

Original Research

Mixed method in language teaching: Concepts and model's evaluation

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In the present research, the authors have studied direct and indirect cross-cultural contact as well as motivated behaviour and language attitude in a study-abroad context in Russia. For research purposes, the mixed method combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies was applied in order to demonstrate contact, behavioural and motivational variables throughout one academic year of the foundation programme. The participants were given a questionnaire containing 50 items aimed at evaluating direct spoken and written contact, media contact, and the importance of contact perceived. Also, the participants were involved in interviews covering seven principal themes that enabled the authors to gain insights into the changes occurring during the educational process and their possible reasons. The authors identified the main factors affecting the language learning motivation of international students studying in Russian international programmes, to define the type and frequency of the contact with the maximum impact on students' perception of language acquisition. The results of encounter experiences were registered at three discrete points throughout the academic year. The detailed analysis showed that written and media use contacts had become more frequent throughout the year while direct spoken contacts had exhibited the opposite tendency. The authors give some recommendations that would encourage contact opportunities and reduce inter-group anxiety among foreign students. The implemented analysis of the research results has demonstrated that the self-confidence of international students had suffered immensely as the result of negative encounter experiences. These types of experiences could be fully eliminated or reduced to a minimum if the hosts were aware of the expectations, attitudes, feelings, and possible forms of the international students' behaviour. The study proved the need for potential students to prepare for the study-abroad programmes before their arrival in the host country. They are supposed to develop communication skills and strategies as well as their linguistic ability. A necessary precondition for students upon their arrival is the provision of institutional support, which allows them to get used to a new cultural and social environment and to bond with native speakers.

KEYWORDS: cross-cultural communication, mixed method, second language, target language, qualitative method, quantitative method, encounter experience, study-abroad programme



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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning Russian as a second language involves studying not only the language itself but also its cultural aspects. Learning another language could serve as a portal to the historical perspectives, literatures, cultures and experiences of humanity accumulated over centuries. This is especially true in study-abroad contexts when learners are engaged in immediate interaction with the representatives of other cultures, and such intercultural encounters have great impact on student's identification with a particular cultural and ethnic group. This leads to the formation of the value of the student's own cultural awareness in relation to those belonging to other cultural groups. Cross-cultural communication affects the disposition of learners of Russian as a second language towards acquiring language skills and motivating their behaviour.

The aim of this intercultural experience for international learners studying abroad is to communicate and interact with the host country members and in this manner acquire a more profound understanding of their culture. Academic mobility and other study-abroad student exchange programmes are often organised and sponsored in the belief that students will be involved in contact situations, and their cross-cultural sensitivity and understanding of the culture of a target language country will be enhanced. At the same time, second language competence will be immensely improved (Ristic et al., 2019). Studying in technical universities in the Russian language could be challenging for international students as no programmes are delivered in English at the moment in the given university, and even Russian-speaking students usually struggle with certain disciplines, such as theoretical mechanics, strength of materials, or perspective geometry.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Participants

The research was implemented with international students taking part in a foundation programme on the university campus in Russia. The programme's aim is to prepare students for entering the engineering programmes in the Russian

university within one academic year. In the technical university, the students received thirty hours of Russian language instruction per week during nine months or one academic year. The language component provided tuition in academic skills and aimed to develop learners' ability to understand and produce written and spoken academic texts. By the year end, the students sat an exam in both Russian language and the appropriate discipline of further studies (mostly engineering) and were supposed to reach the CEFR B1 level of Russian language command according to the standards of the European classification. The foundation programme is a common example of preparatory courses for university entry offered in Russia, as far as the curriculum is concerned. Unfortunately, most of the teaching is done online nowadays due to the quarantine restrictions.

Altogether, more than 1000 foreign students from 87 countries are currently enrolled in the University. They represent different cultures, traditions, customs and languages. Also, Interclub was established, the main international community in the system of cross-cultural communication and formation of the united educational space. The mission of this vocational organisation is understanding the creativity and beauty of all nationalities as the club is open to representatives of all nations sharing the goals and mission of the organisation without any limitation.

In the survey, 60 international students from a great variety of ethnic backgrounds took part, with the majority being Vietnamese (65%). Seven percent of the students were French speakers of Tunisian and Moroccan origin, and the others were representing such countries as Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Congo, Uganda and China. The level of competence of the students at the beginning of the course was assessed as Elementary. 42% of the partaking students were male and 58% female, whereas their ages ranged between 23 and 29. The interview participants were chosen from a pool of volunteers so that they could represent different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. The interviews were conducted a year after the quantitative data had been collected and systematised which

means that the interviewees did not fill in the questionnaires throughout the preceding stages of the research. We didn't predetermine the number of interview participants and kept collecting data until we believed we had reached saturation point. We also interviewed 10 students and two course lecturers, both native speakers of the Russian language. By the interview date, the teachers had been working in this foundation programme for more than 5 years, so they were considered quite experienced and professional specialists.

2.2. Instruments and procedures

The questionnaire containing 50 items was aimed at evaluating four aspects of contact such as direct spoken and written contact, media contact and the importance of contact perceived. Also, the questionnaire indirectly assessed motivated behaviour, language learning attitude and language learning goals. The items of the questionnaire were based on the study by Csizér and Kormos (2009) investigating the role of intercultural encounters in motivation and insignificantly adapted to suit the context of study-abroad programmes. Correspondingly, the questions on motivational parameters were adapted from the instrument by Kormos et al. (2011). The questionnaire was written in the Russian language. The principal variable categories were defined as follows:

- 1) five items for direct spoken contact (frequency of direct spoken encounters with native and non-native speakers of Russian);
- 2) five items for direct written contact (frequency of conventional mail, emails, the use of messengers, social networks, chatting on the Internet);
- 3) five items for media contact in the target language by watching TV programmes, reading newspapers, magazines, the use of Russian-language websites;
- 4) five items for the perceived importance of contact as an indispensable tool for enriching their language, getting to know the language culture, and reducing anxiety levels;
- 5) eight items for instrumental orientation, i.e. the benefits associated with mastery of language, for instance, high demand in the labour market;

6) seven items for international orientation that exhibit students' attitudes to the Russian language;

7) eight items were allocated to the attitude towards learning the target language;

8) seven questions were given to motivated learning behaviour comprising students' effort and persistence in their studies.

The purpose of the interview that covered seven principal themes was to gain insights into the changes that occurred and their possible reasons. The main themes included also direct spoken and written contact, media contact, motivation, attitude towards language learning and students' cross-cultural orientation. To complement the results, we asked the lecturers and facilitators to give a detailed description of the tuition programme and overall characteristics of the students' profile.

Data collection took place at three particular points in time during the academic year, at approximately equal intervals. That means the first data collection was done straight after the students commenced their studies and joined the programme, then in the middle of the year before the winter break, and at the end of the academic year before the exam period.

It took students about 15-20 minutes on average to complete the questionnaire depending on their level of command of the Russian language. Taking part in the research was implemented on a voluntary basis. Both tutors and students were interviewed individually in a quiet room. The duration of the interview for students was 30-45 minutes and the tutor interviews lasted 45-60 minutes.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Mixed method research (MMR) (Riazi & Candlin, 2014) comprising quantitative and qualitative methods is gaining in popularity and broadening its application across a wide range of academic disciplines. This method could as well be applied to language teaching and learning and applied linguistics (Cardenas-Lopez, 2015). As an inter-discourse methodology combining quantitative and qualitative methods, MMR gives the researchers an opportunity to intertwine the strengths of two methodological approaches in favour of producing

more rigorous inferences in relation to the set research problems. In fact, MMR allows researchers to implement a thorough study of more complex research issues that are not possible to investigate by applying only one of these methods. In previous studies, the researchers treat MMR as a holistic methodology rather than a combination of separate methods by incorporating various epistemic perspectives in their problem conceptualisation. The MMR method is gaining increasing popularity and utility across a range of academic disciplines, and applied linguistics and language teaching are no exception. MMR poses its own challenges to researchers when planning and implementing their projects.

As an innovative and evolving research methodology, mixed method research presents new challenges for potential researchers. In this article, the authors discuss MMR proposals that are of particular interest not only to researchers but also to postgraduate and doctoral students. The results could be of interest for potential students who are planning to pursue their education in Russia.

The present research is partially based on the social psychological study of intercultural contact with the principal subject of the investigation being the contact-attitude relation within social psychology. This subfield is called the Contact Hypothesis (McKeown & Dixon, 2017), which basically means that contacts could change behaviour and attitudes of individuals and groups towards one another and, vice versa, such changes would further affect contacts between groups and individuals. Contact hypothesis is seen as one of the leading theories for reducing intergroup conflict which might arise. This theory states that certain conditions such as cooperation towards achieving a common goal, institutional support, and equal status can create a positive intergroup encounter and facilitate development of intergroup relations. However, contact hypothesis could be affected by three principal issues: (1) practicality, i.e. a contact situation, which includes overcoming serious practical obstacles; (2) anxiety of the participants that may lead to an unsuccessful contact or a contact with untapped potential; (3) generalisation, i.e. the

successful results of a contact are limited to the participant and the context of the meeting.

What are the factors required for optimal intergroup contact? Previous research (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008a, 2008b; Paluk et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019; Ramage, 2006) has revealed that equal status of group members, cooperation, motivation, willingness to collaborate, common goals and institutional support are necessary in order to achieve the desirable progress in studying. By means of general psychological observation, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) figured out that familiarity led to an increase in liking due to reduction in anxiety and uncertainty. It was stated that between attitudes and contact, inter-group anxiety is the main mediating variable and both direct and indirect contacts with other cultural group members influence attitudes to the out-group (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991).

The findings of the previous research closely related to study-abroad contexts (Macintyre et al., 1998) suggested that at the beginning of their stay the majority of students are quite optimistic and have mainly positive expectations towards the host country people. However, throughout the period observed their attitudes tend to become rather negative (Cajkler & Addelman, 2000). Overall study-abroad experience, available thanks to the development of academic mobility and double diploma educational programmes, might be anxiety provoking and stressful for many students due to the initial culture shock. Students might have to face and deal with differences in values, cultural and moral norms, attitudes and behaviour in the new learning environment compared to their home culture (Abi-Hashem, 2020). The study-abroad experience might be itself insufficient for enhancing intercultural sensitivity and mutual understanding. Nevertheless, frequent contact with host-country groups could be vital for nurturing positive attitude change and promotes socialisation and acculturation (Chapelle & Sauro, 2017). Moreover, it is of extreme importance to research students' perspectives of intercultural contacts by means of qualitative methods such as diaries and interviews being a part of MMR.

It is generally recognised that more frequent contact experiences lead to confident language use and have an impact on language learners' personal identification. Even in the situations when direct contact with second language speakers is minimal, the learners are exposed to cultural products in the target language, such as videos, books, magazines, podcasts, films, social networks, etc. These cultural products play a significant role in familiarising learners with the different community and influence their attitudes. Thus, indirect contact could be considered as one of the principal variables boosting motivation towards learning.

Speaking of the study-abroad context, we investigated the experience of the students of mostly Vietnamese and African origin participating in a study-abroad programme in Russia using audio and video interviews and a diary study. The results revealed that a large number of participants had to cope with threats to their self-esteem and second language acquisition itself that negatively affected interactions with the participants from the target language groups. Students who succeeded in establishing strong intercultural bonds were those able to maintain control over interaction in the target language and their social status. Linking motivation, attitudes and interaction in study-abroad programmes for Vietnamese and African origin students, it was suggested that positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation have had a great positive impact on interaction with native speakers. Implemented qualitative analysis has shown a complex interaction between the foreign students' perceptions mentioned above, their identities and their involvement with the hosts in Russia. The results prove that thanks to globalisation and an innovative means of electronic communication immersion becomes a matter of choice and language learning in study-abroad environment will require a more profound and strong commitment nowadays.

In our study, we attempted to assess and evaluate how students' contact experiences, goals, and attitudes towards language learning have varied at three discrete time points in the academic year, in particular at the beginning, middle and the end, in

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the context of an international study. For one academic year, foreign students majoring in various engineering programmes study Russian at the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language and are supposed to achieve a command of Russian sufficient to continue their professional education in the target language.

In our research, we split types of contacts into two categories: direct contact with target language speakers and indirect contact using various media products. Correspondingly, for direct contact we included both written and spoken interaction and questioned host-country members as well as international students about their language use. Finally, we attempted to evaluate learners' perceptions regarding the benefits gained from encounter experience and the importance of contact. In the course of the qualitative interviews conducted retrospectively at the end of the academic year, we asked students about positive and negative interaction experiences they had had and which factors they and their facilitators had highlighted as the most important ones in fostering efficient communication with native and non-native speakers of Russian.

4. STUDY AND RESULTS

4.1. Research questions

In our study, we have attempted to answer the following research questions. First, how do encounter experiences vary at three discrete points in time throughout a period of one academic year in a Russian international study context? And second, which factors influence the language learning mo-

tivation of international students partaking in a Russian international study programme? Do the types of contact experiences and their frequency have an impact on students' perception?

The first part of our research was into the general characteristics of motivation for language learning and the encounter experiences of the students

participating in the study-abroad programme. Implementing the survey allowed us to reveal that two variables such as international and instrumental orientation showed the highest mean values, while the mean values for learning attitude and motivated behaviour were around 4 on a 5-point scale (Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of the general characteristics

NO	VARIABLE CATEGORIES	POINT 1 (BEGINNING OF THE 1ST TERM)	POINT 2 (MIDDLE OF THE YEAR)	POINT 3 (END OF ACADEMIC YEAR)
1	Direct spoken contact	2.55	2.78	2.53
2	Direct written contact	2.84	2.95	2.83
3	Media contact	3.12	3.45	3.32
4	Perceived importance of contact	3.44	3.23	2.98
5	Instrumental orientation	4.87	4.32	3.98
6	International orientation	4.92	4.54	4.32
7	Language-learning attitude	4.15	3.98	3.67
8	Motivated learning behaviour	4.22	4.11	3.77

The implemented analysis of the descriptive statistics shows that students of this international study programme have demonstrated language learning goals and attributed high importance to the international status of language. All the goals mentioned are instrumental in nature as students mainly anticipated that the opportunity of study-abroad would help them to find a better job in their home country. At the same time, the quantitative data shows that students not only have a strong motivation towards language learning but also have self-efficacy beliefs, i.e. they strongly believe in their ability to achieve the level of language proficiency required for their professional studies in the sphere of engineering. These results were supported by the interview data. According

to the results analysis, only five out of the ten participants demonstrated confidence they would achieve the desired level of command of the language. Regardless of mainly positive learning attitudes, the mean values for motivated behaviour were lower. The results show that most of the effort the students invest in language learning is related to exams and achieving good marks. To sum up, all the students who took part in the survey exhibited strong language learning goals which are instrumental. However, the prevalence of instrumental goals does not lead to increased effort in language learning. As one of the facilitators described it, *'the majority of the students still have the school attitude and many of them have never attempted an independent study'*.

What possible explanations could be given to such findings? Firstly, students from different ethnic backgrounds might have the potentially variable cultural notions of responsibility for learning. Secondly, living in the era of developing technology, most interview participants provided detailed accounts of how new ways of entertainment and communication enabled them to stay in touch with their home country, thus, reducing the effort put into the target language learning.

4.2. The characteristics of the contact experiences of students in an international study programme

The experimental data obtained by the questionnaire revealed that the majority of participants consider the contact with host-country members and other speakers of Russian important as through social interaction they get new knowledge about the language. At the same time, the mean values of direct, indirect and media contact variables were fixed only slightly above the middle point of the scale due to the lack of frequent contact experiences. Both the quantitative and qualitative data have shown that contact with native speakers of Russian was rather infrequent for the majority of students, partially, due to the numerous numbers of Vietnamese and French speaking members in the international students' community. The exceptions were Indian participants who managed to build up a social network consisting of native speakers. Among the reasons why students did not initiate contact with native speakers – host country members – the lack of the following conditions was mentioned: common goals, collaboration, institutional support, equal status, and sufficiently high communicative ability (Waterworth & Hoshi, 2016). Quite often foreign students felt left out in conversation with native speakers, neglected and disregarded. Institutional support was provided by means of extracurricular activities, however, the efforts were not sufficient, apparently, to encourage frequent encounters between foreign students and host country members and the necessary conditions for successful contact opportunities were not met. Five out of ten interviewees mentioned

that they did not possess a sufficient level of Russian language competence to communicate with host country members, in particular with their roommates in the university student residence or dormitory. These factors led to high levels of anxiety and apprehension accompanying the communication process. Students experienced fear of making mistakes, being misunderstood or not understood at all. For many students, especially the Chinese, negative communication encounters significantly increased their apprehension.

Four participants informed us they were laughed at due to their language mistakes and experienced serious communication breakdowns. The behaviour of interlocutors explicitly or implicitly conveys negative attitudes and creates such feeling among the learners that their efforts in establishing contact have failed. As a result, they feel disregarded and disappointed. Nevertheless, the majority of the students admitted that they felt less apprehensive while speaking with international fellow students and did not experience similar negative incidents like those with native speakers.

Thus, the importance of bonding with the students of one's own language group should not be undermined. At the same time, when students do not have their own mother tongue speakers around to rely on for emotional support, e.g. a Bulgarian student, they start seeking contacts with the representatives of other cultures similar to their own cultures.

The quantitative data analysis has also shown the differences in direct contact experiences among representatives from various linguistic backgrounds. The results have shown that according to Schumann's (1986) Acculturation Hypothesis when the target language speaking community is large and the group is cohesive, second language speakers will be less inclined to communicate in the target language with host country students and teachers. According to the Acculturation Hypothesis, some learners progress rapidly when acquiring a second language, while others make relatively little progress in the same period, in spite of being provided with the same language instruction and having initial ability. As Schumann (1986)

suggested, such discrepancies arise due to characteristics of the psychological and social distances between learners. According to Teemant and Pinnegar (2007), eight characteristics of social dis-

tance could be distinguished (Table 2). Speaking of the characteristics of psychological distance arising between second language learners, four characteristics should be noted (Table 3).

Table 2

Characteristics of social distance

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
Social dominance patterns	When the native speaker language learners view their group as superior in terms of culture, politics, technology, or economics, they are not willing to learn the second language.
Integration strategies	There are three types of learners: assimilative, preservative, and adaptive. Assimilative learners give up their native language values and lifestyles, whereas preservative ones keep them. Adaptive learners become bicultural and are able to switch depending on the group.
Enclosure	Enclosure is low when groups share social facilities. This facilitates language learning.
Intended length of residency	The length of planned stay in the country and the permanency of residency greatly affect motivation towards learning a new language (the average stay in Russia of the participants of this research is 5 years).
Cohesiveness	Strong intragroup contact within the community of the native language speakers with few outside contacts affects second language learning.
Size	Second language acquisition is affected by the size of the native speaker language community.
Cultural congruence	Second language learning is affected by the similarity and harmony between cultures.
Attitudes	The feelings of the reference groups towards each other may also influence second language learning.

Table 3

Characteristics of psychological distance

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
Language shock	If the learners feel silly about trying to learn the language, they are less likely to learn.
Culture shock	Being disoriented or anxious in a foreign culture results in being less likely to learn the second language.
Motivation	Level of motivation has an impact on acquisition of the second language.
Ego-permeability	If second language learners view their first language as fixed and rigid to a certain extent, this affects their learning of the second language.

Indirect contact through numerous available media (such as TV, the Internet, radio, magazines, books, podcasts) tends not to be frequent, similar to direct spoken contact. Some students watched popular TV shows in Russian, but rather for entertainment purposes than for educational ones (Çelik & Casimoğlu, 2018). Very few reading activities were reported; the only exception being some compulsory reading for academic purposes and some electronic texts on the Internet. In recent years, the Internet has become an important and easily accessible medium of communication. It creates an environment for users where they feel more protected and exercise more control over the process of communication. The unique qualities of the Internet enable users to create a positive contact between rival groups.

Social networking sites in Russian were also used rarely and the same situation applied to writing emails in Russian. To sum up, both qualitative and quantitative data related to direct spoken communication emphasise the impact of intergroup anxiety and on students' willingness to engage in intercultural communication (Awwad, 2019). The results of this investigation demonstrate that international students from study-abroad programmes mainly socialise within their own ethnic group due to high communication anxiety and perceived threats to their self-esteem. However, these findings do not exclude friendships between students from different ethnic background as they facilitate students' social and cultural blending into the host society.

5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses motivational and contact variables throughout one academic year. During one academic year we observed a remarkable reduction in the values of all the variables apart from direct written contact.

The results in Table 1 show that the mean values of contact and motivational variables demonstrated a rather sharp decline between Point 2 and Point 3 of the programme, with the exception of direct spoken contact between Point 1 and Point 3. The impact of time on contact and motivational

variables was substantial, apart from the aspect of direct spoken contact demonstrating the medium range results.

Overall, considering the changes in the questionnaire data, we can conclude that no significant changes took place in the first semester between Point 1 and Point 2 with the exception of direct media and written contact while attitude and motivation remained quite stable. However, even three months after arrival spoken contact experiences of students had not improved dramatically due to high levels of communication anxiety and negative experiences of interactions with native speakers. As a result, students tried to avoid face-to-face encounters with host-country members and bonded even more strongly with their first language group in order to protect their self-esteem. Some Chinese students, for example, even adopted the avoidance strategy for communication with native speakers. Thus, the experiences where foreign students felt valued members of the host community were rather rare.

The data collected by means of the interviews have shown the important role of events in similar arguments regarding the willingness to communicate. The data illustrated that the majority of our participants described remarkable events, such as students' conferences, workshops, Interclub meetings, intercultural concerts, which had changed their attitude and willingness to communicate with native speakers and to evolve further communication. It is also apparent that a negative effect on the international students could have been avoided throughout most of the events if their counterparts had shown more understanding of the cross-cultural difficulties arising due to the clash of cultures and had tried to support and encourage students instead of opting out of the conversation (Avtonomova et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, direct written and media contact turned out to be more frequent between Point 1 and Point 2. This could be explained by the instructional tasks given to the students by their tutors throughout the nine months course. During the second term of the programme, students were asked to keep a reflective diary of the media

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sources they followed as well as the magazine articles and journal papers they read. Thus, in a study-abroad context, instructional tasks and institutional support play a crucial role in the attempt to engage students in media and written contact in the target language.

The results obtained show a considerable fall in the contact frequency by the year end. According to the curriculum, at the end of a study-abroad programme, students take exams in both Russian and some content area disciplines. As mentioned by the interviewees, the last period of the second term is commonly dedicated to preparing for these exams. Therefore, students normally have less time to engage in face-to-face contact with each other and with target language speakers.

As far as the motivational variables are concerned, their mean values have also decreased at Point 3 of the period. This could be explained by the fact that the students considered their official language learning period to be over and the language would cease to be the object of study. Instead, the language from then on would become a tool for acquiring knowledge in their further professional studies. Another reason for the drop in motivation might be that in this particular period of time the interviewees were focused on the exams content and therefore paid less attention to the improvement of language skills.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to investigate direct and indirect cross-cultural contact as well as motivated behaviour and language attitude in a study-

abroad context in Russia. The study used the mixed method research approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order to demonstrate contact, behavioural and motivational variables throughout the academic year of the foundation programme. The results obtained proved that written and media use contacts had become more frequent during the year whereas direct spoken contacts were much less frequent.

Basing our conclusions on the quantitative and qualitative data, we suggested three principal groups of factors determining the type and scope of students’ cross-cultural experience. First of all, one should mention the socio-environmental factors that comprise the size of the source language speaking community in the host country and the conflict arising from the differences between students’ attitudes, expectations and cultural beliefs and those of the host country. In this respect, institutional support plays a crucial role in establishing direct and indirect contact with the target language, also by means of organising remarkable and memorable events.

The second factor to be mentioned includes internal variables, e.g. personal attitude towards language learning, self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, communication apprehension and others. All these components predetermine the willingness to communicate and the contact frequency and quality.

Finally, the third group of factors relates to the importance of significant events for successful interaction with native speakers in a study-abroad context.

The experiential history of the participants complements and dynamically interacts with the social and institutional context and learners’ personality traits (Williams-McBean, 2019; Zhang et al., 2013).

To sum up, several conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the results of the research. First of all, the study emphasises the importance of preparing students for their study-abroad programme before their arrival in the host country both in developing communication skills and strategies and

their linguistic ability (Aveni, 2005). Upon arrival, a necessary precondition for students is providing institutional support enabling them to adjust to the new cultural and social environment and to establish contact with native speakers. As the analysis of the results illustrates, the self-confidence of foreign students can suffer dramatically from negative encounter experiences that could have been avoided

or fully eliminated if the hosts had been better prepared for social interaction and communication. Thus, institutional support is needed to help host country members to understand the attitudes, expectations, feelings and possible forms of the international students' behaviour. All these measures would help encourage contact opportunities and reduce inter-group anxiety among foreign students.

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