing to greater diversity of the U.S. student body traveling abroad (first generation, racial, and non-binary gender), generational differences, as well as more empathetic teacher/student relationship models. One lecturer expressed her pleasure in this more inclusive U.S. model as it affords her personal growth in her teaching. She happily admitted, "I frankly prefer it to rigid roles traditional to the French classroom." Such a turn to empathy and human

outreach was widely reported as lecturers discussed the COVID-19 impact on students' mental health. Half the lecturers found that post 2021, their students were showing more gratitude and resilience than ever with no specific correlation to their country France or Spain. In their view these students understand the great fortune they have to travel and share experiences with new people. By contrast, half the lecturers reported students using undefined 'mental health issues' as an "excuse to justify the unjustifiable" i.e. as a response to late work and unexplained absences. Such an opaque yet highly charged excuse for lack of student accountability is occurring more frequently and mirrors concerns concurrent on U.S. campuses today, as is discussed in depth in another article in this special issue (Barneche et al., 2025).

5. Discussion

Not surprisingly, our self-selected sample is composed of passionate professionals, struggling with issues of ongoing professional training, academic integrity and positioning in their social role across countries and institutions–all the while willing to engage in a community of practice. It is worth noting that our respondents frequently remarked on how novel it was to contribute to a body of research. Many remarked that "it was the first time someone asked me about my role." Like other constituencies in this special issue, these lecturers operate under high expectations in terms of student satisfaction and favorable grades, yet lacking additional professional training for themselves and support services found on a U.S. campus for students in need. L2 lecturers' teaching instructions come from various sources such as the local RD or the rare Language Coordinator, directly from institutions, or at times from student evaluations. Their hiring and teaching happen locally, yet the frameworks for learning are imported. It is at this crossroads where several crucial issues of jurisdiction emerged. They point to a need for reciprocal dialogue and increased understanding between lecturers and their U.S. institutions, notably for concerns of ongoing training, academic accommodations, grading, and accountability regarding student social identities.

With relatively few opportunities for specialized ongoing training, our seasoned group of respondents were all favorable for its increase. Notable requests were for better pre-departure coordination for appropriate student placement in their language level, coherent learning goals including technology, and common rubrics for grading and assessment also emerged as points of contention. Explicitly learning more about intercultural methods to better

understand students is also an issue. Further, ongoing problems with U.S. grade-inflation, artificial intelligence or language translation software used for plagiarism, have grown in number and complexity, but lack a forum for discussion. Some of this guidance could be the responsibility of an academic or language coordinator, yet a rare minority of programs employ such a role. Last but not least, strong concern regarding the growing trend of academic accommodations from U.S. students emerged in our interviews; all fourteen lecturers are unanimous in their request for increased guidance and regulation in this matter.

In efforts to make higher education more inclusive academic accommodations are necessary, however we have seen they are very challenging to replicate overseas. Whereas allocating additional test-time may resolve some cases, it is clear that a much greater knowledge gap exists between these lecturers and current higher educational practices in both U.S. and EU contexts. Bridging this gap could attenuate lecturers' concerns about equitable testing and overall assessment as is echoed in the literature (Dunn-Jensen et al., 2021). L2 lecturers in this sample find themselves in a rare authoritative position, while operating in a combined academic space under the influence of several distinct cultures, teaching approaches and specific university protocols. Evaluating students puts them in an incredibly high stakes situation as any low grades may result in students losing financial aid and/or scholarships. Education Abroad research points to how assessment systems can reproduce cultural values about learning and grading can be understood as a culturally based practice. In their study on Arabic language (Kuntz & Belnap, 2001) found that students and teachers of Arabic do hold differing cultural and linguistic beliefs concerning language learning. As two nations with strong social notions of hierarchy, grading in Spain and France is known to be strict and has often reflected instructor/student antagonism and at times even punishment and humiliation. L2 lecturers must navigate professionally in a context where historically defined social roles of rigid teacher and passive student may intervene. Moreover the U.S. requests are generally to enliven their methods, develop language content-based courses that focus on activities and interactivity. These new methods may stray from traditional memorization and repetition; the very ways they were taught and trained. In the words of one French lecturer, “We did not learn ourselves at a time when it was considered to be fun to be in school.” Pedagogically, they struggle with similar debates seen with Content Based Instruction/Content Language Integrated Learning in Spain, these lecturers are more than simply L2 teachers of applied linguistics; given

their foreign student body, and U.S. employer, they are interculturalists by default. As such, they need to attend to classroom language gains while conferring the complicated nuances and inequalities acquired through language socialization.

Of all the many possible changes over 20 years, lecturers were unanimous that one major, critical change observed in students was the discourse and practice around their social identities. In fact, global English prominence means that anglophone students are more than ever prone to continue their English use while abroad, despite all pedagogical efforts otherwise. Thereby L2 classrooms abroad may be, along with homestay shared meals, one of the few remaining “island” spaces for explicit language acquisition, and also for language socialization (as well as increased cultural learning) or providing knowledge about culturally appropriate language use and social implication (Kinginger & Carnine, 2019). Inasmuch as the lecturer's role is one of a pivotal cultural interpreter, conferring value to language practice and sharing appropriate vocabulary, U.S. institutions would do well to better recognize and continue to train for maximum potential for intercultural understanding between lecturer and their students. The antiquated expectation that L2 language gains generally increase when studying abroad has again been reviewed in the literature. High quality relationships built on intentional social interaction in the L2, emerges as the key determinant variable for overall L2 gains, more so than frequency of time spent together or type of relation. It would follow that a lecturer/student in the classroom abroad emerges as a key mediating relationship where high quality L2 contact enhances linguistic gain. (Baffoe-Djan & Zhou, 2020).

6. Implications

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the omnipresence of English as *lingua franca* in these two Western European locations has reorganized the previously perceived monolingual host context. For anglophone American students in Spain and France, national language is necessarily entwined in global, local, and historical contexts inevitably requiring students to negotiate local and global varieties of English alongside and within it (Masgoret et al., 2000). In light of these translanguaging shifts, it behooves EA L2 research to be mindful of its history of monolingual bias (Dao & Trentman, 2021). Anglophone students are evolving in distinctly multilingual environments, where they, themselves, are added value components. Local interlocutors are avidly seeking

ways to improve their English, rendering anglophone students' quest for L2 practice even more challenging (Mitchell & Tracy-Ventura, 2023). Research dating back 20 years shows how a study abroad group reported using English more than French as well as using significantly more English during out-of-class activities (Freed et al., 2004). Therefore, idealized "language immersion" experiences, if we can call it that, are ever much constructed via classroom and potentially host co-living, co-working arrangements. In this way classroom L2 environments, constrained as they may be, continue to carry essential instructional import as the rare place where focused L2 instruction remains. Meanwhile, language learning and socialization has widespread virtual as well as real time modalities. Successful students are forced to maintain specific strategies to initiate their own local L2 gains in a complex arena where the role of mobile communications technology disrupts previous forms and modes of language use during EA. Durbidge (2024) suggests that EA be considered as emergent of, and negotiated through, tensions between localized and globalized imaginaries of language, identity and place. Intervening factors around language learning onsite also intersect with global flows of people and information, further upsetting lecturers' roles in the process.

We have seen that lecturers interviewed play key adaptive roles in and offer constructive input to the EA enterprise. They attempt empathetic approaches with their American students, explicitly positioning local cultural practices alongside pragmatic language learning goals while remaining sensitive to and at times adapting, even praising personal development focus and overall empathy used U.S. methods and assessment. Emphasizing the value of learning through doing onsite, they attempt to use compelling content to create meaningful L2 encounters, enhancing student-centered approaches caring –to the best of their abilities–for social identities. Such practices dispensed abroad, replicate many, but not all higher educational best practices in the U.S. As such, their roles and responsibilities in EA should not be overlooked. Nonetheless the complexity of EA complicates pragmatic academics such as attending to accommodations and grading; here they are asking for more attention and support. Further contributions to the research could look more closely into methods and assessment practices, innovating collaborative, adaptive pedagogical models between the U.S. and EU. In terms of L2 research, lecturers could contribute to more robust studies of L2 gains and strategies in classroom comparisons from campus to abroad.

While respondents here remain dedicated to their task of L2 instruction, significant differences may be found in the amount of institutional support they receive in terms of training and guidance. The EU Council of Europe's (n.d.) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages revealed its 2023 program (the previous update was 2001). Their revised pledge is to reinforce the right to intercultural education as well as take bold steps toward inclusivity, online interaction, plurilingual/pluricultural competence, sign language competences as well as formulations that are gender-neutral. U.S. higher education could be inspired by this ambitious program centered on L2; a gateway to inclusivity, instead of passively deferring to an Anglo-centric curriculum. Such a shift would require decisive institutional support for language learning, a trend that seems to be decreasing in the mainstream, although it is not yet obsolete. In a few examples provided here U.S. institutional support for training proved to be highly beneficial, creating inclusive curriculum and intercultural awareness training. Notwithstanding, it was generated during a global health emergency and has not been replicated since then. Commenting on the top Modern Language Association awarded U.S. domestic language programs, its director pointed to the profound impact of intentional institutional support. "These strong programs offer valuable strategies for institutions with struggling programs, and they speak to how transformative full-throated institutional support can be for language learning." (Chang, 2023).

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