ABSTRACT

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE VIRTUAL WILD: THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONS ON LEARNING ANOTHER LANGUAGE IN INFORMAL VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

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This study investigates learning a foreign language in informal virtual environments (the “virtual wild”) and learners’ emotions connected to the process. Evidence suggests that incidental foreign language contact in unstructured, virtual environments can enhance second language (L2) learning, and that the use of online informal learning of language activities with students learning English as an L2 results in higher fluency, lower error rates, and greater engagement compared to learning that occurs in a traditional classroom setting. The research on online informal learning of English (OILE) aligns with the newest research in linguistics asserting that language is learned through experience with it and an exposure to usage-events. Nevertheless, such incidental informal learning is generally untrusted, believed to cause more harm than good, and not commonly encouraged in the classroom.

In the U.S., where English is the dominant language, not a lot of emphasis is put on learning other tongues. Learners who, despite that, chose to engage in this endeavor are mostly unsuccessful and quickly give up. The enrollments are consistently decreasing, programs are eliminating, and only a fraction of students achieve expected results. The abysmal retention rates clearly indicate that even highly interested students are disappointed with how languages are being taught and eventually quit. Among the reasons behind these statistics are the
“grammar+vocabulary lists” approach used in the majority of foreign language (FL) classes and FL anxiety that negatively influences learners’ achievement.

With the great success of OILE in Europe, this study endeavors to apply this concept to other languages, using German as an example. This adoptive concept is referred to as Online Informal Learning of Language or OILL. This study investigates whether OILL can foster a higher language gain than traditional FL instruction. In addition to that, OILL’s emotional aspects are examined in order to assess whether emotions influence the success of OILL and whether this information could yield, so far undiscovered, ways of significantly lowering or eliminating FL anxiety.

Sixty-one intermediate and higher German learners enrolled in the study, however, only 16 participants completed the full 10 hours and took all required tests and surveys. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: Experimental Group (EG), engaging in online informal learning activities in German (e.g., watching German movies, shows, programs, or videos; listening to the music; reading the Web; etc.) and Control Group (CG), who engaged in traditional, textbook-based activities mirroring traditional classroom practices (e.g., fill in the blanks exercises; texts, short videos, and audio recordings altered towards educational purposes and followed by an array of exercises; etc.). All activities were delivered online via a platform with German activities.

First, the participants were prompted to take an Interest and Demographic Questionnaire (IDQ) investigating their current familiarity with the virtual wild. As next, the learners took a German pre-test and, after they completed 10 hours of activities, a German post-test to assess their language gain. At random times, when the learners engaged in the German activities, they were also prompted to take an Emotion Form (EF) survey that has been developed based on the
Experience Sampling Method (ESM). This instrument was to assess their emotions in the moment.

The results of the study show an advantage of OILL, although limited through the small and unbalanced sample. First, out of 16 participants who completed the full study, only 4 were in the CG (25%) and three times more, 12 (75%), in the EG. Thus, the study suggests that three times more learners are likely to persevere when engaging in the virtual wild and only a few, already highly motivated and committed learners, chose to continue learning their favorite language when it is through a more traditional approach. This finding mirrors the statistics on students’ retention in the FL classes in the U.S. While no differences in the overall language gain between the EG and CG was found, descriptively, both groups achieved language gain. This implies that even if OILL does not produce higher language gain, it does engage three times more learners than traditional approaches.

The results on learners’ emotions across time indicated that all learners’ emotions, regardless of the condition, stayed consistent over time and did not significantly differ between the groups. The average emotion reported by all learners varied between slightly and moderately positive. Finally, no correlation between the language gain and emotions was found for the 16 participants. In addition to these data, the IDQ indicated that out of 57 participants who took the survey, almost 80% never or rarely engage in any types of OILL-like activities in German. This result suggests that the extremely rich, mostly free, and authentic input available online is barely used by language learners in the U.S.

This study was the first implementing OILE towards language other than English and due to a small and unbalanced sample can only be perceived as preliminary. Nevertheless, it suggests that despite the common belief, virtual wild is not harmful and does result in a language gain as
well as it fosters positive emotions. Most importantly, however, this study suggests that
traditional practices are able to reach only a fraction of highly interested students, while OILL
appears to attract and keep triple the number. While more research on OILL is needed, this study
presents strong implications for changing the way how languages are being taught in the
American schools.
LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE VIRTUAL WILD: THE INFLUENCE
OF EMOTIONS ON LEARNING ANOTHER LANGUAGE
IN INFORMAL VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

BY
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FOUNDATIONS

Doctoral Director:
Lindsay N. Harris
Our pedantic mania for instruction is always leading us to teach children the things they would learn better on their own accord.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
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DEDICATION

Dla Robalków. Bez Was nie byłoby nic.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 20.7% of U.S. residents speak a language other than English, but only a fraction speaks, reads, and comprehends another language well enough to use it in everyday life (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). While these data refer to languages spoken at home (usually as a heritage language) and no data on speakers of other languages as a result of educational training exist, it is a known fact that the majority of Americans are monolingual, placing the United States behind most nations in the world (including European nations and China) in the percentage of citizens who have some knowledge of another language (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017). As a former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan noted, the United States may be the only nation in the world where it is possible to complete high school and college without any foreign language study (Duncan, 2010).

While the leading role of English in the world certainly limits the need for knowing other languages in the U.S., it is nevertheless a skill creating career opportunities and developing one’s horizons of understanding the wider world and its various cultures. The former U.S. secretary of Education emphasized repeatedly the growing need for raising speakers of other languages as an essential component of the 21st century skills necessary for global citizenship (Duncan, 2010). To successfully compete with other nations and prosper economically in the global market as well as to improve relations with other countries, Duncan (2010) argued that it is absolutely
essential for Americans to become fluent in other languages and that schools, colleges, and universities should put producing bilingual students as a central part of their mission.

Despite this advocacy, foreign language programs have been scaling down or completely eliminating courses in most languages due to consistently decreasing enrollments (Gettys & Lech, 2013; Looney & Lusin, 2018). Between fall 2013 and fall 2016, enrollment in languages other than English in colleges and universities in the United States fell by 9.2%, which constitutes the second-largest decline (following a 12.6% decrease in 1972) in the last two hundred years (Looney & Lusin, 2018). In 2016, out of every 100 students enrolled in American colleges and universities, only 7.5 were enrolled in a foreign language (FL) class (Looney & Lusin, 2018).

But especially alarming is the lack of retention of students in language programs. The total ratio of introductory-level to advanced undergraduate-level enrollment in languages other than English (including American Sign Language) is 5:1, meaning that for every five introductory enrollments, there is only one enrollment in an advanced course at the undergraduate level (Looney & Lusin, 2018). Perhaps the most daunting statistic among these data is the percentage of FL students who reach the anticipated advanced level of language after four years of high school and four semesters of college: only about 10% of the handful of students who enroll and remain in FL courses achieve this level of proficiency (e.g., Center for Applied Second Language Studies, 2010; Gettys & Lech, 2013; Long, 2012).

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1 The majority of American colleges and universities call their language departments and programs “Modern Languages” or “World Languages” to avoid the negatively marked “foreign”. Those who research the teaching and learning of languages mainly spoken outside the country or community of instruction, however, commonly use the term “foreign languages” (and the abbreviation FL). For consistency’s sake, the present research will use the term “foreign language” to indicate any language other than English being taught or studied in the United States.
These statistics clearly indicate that, despite the great need for multilingual speakers, American students do not want to learn languages, and those who do are largely unsuccessful and quickly give up.

Statement of the Problem

In colleges and universities across the United States, the common method of teaching a foreign language constitutes a model Taylor (2008, p. 863) calls the “vocabulary + grammar” approach. It involves a textbook-based program organized according to the complexity of grammatical structures—from the easiest (but not necessarily the most frequently used) to the most complex—and lists of disconnected lexical items. Despite the fact that most programs use a communicative approach that emphasizes “meaningful and authentic language use rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 90), the typical class spends the majority of its time on grammar lessons, and as a consequence, the “meaningful and authentic language use” is often reduced to practicing grammar patterns in short speech instances. With program standards focusing mostly on grammar topics and the time constraint of 150-200 minutes weekly, U.S. teachers do not have many opportunities to create a truly meaningful and authentic language-use environment.

At the same time, especially in Europe, there is a growing interest in naturalistic, usage-oriented approaches to learning other languages, and even more of an interest in developing such learning experiences with the use of technology (e.g., Kupens, 2010; Sockett, 2014). In countries where English is not the dominant language, more and more people are engaging in activities that involve authentic materials in English, like watching movies and television shows, listening
to music, participating in interest-based forums, or reading the Web (Sockett, 2014). Emerging research in this area increasingly suggests that incidental contact with English in unstructured virtual environments (the “virtual wild”) fosters faster and better results for learning than do even intensive versions of traditional, classroom-based instruction (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Lehtonen, 2017). Regardless of whether it is used as the main source of knowledge or as a supplement to traditional classroom-based instruction, informal online learning strategies, which are in alignment with the newest linguistic research, reliably deliver language skills (Kupens, 2010; Sockett, 2014; Tyler et al., 2018). These strategies, however, require a constructivist-oriented mindset and autonomous learning skills. While some U.S. students, usually those more persistent in their efforts and in favor of technology, engage in online activities in the target language outside of class, many are unsure of where to find resources and how to use them, or if it is advisable to use them at all. Often these autonomous practices and engagement in the uncontrolled wild are discouraged by teachers, who are guided by the common opinion that such incidental environments, full of errors and false information, create more harm than good (e.g., Sockett, 2014). This attitude results in teachers sheltering students from the richest and most natural ways of learning another language (Sockett, 2014) as well as contradicts the social constructivist model of learning advocated in current pedagogical practices (Tyler et al., 2018).

Another factor believed to contribute to the disheartening numbers in FL programs is a construct called FL anxiety. Research suggests that many students experience negative, fear-related emotions when learning or using another language, resulting in lower language achievement (Avan, 2010; Mercer et al., 2012) and decreasing student interest and retention in learning a language (Ely, 1986; Horwitz et al., 1986). Despite the numerous solutions proposed
for lowering FL anxiety levels, none of them has proved significantly effective for improving enrollment or success in FL programs. Viewed from the perspective of positive psychology, a possible fault with these solutions may be their focus on the problem rather than the solution (e.g., Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Seligman, 2002).

A more effective teaching approach is needed to foster not only larger language gains, but also more authentic and meaningful language use. Students require a positive space where they feel comfortable and self-confident while attaining the skills of a new language, and teachers who focus more on the joys than the fears of this process. Teachers must also foster student autonomy and the skills to independently extract knowledge from exposures to language in the wild.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine whether time spent in an informal online context during the learning of an FL results in larger language gains and fosters more positive emotions and autonomous learning compared to more traditional and formal learning practices. If effective, the approach introduced here has the potential to improve the daunting FL enrollments in the United States and, ultimately, produce more multilingual Americans.

Research questions

The research questions that will guide this study were
1. What is the difference in the overall language gain between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities?

2. Does the trend over time in participants’ emotions differ depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group?

3. Is there a correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group?

Operational Definitions

The following terms are used in the study:

**Emotion Form (EF)** – A short survey based on the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) including questions about activities, thoughts, and emotions present during the engagement in the German activities when the survey has been sent to participants.

**Experience Sampling Method (ESM)** - A research procedure that studies what people do, feel, and think during their daily lives (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1983). It consists of a short self-report survey given to participants at random times during an assessed activity and reports on students’ emotions and engagement in the moment.

**Foreign Language (FL)** – Language that is not one’s native or second language and is not spoken in the community in which someone lives.

**Foreign Language Anxiety** - Feelings of worry and negativity as well as an array of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual’s mother tongue (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mercer et al., 2012). Research indicates
that a high level of FL anxiety significantly decreases students’ achievement (Avan, 2010) and leads, in turn, to lower retention and decrease in enrollment.

**Learner Autonomy** - Taking charge of one’s own learning using the resources available. The concept is grounded in the constructivists’ view that emphasizes the active role of the learner in the learning process (Lai, 2017).

**Online Informal Learning of English (OILE)** - English language learning using informal original resources in English available through the Internet, such as movies, television shows, and music (Sockett, 2014). Learners choose to engage in the activities with no clear intention of learning the language, so learning of the language is a mostly incidental by-product of their engagement and learners are often unaware it takes place.

**Online Informal Learning of Language (OILL)** – The adaptation of OILE for the learning of languages other than English. In the present study, OILL is implemented in German, but is in theory applicable to any language.

**Second Language (L2)** – Language that is not one’s native or first tongue. It does not correspond to the numeric position in which it was learned and may in fact be speaker’s third or fourth (or beyond) language; instead it is the language spoken by the community in which someone lives as a newcomer.

**Usage-Based Linguistics (UBL)** – An umbrella term for usage-based approaches or usage-based models of language and language acquisition originally introduced by Langacker (1987, 1988).

**Virtual Wild** - Wild environments of authentic L2 communities available through the Internet. Such environments include all websites and Internet sources in the L2, including, but not limited to, social media websites, informational or news websites, movies, television shows and
programs, podcasts, radio shows and programs, short videos, music and music videos, online games, interest communities and forums, chat rooms and conversation exchange websites and apps, online stores and libraries, and ebooks and audiobooks.

**Wild** – Authentic environments in a target language culture or community. It originates from research by Hutchins (1995), who used the term “wild” to indicate that his study focused on real life situated cognition as opposed to psychological studies of the human mind in the laboratory. Clark and colleagues (Clark et al., 2011; see also Wagner, 2015) use the term “wild” to describe real life, authentic situations and activities in an L2 community that involve other people, often strangers, as the opposite of the classroom in which students engage in fully controlled activities structured and scaffolded by the teacher.

**Overview of Methodology**

The study was a quantitative experimental study. Sixty-one (61) participants signed up for the study but only 16 completed ten hours of activities and all required tests and surveys and two participants completed all of the tests and surveys but only five hours of activities. All participants have completed at least two semesters of college-level German before joining the study. Participants were recruited through a call sent to German college instructors in the Chicago area as well as to instructors at colleges throughout the U.S. via educational forums (e.g., the AERA second language forum, American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages forum, American Association of Teachers of German forum).

The participants engaged in activities connected to learning German completed on their own time and not connected to any class activities and were randomly assigned to one of two
groups. The experimental group (EG) engaged in an informal mode of learning German and was able to choose from a wide variety of authentic German materials not altered for educational purposes. The control group (CG) engaged in a formal mode of learning German through more traditional pre-planned activities that mirrored activities used in the German courses and were textbook-based. All materials and activities for both groups were posted on the Coursesites learning management system at coursesites.com. Participants were asked to complete ten hours of activities (excluding the pre- and post-test) in a time frame of two weeks. The participants completed a German performance pre-test at the beginning and a German performance post-test at the end of the study to measure their language gain, which was then analyzed using an independent sample t-test and comparing the overall means and confirmed by a non-parametric Mann-Whitney test comparing the overall ranks of gains between the EG and CG due to the small and unequal size of the samples.

Additionally, this study employed the experience sampling method (ESM) in form of a short survey called the Emotion Form (EF), which measured students’ emotions in the moment during their engagement in the German activities. This tool gathered data across time and allowed for monitoring of the variability of emotions during both experimental and control conditions. These data were analyzed using a Mixed Design Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test in order to assess how emotions during the German activities differ between the groups as well as within the groups in the overall duration of the study.

Participants who completed all ten hours of the study were compensated $50 and were entered into a drawing for a Kindle e-reader at the end of the project. Participants who took the pre-test but did not complete ten hours received $10. All participants received access to the
digital library of the German materials from both the experimental and control conditions for a period of one year after the study.
CHAPTER 2
FRAMING OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is the concept of Online Informal Learning of English, or OILE. The online informal learning of English (OILE) is a concept aligned with the research on language learning in the wild (Clark et al., 2011; Wagner, 2015) and refers to language gains that result from organic unplanned and unstructured exposure to English through a range of online activities like watching original television shows and movies, listening to music, and reading blogs and news sites. It constitutes an alternative to the in-person interactions with L2 communities originally described in the research on language learning in the wild (Clark et al., 2011). The concept of OILE is consistent with the usage-based theory of language and language learning that claims language is learned through exposure to usage events in a situated learning environment and relies on the same cognitive processes as any other learning. OILE is also aligned with the constructivist view on learning advanced by developmentalists. It is autonomous and builds on learners’ autonomous skills in acquiring and constructing knowledge that largely happens incidentally. Research on OILE suggests that OILE learners achieve high results in learning English predominantly due to situational-emotional factors that involve learners’ freedom of choice in engaging in these activities and choice of which activities to engage in, as well as the lack of evaluation associated with these practices and perhaps even the lack of pursuing knowledge of the language as a main goal (Sockett, 2014).
The idea that OILE is only possible for English and not transferable to other languages is the position held by the leading OILE researcher, Sockett (2014). Sockett claims that one of the key elements of OILE’s success is allowing students to make the choice of engaging in OILE activities, and that the draw of English activities exceeds that of activities in any other language, due to the global status of English-language culture. According to Sockett (2014), the culture around us has an impact on the way we view the world. American movies and TV shows and music in English draw the biggest interest. Therefore, the decision to engage in OILE activities is strongly connected to the desire to be up-to-date with today’s world, with the newest movies, songs, games, and others.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons to suspect that OILE could also work in other languages. Studies in OILE indicate that even if the decision to engage in OILE is not led by the desire to improve one’s English skills, it is nonetheless a side reason often named by OILE learners, which indicates intrinsic motivation as a driving factor (Sockett, 2014). The same intrinsic motivation and desire to learn more about the language and culture must also exist for students of other languages. In fact, in a culture that places so little value on multilingualism, anyone enrolled in a foreign language course is almost by definition intrinsically motivated.

Sockett (2014) also points out that the amount of available resources in English (including supportive elements like subtitles in the L2) is certainly much greater than the amount of resources to be found in other languages. For instance, it is very difficult to find German movies or TV series with subtitles in German, while movies in practically any language with English subtitles can be easily obtained. This, however, does not mean that such resources are not available. In fact, with the current affordances of technology and various apps and websites,
modifications to original resources are easily accessible (e.g., one can easily find and use German subtitles for a German movie even if the original format does not include the subtitle option). Moreover, the amount of resources will not be an obstacle for those who wish to engage in the original language-culture experience. In fact, many subcultures that center around languages other than English are popular throughout world. Japanese anime, K-pop, and Bollywood movies are examples of phenomena that often become the very reason for learning a language. Thus, if anime fanatics can teach themselves Japanese using only the internet, it is in principle possible for people with other interests studying other languages to do the same. Additionally, numerous OILE-like resources (e.g., social media websites, blogs, forums, and informational websites) are widely available in either the original language or in many different languages.

It follows that OILE may be indeed transferable to other languages, even if in a limited capacity, and can bring numerous advantages to the FL learning experience. At the very least, the possibility of this transfer needs to be further explored. In searching for ways to adapt OILE to OILL, the online informal learning of the language must mirror the experiences and activities described by OILE researchers and not simply revert to technology-informed instructional strategies. In other words, OILL should not be perceived as a tool to use in the classroom; instead, students must be introduced to OILL resources and instructed on the different ways of using them on their own time. With that said, it is important that students decide to engage in the activities because of their interest in the culture itself or in the information they can gather through language exposure, rather than out of a desire to improve their language skills alone.
The present study investigated the feasibility of expanding the OILE concept to a more general OILL, the Online Informal Learning of Language, using German, a commonly studied FL in the United States, as a case study.

Researchers of OILE also suggest that the success of OILE environments is associated with the positive emotions present during this engagement, which fosters students’ intrinsic motivation, resilience, and autonomy (Sockett, 2014). In particular, these emotions come from the freedom to choose to engage in online activities and, once online, to choose which activities to engage in. This choice and the resulting positive emotions can significantly improve student learning and retention (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Roed, J., 2003; Sockett, 2014). Online environments may also constitute a “safe zone” of learning, eliminating many of the negative aspects present in a classroom setting and reducing FL anxiety (Roed, 2003).

Extensive research on positive emotions in education indicates they broaden perception, attention, motivation, reasoning, and social cognition, and therefore foster more effective and more pleasurable learning experiences (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman, 2002). Experiencing more positive emotions during an activity builds resources that can later be used in challenging situations. For example, when a learner encounters consistent success in understanding messages in another language, the language becomes associated with positive emotions like joy or awe. Later, in a situation when this understanding is diminished, the learner will be motivated to persist through the momentary difficulties because of the acquired positive associations and the understanding that these difficulties are temporary (Seligman, 2002). For this reason, the more positive emotions that can be created during a learning experience, the more resilient and, consequently, less anxious learners are.
This literature review discusses the linguistic theory, usage-based linguistics (UBL), as the theoretical basis of OILE and examines how the main tenets of UBL align with OILE. Next, it situates OILE within the constructivist framework, with special attention to autonomous learning as an important tenet of both OILE and constructivism. OILL, as a derivative of OILE, is proposed. Finally, research into the emotional aspects of learning a language and the potential contributions of the present study to that literature are discussed.

Usage-based Models of Language

Psychologists, linguists, and neurolinguists, among others, have increasingly been challenging generative linguistics, which dominated these fields for the second half of the twentieth century. Generative linguistics holds that one is born with an innate capacity to generate grammatically correct sentences from the earliest age and without this capacity, called universal grammar (UG), learning a language would not be possible (Chomsky & Halle, 1965). However, recent research indicates that areas of the brain previously believed to be used solely for syntax are active during many non-linguistic activities (Tyler et al., 2018), presenting a strong challenge to the nativist view. Tomasello (e.g., 2009) and others (e.g., Bybee, 2010; Ellis, 2003, 2006; Tyler et al., 2018) provide evidence that language learning is gradual, contextualized, social, and based on general cognitive principles of learning and development (Tyler et al., 2018). According to Ibbotson and Tomasello (2016, p. 9), children are not born with a universal tool dedicated for learning grammar; instead “they inherit the mental equivalent of a Swiss Army knife: a set of general-purpose tools—such as categorization, the reading of
communicative intentions, and analogy making—with which children build grammatical
categories and rules from the language they hear around them.”

These claims lie at the foundation of the UBL model of language and language learning.
The term “usage-based” was first introduced by Langacker (1987, 1988), and the perspective
emphasizes the notion that the linguistic structure of language is primarily shaped by its use, and
the use of language is the foundation for language learning. Language emerges as a result of the
user’s exposure to numerous usage events (Barlow & Kemmer, 2000) referring to situated
instances of the language user producing or understanding language to convey particular
meaning in a specific social situation (Tyler et al., 2018).

According to UBL, language exemplars are the basis of the linguistic structures formed in
the speaker’s mind, and the development of more abstract representations like morphemes,
phonemes, or syntactic patterns is strongly tied to usage events because “abstract utterances
without any phonetic or lexical content do not exist” (Kemmer & Barlow, 2000, p. ix). In the
usage-based view, language is not divided into competence (tacit knowledge of language
structure) and performance (the actual use of language), as suggested by Chomsky & Halle
(1965) in his theory of distinction, but rather “grammar is viewed as the cognitive organization
of one’s experience with language” (Bybee, 2008, p. 216). Language emerges from use and
shapes the use of it further.

The linguistic basis of the structures in any language, according to UBL, are
constructions —form-meaning pairings, existing on all levels of language, from words to
discourse patterns. They may be full utterances (like “I want ice cream”), idiomatic expressions
and sayings (like “It’s raining cats and dogs”), parts of utterances (like “I want to,” “Let’s,” or
“on Monday”), simple words (like “cat,” “book,” or “lecture”), or much smaller elements of language like prefixes or suffixes. We learn these constructions while interacting with other speakers—i.e., through using them. Language must be approached as a whole that can only be divided into smaller and bigger chunks, such as morphemes, words, or phrases. Children first learn simple grammatical patterns; then gradually, they intuitively categorize them into rules (Bybee, 2010; Tomasello, 2009). In the beginning, children speak using only concrete, simple constructions based on patterns of words, e.g.: “Where is the X?”; I wanna X”; Put X here”; “Mommy’s X-ing”; “X gone”; “X broken”, etc., and later they combine these simple patterns, creating more complex ones, e.g. “Where’s the X that Mommy Xed?” (Tomasello, 2009). This categorization process creates a vast network of phonological, semantic and pragmatic associations that is affected by the frequency of use. It contains both specific and more generalized information about form, meaning and contextual of use of the constructions and words (Bybee, 2008).

It follows that a lot more imitation than creativity is present during language learning (Bybee, 2010). In the nativist tradition, very little attention is paid to imitation, which is considered to be relatively unimportant for language acquisition. This conclusion is especially based on the fact that children often produce utterances they could not have heard from their guardians. However, as many researchers (e.g., Bybee, 2010; Tomasello et al., 1993; Ellis, 2006) point out, imitation is a much more commonly used tool than believed by nativists and is a crucial element in the process of language learning.

Another important tenet of UBL is the assertion that language acquisition is governed by the same cognitive and emotional processes that govern acquisition of any skill. It involves
determining structure from usage and this, in turn, requires a learner to use the full range of comprehension strategies, i.e., to remember the language sample, categorize the experience, determine patterns among and between stimuli, generalize conceptual schema and prototypes from the sample, and use cognitive structures, analogies, and images in thinking (Ellis, 2008). Thus, the usual learning conditions, including exposure to the subject and repetition, are required (Bybee, 2008).

UBL in Practice

Many UBL researchers (e.g., Behrens, 2009; Madlener, 2015; Tyler et al., 2018; Tomasello, 2009) strongly advocate for second- and foreign-language instructional approaches aligned with UBL in the hope that it might produce better outcomes. The common model of language teaching in the majority of U.S. institutions still revolves around a structure Taylor (2008, p. 863) calls “the ‘dictionary + grammar book’ model of language”. According to this model, language is represented as the process of learning the grammatical structure as an entity, as well as which words fit into that structure (Tyler et al., 2018). The grammatical structure is a central component of this approach, and is often assumed to be innate, encapsulated, activated by minimal language input (Tyler et al., 2018), and not involving interaction with any general cognitive processes. The second element of instruction in the dictionary + grammar book approach is a lexical component that holds the words that fit in these grammatical structures (Tyler et al., 2018). The consequence of such a view of language learning is that foreign language instruction often amounts to the teaching of a decontextualized set of rules (and their exceptions) and lists of words. Students are expected to connect the words with the rules and
create instances of language they have never heard before (Gettys & Lech, 2013; Tyler et al., 2018). This approach not only ignores 40 years of empirical research in child language acquisition and related fields that support the claims of UBL (Tyler et al., 2018), but also produces rather lackluster outcomes in students’ achievement. Studies show that the vast majority of students in high school and college never achieve the expected advanced level of ability after four years at the high school level or four semesters at the college level of language instruction (e.g., Center for Applied Second Language Studies, 2010; Gettys & Lech, 2013; Long, 2012). Thus, it is important to find a bridge between contemporary linguistic theory and actual teaching and learning practices.

Usage-based Linguistics and Online Informal Learning of English

The online informal learning of English (OILE) and the here-proposed modification of it, OILL, are strongly aligned with the tenets of UBL. It is not a method of teaching per se, but an approach to learning that for years has been successfully used outside the walls of classrooms by individuals with an Internet connection who were strongly motivated to learn a second or foreign language. It is therefore worth considering whether this approach can be introduced to classes of students who may be somewhat less motivated to learn a language or to whom it simply did not occur that they could easily continue their education outside of the classroom.

Because, according to UBL theory, language skill emerges from participation in usage events, it is imperative that a user is exposed to opportunities for such events. In OILE, learners engage in the real, raw language sample present in an array of OILE activities and materials, such as songs, movies, Web articles, forums, social media, and the like. Such engagement
exposes learners to a wide selection of phrases used in common and less common situations as well as idiomatic expressions, slang, and abbreviations, and are a mirror of the usage events present in the non-virtual wild. This is also the language that is hardly implementable in an actual classroom. Learners who engage in OILE activities have an opportunity to interact with usage events and, therefore, to experience the language. Additionally, in activities like blogging, chatting, or social media interaction (e.g., exchanging comments via Facebook), learners use language instances and co-create linguistic structures through language use.

More passive activities, such as watching television shows and movies or listening to music, create a strong basis of the language constructions in one’s mind. Common phrases and sayings, often repeated in movies and TV shows, inspire later imitation of these language exemplars. Thus, the conditions of frequency and imitation, emphasized by Bybee (2010) as the key elements in learning a language, are met.

Additionally, learners engaged in OILE activities learn the language as a whole in its organic, natural version and extract linguistic rules and generalizations based on their exposure to it. Depending on individual backgrounds and experiences through and beyond OILE, different learners experience different levels of extraction. Some may be supported by their traditional classroom learning experiences, and others will extract the linguistic features on their own (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; examples of each of the levels of extraction are provided in the section on OILE research). In either case, UBL predicts that linguistic knowledge emerges from the usage events. To date, several studies (e.g., Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Sockett, 2014) have shown that some level of extraction indeed occurs through OILE activities.
Finally, UBL claims that language is ultimately learned through exposure to authentic language exemplars and through the meaningful use of language as a means of actual communication. To engage in OILE activities is to immerse oneself in such exemplars, where the actual delivery of a message (e.g., an opinion about a musician or a movie) is the only purpose of language use. This in itself is a strong indication that OILE is a practical extension of the UBL theoretical model of language and language learning.

Constructivism and Learner Autonomy

As UBL emphasizes, language learning is governed by general learning principles, and so it is useful to examine OILE and OILL through the lens of domain-general theories of learning. A theoretical perspective on learning that aligns with the theories of UBL is the constructivist view of learning. According to constructivism, learners create their own learning, which means they transform and organize reality extracted from interactions with the environment using common intellectual principles (Candy, 1991; Schunk, 2012). Thus, knowledge is produced through interpretation of socially conditioned messages meaning language that is used in particular social situations (Benson, 2001). Effective learning, from the constructivist perspective, involves the learners’ active participation, through social interaction, in determining their process of learning and in deciding what meaning it has for them. Therefore, learning will be most effective when learners are fully involved in decisions about the content and processes of learning (Benson, 2001). This idea of autonomous learning is reflected in the freedom of OILE learners to choose to engage in online activities, how active they wish to be, and how they use the knowledge extracted from these activities. For example, some learners choose to watch a
movie with subtitles in their native language; some, however, watch the movie with subtitles in the original language or without subtitles at all. Benson (2001) emphasizes that each learner creates his or her own interpretation of what he or she is learning and his or her unique construct of knowledge.

Social constructivism, as conceptualized by Vygotsky (1978), is especially significant for informal online learning environments. Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) stipulates that through interacting with more knowledgeable peers, one gradually develops an independent problem-solving mechanism. Meanings acquired through linguistic interaction are internalized by the learner as the directive communicative speech of others, and then they are transformed into self-directive inner speech (as cited in Benson, 2001). In the OILL environment learners engage in various activities where they interact, directly and indirectly, with the speakers of the target language, and the ZPD can be observed on many different levels. For example, watching a movie in German with English subtitles may be viewed as a highly guided activity, where the learner is only passively participating in the input. Watching the movie with German subtitles, however, constitutes an engagement with “a more knowledgeable peer;” this activity requires more active participation on the part of the learner, who cannot rely on the English translation. While the majority of input in OILL remains on the passive level, there are also numerous opportunities for the learner to interact with a native speaker. In such situations—for example, posting on forums—criteria for the ZPD are met. At first, the learner may only read the posts of persons fluent in German; with time, he or she may post a short comment to these posts, eventually leading to longer exchanges and perhaps even a longer conversation with the author of the post or an entry by the learner him- or herself (Sockett, 2014).
Moreover, combining OILL activities with classroom instruction presents an even better opportunity for effective learning of a language within the ZPD. Under these circumstances learners, even those who engage in wild experiences on their own, have a valuable resource in the person of their teacher to help them understand many aspects of the wild language that they encounter (Clark et al., 2011; Eskildsen, 2009; Wagner, 2015). The teacher can not only explain the language, structures, or cultural circumstances for the learner’s wild experience, but also lead him or her through more focused steps to find out more about the topic, or to practice observed language through structured activities and build on them. This guidance can not only enhance learner’s skills but also encourage him or her to undertake an autonomous exploration of similar activities.

Constructivist philosophy implies that learners must take ownership of their learning process and meaning making, consistent with Little’s (1994) claim that all successful learning is autonomous. Autonomy is a concept in which learners develop their own ways of extracting knowledge. According to Holec (1981), it means learners’ having responsibility for all aspects of their learning, including determining the objectives, defining the content and progression, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring their progress, and evaluating what they have experienced. This control over learning may take a variety of forms in the learning process for different individuals (Benson, 2001).

UBL is, essentially, a constructivist theory of language acquisition. All language knowledge “is ‘constructed’ on the basis of the input” (Goldberg, 2009, p. 93), so true participation in usage events can happen only through active participation of the learner, who extracts information and constructs a new set of skills based on it. Consistent with this premise,
the OILE environment gives learners the opportunity to truly engage in the real-life events and construct their own learning through online informal experiences.

Language Learning in the Wild

It is often argued that one of the most important tenets of UBL, authentic experiences with the language (Barlow & Kemmer, 2000) cannot happen behind the classroom door (Clark et al., 2011). Learning happens “through practice…in the everyday activities of communities of language users” (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 96), and second language learners often not only have the goal of speaking another language, but also of becoming a part of its community and engaging in the social and cultural environment of that language (Wagner, 2015). Thus, language learning through real usage events can only happen in the wild (Hutchins, 1995), that is, through unplanned and unanticipated interactions with native speakers handling a situation in the L2 outside of the learner’s comfort zone.

The term “in the wild” originates with Hutchins (1995), who described the learning conditions in everyday environments as unstructured and depending on real life events and reactions. He argued that bringing the lab tools into the wild creates an opportunity to truly understand the actual occurrence. Following this concept, Wagner (2015, p. 116) argues that L2 learners should participate in and explore the L2 environment. However, Clark et al. (2011) propose that learning in the wild should be connected to traditional classroom learning rather than being viewed as a separate opportunity to learn a second language. In fact, their study focuses particularly on the possibilities of a connection between classrooms and the wild. They note that activities in the classroom can initiate, form and support language practice and learning
outside of it, and, in turn, activities in the wild can be harvested and reflected on to strengthen language learning and develop resources for the language learners (Clark et al., 2011).

While offering the potential to enliven instructional practice, language learning in the wild is limited to environments where actual L2 communities are easily accessible and to second, rather than foreign, language instruction. Nevertheless, true, spontaneous, or wild contact with the language is crucial for entering another cultural world. A viable solution connecting the ideas of the wild research and tenets of UBL may be a branch of research following UBL tenets and using many ideas and strategies of learning in the wild–OILL.

Informal Learning

One of the major advocates for informal learning, Cross (2007, p. 15), points out that “learning … enables you to participate successfully in life, at work, and in the groups that matter to you.” Informal learning occurs in all situations and during all life experiences, regardless of whether it takes place in school, at home or in any other context. Given this ubiquity of learning environments, it is hardly possible to not learn throughout one’s life. As Cross (2007, p. 17) notes: “Most learning experiences blend both formal and informal aspects. Sometimes public transport is the best way to get somewhere; other times it’s better to take one’s own path.” Yet, in many classrooms the necessity of the mutual support of formal and informal learning is often ignored. For example, in a typical FL classroom, while there is a lot of pressure on teachers to use authentic materials and communication, teachers are often confused as to how to navigate between the textbook (e.g., teaching students rules of conjugations) and authentic materials (often filled with grammar that has not been discussed in class). Allowing students to be more
autonomous and engage on their own in wild experiences with the L2 is an example of “taking one’s own path,” as contrasted with the “public transport” of carefully designed instruction. Supplementing classroom instruction with OILL exemplifies the blending of formal and informal learning.

Informal learning is not a new idea; on the contrary, it has been discussed for at least the last century. However, not a lot of attention in educational research has been given to this form of pursuing knowledge (Benson, 2001). While informal learning is generally conceptualized as occurring outside of the classroom, no learning, including learning that takes place inside a classroom, is really possible without informal learning, especially in subjects like language learning. This is why it is crucial to integrate informal learning strategies into the regular classroom-based curriculum.

Informal learning is important in FL learning for several reasons. First, learning another language is a life-long process. Regardless of whether one lives in an L2 country, whoever wants to achieve a working level of an L2 must engage in language-related activities far beyond the end of classroom instruction. Another reason informal learning is important for success in learning an L2 is that any learning of an L2 in a classroom is merely an introduction to basic rules, words, and structures. Learning strategies and ways of extracting knowledge of constructions and language elements (e.g., words, structures, grammatical rules) from formal and informal materials and events contributes to the development of successful language learners. Unfortunately, these skills are rarely taught in FL classes; instead, determined or gritty students have to figure them out on their own. As Cross (2007) notes, “Learners need to be attracted to
learning experiences” (Cross, 2007, p. 18). The source of these skills and methods for teaching them lie in the realm of informal learning.

Online Informal Learning of English

Where informal learning meets UBL, and perhaps the best realization of language learning in the wild outside of a physical L2 environment, is online informal learning of English, or OILE. The term originates from research by Kusyk and Sockett (2012) and refers to online informal experiences with the target language—in their study, English. It centers around students’ informal engagement in activities in virtual environments that are authentic English events, e.g., movies, videos, television programs, music, video games, informational or entertainment websites, and the like. Sockett (2014) emphasizes that this sort of learning is often unintentional and merely a by-product of other activities. Therefore, critical to OILE is that the goal of the learner is not necessarily language learning itself, but rather pure entertainment or gathering information about something other than the language (Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sockett, 2014).

According to Sockett and Toffoli (2012) and Sockett (2013), several important characteristics lie at the core of OILE. First, OILE activities are not merely online tools and applications that allow direct or indirect interaction with an L2; they must be distinguished from other types of non-formal and formal online learning tools and activities. Technology has been rapidly developing in language education, and there is an array of technology tools available for in- and out-of-class language learning. These include full online platforms and programs like Rosetta Stone, and Tell Me More, Pimsleur’s programs, language learning applications like
DuoLingo, chat and language exchange apps like Hello Talk or Tandem, and numerous websites with conversation exchange options like LiveMocha. Additionally, there are websites and apps that help people practice certain aspects of language as well as YouTube instructional or informational videos and informational websites. These applications and tools are solely dedicated to helping FL students learn, and they are specifically designed for this purpose. Because of this, such tools are usually organized based on a textbook- or classroom-like curriculum and imitate, at least to some extent, an academic setting or a textbook style of learning. Even when such tools include authentic L2 materials, they are often adapted according to lesson objectives or are presented simply as a means of learning a language rather than as entertainment in itself. Examples of learning-centered technology tools also include well-established fields of technology use in FL, like Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Because OILE is premised on the idea that informal learning “occurs naturalistically, using resources not specifically tailored for educational purposes and which are situated outside of any institutional context” (Sockett, 2014, p. 11), these tools are not included in OILE research and resources, although research in this area shows these tools have a positive influence on learning a new language and certainly should be a part of the regular curriculum.

The defining characteristic of OILE is its insistence that learning be unintentional, unconscious, and incidental. During OILE activities, the learner is largely unaware that learning is taking place (Sockett, 2014). Sockett defines OILE activities as “emerging from an intention to communicate” (p. 12), which stands in close relationship to the main tenet of UBL, wherein communication is the key element and main purpose of any language learning. An OILE learner engages in activities to exchange opinions about their favorite TV show or musician. Thus,
learning of language is “merely a by-product of this decision” (p. 130), which is closely related to the idea of learner autonomy that many researchers (e.g., Benson, 2001; Benson & Reinders, 2011) argue lies at the core of successful language learning. Toffoli and Sockett (2015) indicate that the activity may not necessarily be defined as informal, but the decision to engage in it may be. OILE happens without following any order or progression known to the learner and does not follow any timetable.

The existing studies on OILE (e.g., Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sockett, 2014; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012, 2015) have mainly focused on determining to what degree and in what ways students are being exposed to OILE practices. These studies have primarily involved university students in France, and the results may be generalized to the typical non-specialist learners of English in non-English-speaking European countries. These studies explored students’ use of Facebook, blogs, or forums; reading texts in English online; participating in virtual worlds where they used English; and chatting or exchanging emails in English as well as watching shows and movies or listening to music in English. The results indicated that almost all participants were actively involved, although with varied frequency, in some OILE events. The most commonly listed activities included TV shows, movies, and music in English. Although the majority of students indicated that they chose these activities because they were interested in the content and in being current with the newest trends in the English-speaking culture, most noticed that these practices also strongly improved their English skills.

While Sockett and his colleagues (Sockett & Toffoli, 2012; Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sackett, 2014; Sackett & Toffoli, 2015) collected a great deal of information from English learners about the degree and type of their engagement in OILE, Cole and Vanderplank (2016)
actually compared learning in the traditional, instruction-based setting with learning in the virtual wild. Two types of Brazilian learners of English were participants in the study: fully autonomous self-instructed learners (FASILs) who had learned English mostly through informal contact with the language, and classroom-trained learners (CTLs) who were current long-term students at leading private English language centers in Brazil. The participants were selected based on socio-economic status, age, educational level, and years of learning English and assessed on seven aspects of language proficiency; they were also interviewed on their attitudes and beliefs. Results indicated that FASILs had significantly better scores on a range of skills and knowledge in formal and informal settings. An interesting detail of the results was the performance of FASILs on the grammatical judgment test. While having no formal instruction on grammar rules beyond the very basic instances, the FASILs significantly outperformed learners who had been taught sophisticated grammar structures, including the ones present on the test. Moreover, FASILs’ advantage was independent of the time spent engaging in informal learning activities.

Based on these results, Cole and Vanderplank (2016) suggest that “adult learners can and do achieve high levels of English language proficiency without formal training” (p. 40). Therefore, even if some researchers (e.g., Reinders & White, 2011) argue that uncontrolled and unguided access to authentic materials can be more harmful than helpful to the learning process, informal online language learning may have a much stronger influence on learning than is commonly assumed (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Sockett, 2014).
Emotions in Education

“The classroom is an emotional place” (Boakearts & Pekrun, 2015, p. 76) and “students’ emotions have profound effects on their attentional engagement with academic tasks” (p. 78). This effect of emotion on learning applies beyond traditional classroom settings to informal, virtual, and personal environments. According to Reeve (2009), an emotion can be defined as “a coordinated reaction typically covering four domains: subjective feelings, biological/physical reactions, purposive (goal-directed) behavior, and a social component that guides emotional expression and interpretation in situ” (as cited in Gregersen et al., 2014, p. 575). Emotions involve not only subjective feelings, but also attention and cognition, facial expressions, and cardiovascular and hormonal changes (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). According to Boakearts and Pekrun (2015, p. 78), “emotions prepare us for doing something.” In the most general terms, the function of negative emotions like anxiety, frustration, shame, boredom, or anger is to cause an immediate action of a flight, change of strategy, hiding, or an attack—actions that are a necessary means for survival in general. Positive emotions, on the other hand, like motivation, joy, engagement, pride, hope, or relaxation influence more long-term actions or an action to be performed at a later time. Emotions profoundly affect students’ engagement, achievement, and identity, which also implies that they are of critical importance for the agency of educational institutions and society at large (Boakearts & Pekrun, 2015). Many researchers agree that there is no cognition without emotions (Clore & Schiller, 2016) and that emotions affect the focus and the process of cognition (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009).

In the field of second language acquisition, more emphasis is put on the cognitive than the emotional aspects of learning a language (Swain, 2013) although research on motivation and
other emotional phenomena have been influencing teaching methods and strategies of language learning in different ways. Many researchers agree that learning another language is not just a cognitive process, but a very emotional one (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz & Young, 2001; Swain, 2013). UBL researchers, while advocating for the development of practical applications that align with the theory, have not made any claims about the implications of emotions for UBL. The question thus arises; what role do emotions play in learning a language in a manner aligned with the UBL model? This is a gap that needs further exploration. Thus, the proposed research investigates emotions in conjunction with OILL, with the goal of opening a discussion on emotional effects in UBL.

Negative Emotions and Foreign Language Anxiety

The dominant theories of emotion in psychology, education, and related fields have been primarily focused on “man’s shortcomings, his illness, his sins” (Snyder & Lopez, 2009, p. 3) but have paid little attention to human potentialities and achievable aspirations (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 1998, 2001; Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014; Reeve, 2014; Seligman, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2009). This negative tendency has not been different in the field of second and foreign language education (MacIntyre et al., 2016). In fact, perhaps the most widely studied aspect of emotions in second language acquisition (SLA) is the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety (Gregersen, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz at al., 1995, 1988).

While related to three main factors of performance anxiety—communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—it has been argued that FL anxiety is not merely a combination of these three fears transferred to the foreign language learning
environment but rather are “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). It follows that people who generally are more anxious may display no characteristics of FL anxiety at all and people who are generally not anxious at all may be very anxious in all or certain components of the language learning experience (Horwitz, 1995; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991).

Language learning in itself is a unique phenomenon that involves learning a communication skill typically acquired in and strongly associated with the early developmental stages. Adults learning another language may therefore often feel like immature children, unable to communicate their message regardless of their age, experience, or education. Guiora (1984) argues that learning another language directly threatens an individual’s self-concept and worldview. To communicate at all, complex and non-spontaneous mental operations are required and any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual’s self-concept as a competent communicator. This may in turn lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic. Second language communication is necessarily problematic because it involves constant risk taking in an environment of linguistic and socio-cultural standards that are usually uncertain or even unknown to learners. Authentic communication in another language is also limited because of the immature command of the second language relative to the first. A language learner’s self-esteem is vulnerable to the awareness that the range of communicative choices and authenticity is restricted, and many students believe that to have any chance of comprehending the target language message they must understand every word that is spoken (Horwitz et al., 1986).
A major finding in the FL anxiety research is that higher FL anxiety leads to lower language achievement (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mercer et al., 2012; Oxford, 1999). Students with a higher level of FL anxiety tend to get worse grades in a language class and are more apt to drop out of the course or not continue learning. The negative emotion of anxiety affects cognitive processing at all stages of learning a language: the input stage, processing stage, and output stage (usually the most affected one) (Mercer et al., 2012).

To date, a number of solutions to address FL anxiety have been proposed. Many of the suggestions constitute different teaching methodologies (such as community language learning; Horwitz et al., 1986) or teaching strategies (e.g., no immediate error correction and allowing students to speak with errors to encourage communication). Even if helpful in lowering the negative feelings of anxiety, however, these approaches nevertheless address the problem from the problem-focused perspective, which can result only in bringing the situation toward a state of neutrality (Seligman, 2002). From the point of view of positive psychology (e.g., Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001; Isen & Reeve, 2005; MacIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer, 2016; Seligman, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2009), a problem cannot be solved if the focus is on the problem itself. Seligman (2002) argues that getting rid of what we do not want in our lives does not automatically bring what we do want. Instead, an approach is needed in which the positive aspects of the situation or environment are enhanced to such an extent that they overshadow the negative factors and become a driving force in the experience. This study proposes such an approach, using online virtual environments as a medium for creating more positive experiences for learners of other languages.
Positive Emotions in Language Learning

Positive emotions are defined as pleasant or desirable situational responses and markers of people’s overall well-being or happiness that enhance also their future growth and success (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001; 2013). The emotions broaden perception, attention, motivation, reasoning, and social cognition (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001; 2013; Seligman, 2002). One of the most influential theories on positive emotions is the broaden-and-build theory proposed by Fredrickson (e.g., Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001; 2013). The theory holds that while negative emotions (such as language anxiety) tend to narrow learners’ thought-action repertoires, (causing, for example, limited participation in class), positive emotions tend to broaden learners’ dynamic moment-to-moment thought-action repositories, which results in acquiring various types of personal resources that last beyond the timescale of the positive emotions itself (Gregersen et al., 2014). According to Fredrickson (2001; 2013), positive emotions result in broader attention, greater working memory, enhanced verbal fluency, and increased openness to information, and they can facilitate enduring success by opening avenues of constructive thoughts and actions. The personal resources accrued during states of positive emotions are durable, outlasting the transient emotional states that led to their acquisition. These resources can be drawn on whenever they are needed, even if the individual does not feel positive at that moment. Although positive emotions are temporary and transient, they encourage a broadened range of actions that over time builds enduring personal resources. Research has also shown that positive emotions produce more creative (Isen & Reeve, 2005) and varied (Kahn & Isen, 1993) actions.
These characteristics have important implications for learning a foreign language and for learning in general. For example, it is hardly imaginable that any learning could take place without the learner’s attention. Working memory is also of a great importance in any learning, but while in some subjects the emphasis is put on understanding a concept, the majority of language learning happens through memorization of patterns and words (Bybee, 2008) or, in UBL parlance, constructions. The durability of the personal resources accumulated during experiences of positive emotions can also significantly add to developing autonomous skills in learning a language. For example, a learner who has the desire to speak fluently or read a novel in German will be able to stay focused on achieving the goal despite hardships present during the learning process. On the other hand, a learner who does not have positive feelings connected to his or her goal will potentially have a much harder time staying committed to the goal when learning is confusing, intimidating, and hard. That follows that the positive feelings gained during watching an interesting movie in German or listening to a song, for example, build the learner’s desire to become fluent and, therefore, also his or her resilience and persistence in learning. Given this premise, students engaging in activities strictly focused on enjoyment (e.g., watching a German movie) will have much more resilience and interest in engaging in less enjoyable activities (e.g., practicing grammatical structures) in their regular class.

Emotions in Online Informal Learning of Language

OILE researchers have described the emotional aspects of language learning rather vaguely, while at the same time strongly indicating that the emotional side of OILE may be the driving force behind its success. The most commonly mentioned emotional aspects of OILE are
freedom of choice (of activities), the sense of belonging to a community, the concept of self or the imagined future self (referred to also as language identity), the lack of affective filter or affective pressure, and intrinsic motivation. OILE researchers also often use words like “like,” “engage,” “personal,” “interests,” “involved,” and “attention” to describe learners’ attitudes toward OILE (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sockett, 2014; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012; Toffoli & Sockett, 2015). Sockett (2014) draws a link between OILE and Krashen’s (1985) theory of the affective filter, which might be considered a precursor to foreign language anxiety research. According to Krashen (1985), the affective filter is a mental block that prevents the learner from fully utilizing the comprehensible input (necessary listening and reading material in large amounts) he or she receives for language acquisition. The filter is up when the learner is not motivated, is lacking in self-confidence, or is anxious, and it is down when the learner is not concerned with the possibility of failure, considers himself a potential member of the group speaking the L2, or when he forgets he or she is interacting with another language (Krashen, 1985). Sockett (2014) suggests that learners engaged in OILE activities are not exposed to affective pressure and are highly motivated. This is because they chose their own content, are not being evaluated, and the OILE context is synonymous with leisure and, “as such, is low on anxiety and high on motivation” (Sockett, 2014, p. 25).

While these assumptions imply that OILE environments create a place for positive emotions to flourish, the data on these emotional aspects are not emphasized in Sockett’s (2014) research and are more of an implicit assumption than a clear outcome of his studies. It is assumed that if students engage in watching a new episode of their favorite show, this choice is driven by their interest in the show or in the activity of watching a show; however, it is not clear
if the affective filter is indeed not present (or very low) during these endeavors. In fact, many participants in the studies by Sockett and colleagues (Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sockett, 2014; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012; Toffoli & Sockett, 2015) indicate having at least some trouble understanding the material, while others choose to engage in only passive input (e.g., watching movies or shows or listening to music) rather than more active activities (e.g., chatting with native speakers or engaging in discussion forums). Very little data draw clear conclusions about which emotions are present during OILE activities and their relationship to students’ learning.

The proposed study aims to address this gap and look closer at what happens in online informal learning environments and what emotions are at play among the students. If the OILL environment is a space for learning with a high ratio of positive to negative emotions, the findings will introduce implications for lowering FL anxiety and the affective filter. Identifying a space in which effective learning takes place and is fostered by a higher level of positive emotions than is usually experienced in a regular FL classroom has the potential for changing the way languages are taught, as well as students’ general attitudes toward learning them.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether an informal online context for learning a foreign language resulted in greater language gain and fostered more positive emotions compared to formal more traditional learning practices. The research questions and hypotheses guiding the study were as follows:

1. What is the difference in the overall language gain between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities?

   Null Hypothesis 1 (H₀₁): There is no difference between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities in their overall language gain.

   Alternative Hypothesis 1 (H₁₁): There is a difference between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities in their overall language gain.

2. Does the trend over time in participants’ emotions differ depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group?

   Null Hypothesis 2 (H₀₂): There is no trend over time in participants’ emotions differing depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group.
Alternative Hypothesis 2 (H₁₂): There is a trend over time in participants’ emotions differing depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group.

3. Is there a correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group?

Null Hypothesis 3 (H₀₃): There is no correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group.

Alternative Hypothesis 3 (H₁₃): There is a correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group.

This chapter presents the setting in which the study took place and eligibility criteria for participants as well as the measures, research instruments, and procedures used to collect and analyze data.

Setting and Participants

The a priori G-Power analysis for the independent sample t-test indicated that the power level of .8 would be achieved with the sample of at least 128 participants (64 in each group). Other G-Power analyses for the Repeated Measures Mixed Design ANOVA test indicated a number of 12 (with the number of measurements of 6); therefore, the higher 128 was established as the number to achieve reliable results for this study. However, due to the complexity of the study, time, and effort it required as well as a limited number of learners of German who completed at least two semesters of college German, I anticipated only about half of this number of learners would be interested in the study. Eventually, 61 learners of German enrolled in the study, which given these difficult circumstances, can be considered a success. Nevertheless, only 16 participants completed the entire ten hours and all required study elements.
The participants were required to have completed at least two semesters of college-level German or equivalent and to be not enrolled in any German course at the time of the study. This was to ensure that the only exposure to German happened through the engagement in the study to achieve clear results for their language gain. Participants were recruited through a call sent to German college instructors in the Chicago area as well as to instructors at colleges throughout the U.S. via educational forums (e.g., the AERA second language forum, the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages [ACTFL] SIG forums, and the American Association of Teachers of German [AATG] forum). The call included the general description of the study with details about time commitment and compensation and a link to the informational website (http://iwonalech.wixsite.com/virtualgerman) that included a short introduction video, instructional videos about the different tools used in the study, descriptions and links to the tools, and links to the Informed Consent (that also served as the sign up form) and questionnaires. The website also featured a chat window through which potential participants could contact me with any questions before and during the study.

Participants who enrolled in the study were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the experimental group (EG) or the control group (CG) and were given a study ID number to protect their identity. They then used this number for all future actions in the study: filling out the demographic questionnaire, registering for the German activities platform Coursesites, filling out the Emotion Forms as well as taking the proficiency tests.

The EG engaged in an informal mode of learning German. These participants chose from a wide variety of authentic German materials that had not been altered for educational purposes. These included original German movies and television shows (with German and/or English
subtitles), German videos, interviews with celebrities, programs in their original version, German informational websites (e.g., German news or German sport sites), German music with and without captioned lyrics, and German video games as well as known social media applications in German (e.g., Facebook). The CG engaged in more traditional pre-planned activities that mirrored activities or homework used in a regular language class. These included educational materials adopted from the three most commonly used textbooks in the third semester of German (intermediate German 1): *Denk Mal, Keleidoskop*, and *Stationen* (with the majority of materials with *Kaleidoskop*). Examples of CG activities included prepared altered texts for reading and listening with an array of exercises (e.g., questions, multiple choice, fill-in-the blanks); short quizzes for vocabulary practice; vocabulary games and exercises for matching, eliminating or completing words; and pedagogical short videos with follow-up exercises as well as audio recording with dialogs or short stories with follow-up exercises.

All activities for both groups were posted on the Coursesites learning management system at coursesites.com in form of a course. Figures 1 and 2 present the entry page for both courses, the experimental and control course, respectively.

Both courses were organized thematically according to seven main themes/modules:

- Module 1: Familienleben, das Ich (Family life, Me)
- Module 2: Liebe & Beziehungen (Love and Relationships)
- Module 3: Gesellschaft, Kultur, Umwelt (Community, Culture, Environment)
- Module 4: Freizeit & Urlaub (Leisure Time and Vacation)
- Module 5: Arbeiten & Lernen (Work and Learning)
- Module 6: Tägliches Leben (Everyday Life)
• Module 7: Medien & Wissenschaft (Media and Science)

Figure 1: “Module und Aktivitäten” (Modules and Activities) page on Coursesites for the experimental group

Figure 2: “Willkommen! Hier Starten!” (Welcome! Start here!) entry page Coursesites control course
Each module included subfolders with different organization between the groups. The EG’s subfolders were divided into types of activities as follows:

- **LESEN**: Lektüren, Artikel, Bücher (Reading: stories, articles, books)
- **MUSIK**: Lieder, Songtexte, Musikstars (Music: songs, lyrics, music stars)
- **FILME**: Kurzfilme, Dokus, Spielfilme (Films: short films, documentaries, movies)
- **ZUM LACHEN**: Witze, Komiker, Lustige Videos (To laugh: jokes, comedians, funny videos)
- **MEDIEN**: Zeitungen, Nachrichten, Berichte (Media: newspapers, news, information)
- **SOZIALE MEDIEN**: Netzwerken, Netzgemeinschaften, Foren (Social media: social networks, network communities, forums)
- **FERNSEHEN**: Serien, Sendungen, Shows (Television: TV series, programs, shows)
- **SPIELE**: Kreuzworträtsel, Wortspiele, Videospiele (Games: crossword puzzles, word games, video games)

These subfolders included different amounts and types of materials to ensure the richness of choice; however, they were merely meant to encourage participants to explore any other materials beyond the examples.

The CG subfolders included thematic categories depending on the theme of each module. For example, the first folder “Family Life and Me” included subfolders: “Me” and “Family Life” separately. These included different activities like texts in the written and audio versions with an array of exercises focusing on vocabulary and some on grammar, short videos created for educational purposes with a script and follow-up exercises, vocabulary lists and quizzes or exercises for practice, and similar. Additionally, each module included a subfolder called...
“Grammatik” (Grammar) including a grammar review of the topics included in the lexical part of the module or related to it, usually following the organization of the textbook from which the majority of exercises came.

Both courses included instructions in the form of a text and a short instructional video about how participants should proceed with the materials presented in the course. The videos were screencast recordings guiding participants through the organization of the course and the website as well as explaining the steps of the study. Additionally, both groups were provided a folder with helpful tools. For example, the CG had a folder with links to the dictionary, a German keyboard, conjugation and grammar website, and pronunciation online tool – typical tools usually provided by every language instructor. Only the EG was given a link to two German online dictionaries (one of which was a German to German dictionary and another German to English/ English to German).

Participants in the CG were instructed to follow the activities in the modules in the order they were displayed; however, they were allowed to skip some activities to complete others they liked better as long as they completed some activities in each of the subfolders, including the grammar subfolder. The CG learners were also instructed to spend approximately one and a half hours in each module overall to complete 10 hours and experience activities in every thematic module. These conditions were to mirror the typical classroom work as much as it was possible in the strictly virtual passive environment of this study.

Participants in the EG, on the other hand, were only given tips rather than clear instructions on how to navigate between the activities and folders and suggestions on what they could do with the activities and materials. This group had the freedom to engage in any activity
in any folder they wished; however, I advised them to try to do something in every module to ensure the equal opportunity for thematic exposure in comparison with the CG. The EG learners were also encouraged to go beyond the materials available on Coursesites and explore different materials on their own. This was to encourage their autonomous skills and “teach” them to be active independent learners.

To measure the participants’ time spent on the activities as well as to monitor when they were online to administer the Emotion Form, participants were required to clock in each time they accessed their course and clock out when they left the activities. The tool used for this purpose was Time Clock Wizard, a simple application available for a desktop computer or phone (any operating system). Whenever a participant logged in to Coursesites, she or he was prompted to clock in before starting any activities. During the time participants were clocked in, I sent them the EF survey at random times in 15-40 minutes’ intervals via email or text message. This was to gain insight into their emotions at the very moment they were engaged in one of the German activities.

Participants who completed 10 hours of activities and all required questionnaires and tests were compensated for their time in the amount of $50 and were entered into a drawing for a Kindle reader. Participants who signed up for the study and took the pre-test only were compensated $10. Additionally, all participants who enrolled in the study and registered to Coursesites received a year’s access to the digital library of the original German materials (e.g., movies, TV shows, books, music) as well as the structured activities in both courses after completion of the study.
Measures

Background Information about Participants

First, the Interest and Demographic Questionnaire (IDQ), administered through Qualtrics, was provided to the learners at the beginning of the experiment. The IDQ asked about the participants’ interest and previous experiences in German and information about their language learning experiences in general. It included questions about their familiarity with other languages and/or participants’ first or native language as well as their familiarity with and types and frequency of use of authentic online informal resources in German. It also gathered basic demographic information like gender, age, and student status. For the specific questions and the structure of this instrument see Appendix A.

Measuring Language Gain

A German performance test (GPT) was given to participants at the beginning (as a pre-test) and at the end (as a post-test) of the study to measure language gain. The GPT constituted two parts. The first part was a comprehension self-grading test adopted from the proficiency assessing test at Goethe Institut, one of the most influential German language organizations and German testing providers in the world. The second part of the GPT was a written and oral test. The written part of the test included a commonly used Chaplin Test (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016) involving a short excerpt from the Charlie Chaplin movie Modern Times that participants were supposed to describe in the most detail possible. Instead of the validated IELTS rating rubric that would be difficult to transfer to the German language due to its specificity for the English language, a different assessment rubric was used, the Written Proficiency Test Scale by the
American Council of the Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2012). See Appendix B for the GPT and Appendix C for the grading rubric.

The oral part of the GPT was created based on the typical questions posed in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) test, widely used not only in the United States but throughout the world for assessing oral proficiency (Liskin-Gasparro, 2003). Nine questions and two situations were included in this part of the test. The questions involved topics of personal and general interest, e.g. who the participant is and what she or he does; where she or he works or goes to school; what her or his interests are as well as when and in what circumstances these interests, school, or work have begun; and questions about the participant’s town and current happenings in it. Two questions were presented in a written form to which participants responded by speaking (an audio recording), seven questions were presented as audio recordings delivered by a German native speaker, and two situations were described in English (as they usually are in the regular ACTFL OPI test) and participants responded to them by speaking. The second situation also included an unanticipated complication that was recorded as an audio by a German native speaker. This part of the test was assessed with the general rubric used for the ACTFL OPI test.

All tests were administered through Coursesites. The written and oral parts requiring manual grading were copied and coded for each participant (including the information about whether the test was the pre- or post-test) to ensure true blind grading by the principal investigator. The OPI rubric for measuring the oral responses is included in Appendix D.
Measuring Emotions

Studies in the emotional and affective aspects of language learning have had one major limitation. Regardless of whether the data were analyzed using quantitative or qualitative methods, the majority of studies have relied on interviews or questionnaires that ask students to reflect on their feelings or emotions rather than having students report them as they take place. Perhaps the most recognized and validated research tool for measuring foreign language anxiety is the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale ([FLAS]; Horwitz et al., 1986). Other scales propose separating foreign language (FL) anxiety at different stages: The Input Anxiety Scale, Processing Anxiety Scale, and Output Anxiety Scale (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000) and consist of similar questionnaire measures. Qualitative interviews, even though they yield more detailed information about how students feel, also report learners’ beliefs about their anxiety or emotions after the fact rather than their actual emotions during the process of learning.

However, one of the leading researchers on emotions, Fredrickson (2001), argues that emotions are micro-moments, seconds of feelings that take place during interaction with someone or something and Reeve (2015, p. 340) defines emotions as “short-lived, feeling-purposive-expressive-bodily responses.” Given these characteristics of emotions, reflective measures do not seem to be the best choice. To address this gap, this current study utilized a research tool that has been widely used in psychological and educational research but to date and to the knowledge of the author, has not been used in any foreign language environment.

The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) is a research procedure that studies what people do, feel, and think during their daily lives (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1983). It consists of a short self-report survey given to participants at random times during an assessed activity and
“combines the ecological validity of naturalistic behavioral observation with the nonintrusive nature of diaries and the precision of scaled questionnaire measures” (Hektner et al., 2007, p.7). Initially, the ESM was used with help of a pager, paper, and pencil. Participants were beeped at random times during their daily activities and at the moment of the beep, they were required to fill out a short paper-and-pencil survey. Currently, many advanced-technology tools are available to use this tool for research.

The ESM survey in this research is called the Emotion Form (EF) and includes questions about the thoughts and activities of the participants while being “beeped”: “What was the main thing you were doing?” “What else were you doing at the same time?” and “What were you thinking about?” The next two questions focused on the participants’ sense of choice of the activity they were engaged in while being beeped: “Think back on how you got into this activity…Were you doing this activity mainly because you” with four choices of answers: a) wanted to, b) had to complete some hours of the study, c) had nothing else to do, d) thought you should do it and c) other with a blank for a free response. The next question asked: “Indicate how much choice you felt you had in engaging in this activity,” and participants were prompted to select one of five responses on a 5-point Likert scale: none at all, a little, a moderate amount, a lot, a great deal. This question is included in the EF to directly measure whether the choice of engaging in a particular activity, as suggested by Sockett (2014), had a significant influence on the language gain.

Next, eight items (four positive and four negative) describing the most frequent and appropriate emotions that could take place in a learning environment like the one present in this
study were listed, and participants were prompted to indicate how strongly they were experiencing each of the eight emotions. The emotions listed were

1. Interested, alert, curious
2. Irritated, annoyed, frustrated
3. Embarrassed, self-conscious
4. Fascinated, in awe, amazement
5. Inspired, uplifted
6. Proud, confident, or self-assured
7. Bored, disengaged, not interested
8. Overwhelmed or stressed

These emotions were selected from the 20 items included in Fredrickson’s Positivity Ratio Scale ([PRS], Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson, 2018). Fredrickson’s PRS is currently the most commonly used scale for assessing the ratio between positive and negative emotions as well as measuring the positive emotions themselves (Galanakis, 2016). Fredrickson identified 20 emotions, 10 positive and 10 negative, with each being additionally described – e.g., the positive emotion of amusement is accompanied by “fun-loving” and “silly.” In this study, only eight emotions were selected from this list for two reasons. First, some of the emotions listed on Frederickson’s scale (Frederickson, 2018) were not appropriate or very unlikely to be experienced during the German activities in this study (e.g., guilty, repentant or blameworthy, or love, closeness or trust). Second, given the frequency of the EF that participants were contacted (every 15-40 minutes during the activities), deciding among 20 emotions would most likely have led to missing data or unreliable responses. Additionally, some of the eight emotions were
slightly modified or renamed to fit the situational character of the study. For example, the emotion “disgust, distaste, or revulsion” on Frederickson’s scale (Fredrickson, 2018) was renamed “bored, disengaged, not interested” as the most closely corresponding equivalent that could occur in an educational environment.

The eight emotions were introduced with a prompt: “Indicate what emotions you felt when you were prompted to take this survey and how strongly you felt them.” Participants were asked to respond using a 4-point Likert scale following the guidelines from Fredrickson’s research, with the following items to choose from: not at all, a little, and moderately. The item “extremely” was modified to “very much” to better fit the potential choices in this particular study. Additionally, a more generalized scale of positivity was added from which participants reported their overall emotions: very negative, moderately negative, slightly negative, neither negative nor positive, slightly positive, moderately positive, and very positive,” which was introduced by the question: “Overall, how did you feel in the moment you were prompted to take this survey?” Finally, the participants had a chance to add any other thoughts and comments in an open-ended question at the end of the EF: “What are any other thoughts that come to your mind right now?” The EF is included in Appendix E.

The EF was administered through Qualtrics. Whenever a participant would clock in indicating starting the German activities, I would send the link to the EF survey via email or text message every 15-40 minutes until they clocked out. These time intervals were based on the recommendation by Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (2014) who indicated that the ESM form should not be given to participants more often than every 20 minutes during the measured time or activities to ensure participants will not become tired and the responses will remain reliable.
but at the same time enough data are collected to ensure validity. While the EF was usually sent every 20-40 minutes; occasionally, this time was shortened to 15 minutes when I noticed that some participants were clocking in for shorter period of times (e.g. 20 or 30 minutes).

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (2014) also recommend that the times participants are being “beeped” should not be predictable, to limit instances when participants expect the EF and think about the responses before they are asked to record them. Therefore, the exact times of the EF were often altered, and the EF was sent at random times. Due to the specific character of this instrument, the participants had a possibility to practice filling out the EF before completing the actual forms for the research; however, not many of them used this opportunity.

Procedures

The participants in this study were recruited from several places and colleges to ensure a diverse sample. Enrollment beyond the first semester of German is rather small; therefore, it was expected to be difficult to find students beyond the two semesters who wanted to engage in studying more German.

All introductory materials, videos, examples and explanations for the study were provided on a website where participants were also able to fill out the informed consent form and sign up for the study. After they signed up, they were randomly assigned to one of the two groups and received their login information for the Coursesites platform. As the first task, participants were asked to take the IDQ and the GPT. Then, they were prompted to start the German activities.
In the beginning phase of the study, when participants were becoming familiar with the platform, as well as throughout the entire study time, I was available for online chat and voice call to answer any questions. I was also available as a distance instructor and answered any questions about German itself. Since OILL is thought to be a supplement for regular class activities, having an instructor was a natural element that would be present if this method were implemented in a traditional class setting. I anticipated that most of my attention in the instructor role would be focused on the control group to mirror the traditional educational setting of a language class. I clearly indicated my availability to explain language concepts, words, structures or anything the participants might be struggling with. Interestingly, I did not receive any inquiries from the participants in the control group and only a few from the experimental group participants.

The call was sent out on the beginning of July, and the study was administered between July and August with the end date on August 15th. The study was open for new participants for one month, and each new participant was added to either the CG or the EG to achieve an even number in both groups.

The participants were instructed to log into the website at least every other day and were prompted to spend about one to two hours in each sitting (about five hours weekly) to complete 10 hours of activities within two weeks. However, the majority of participants followed their own schedule and engaged in the activities for very different periods of time. They were given a due date for completing the 10 hours to assure the completion of the study.
Data Analysis

The first research question was “What is the difference in the overall language gain between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities?” To address this question, first, the dependent variable, the overall language gain score, was calculated for each student in both groups based on the German test (GPT). Scores from the pre-test were compared with the scores from the post-test between the EG and CG using a non-parametric Mann-Whitney test, resulting in a score representing the overall language gain of participants. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was selected due to the small sample size and unequal samples sizes between the groups.

The second research question was “Does the trend in participants’ emotions differ over time depending on whether the participants are in the control or experimental group?” To address this question, data from the EF item on the overall emotions (question 5) was analyzed using a mixed design ANOVA to allow analysis of data measured in different moments across 6 points in time and how it differed between the groups.

To address the third research question, “Is there a correlation between language gain and emotions within both groups?”, the average emotion scores were compared to the language gain scores to see if a correlation between the emotions and the language gain scores existed.

Summary

The methods used in this study provided the necessary information and data to be able to address the research questions. The analysis of the data identified relationships between the language gain results, emotion trends over time, and the relationship between both. Additionally,
the analysis took into consideration attrition rates that yielded valuable information that was not detected by other calculations.
Participants

Sixty-one participants signed informed consent after they were recruited for the study through calls for participation on different educational forums and other contacts. Although the call was mostly sent out in the U.S. with the intention of recruiting only U.S. residents, eventually also participants from other countries were recruited due to a small number of interested learners. Out of the 61 enrolled participants, four have not completed the IDQ fully and their data were removed from any future calculations. Out of remaining 57 only 16 participants, 12 in the experimental and four in the control group, completed the full study with the pre- and post-test, all questionnaires, and ten hours of activities. Two more participants in the CG completed all required steps but with only five hours of the activities and due to the fact that there were only two of them and both in the control group, they were excluded from the statistical tests. Figure 3 shows the attrition of the 57 participants in the study.
Figure 3: Attrition of participants

Thirteen participants have never continued with the study beyond the IDQ and have never logged in to the German activities platform on Coursesites. Forty-four participants (77.2%) did log in to Coursesites, meaning they attempted to participate in the study’s activities and had a chance to view the activities in CG or EG depending on where they were assigned. Out of the 57 participants, 26 were assigned in the experimental group and 31 in the control group. On the beginning of the experiment, all participants were equally distributed between the groups, however, in the last phase of recruitment, when noticed that only two participants assigned to the CG were continuing with the study, several late-registering learners were assigned to the control group to achieve a similar number of active participants in both groups.

Interest and Demographic Questionnaire

According to the IDQ, out of 57 participants enrolled, 17 were male and 40 were female. Twenty-two were 18 to 25 years old, eight were 26-30, 13 were 31-40, and 14 were above 41
years old. The native language reported by the participants was mostly English (44 participants). Languages spoken as L1 also included Polish (4), Serbian (2), Spanish (2), Bulgarian (1), French (1), Lithuanian (1), Persian (Farsi) (1), and Ukrainian (1). Fifteen participants indicated they had completed two semesters of college German or the equivalent and the remaining majority had taken more than three semesters. When asked about their reasons for learning German, 27 participants indicated it was because they love German, 21 chose the option of “I wanted to learn some foreign language and German seemed like the most interesting one,” 16 participants indicated they have a German heritage and wanted to explore it deeper, nine admitted they needed credits in a language (or German), three indicated having a spouse or partner of German origin, and one participant wanted to understand what Rammstein, possibly the most famous German group in the world, or another musician sings about. Fifteen participants also chose to add other reasons, which varied among career, traveling interests, personal experiences related to the language or a German speaking country, or an educational interest.

An important element of this study was to find out how much time and effort German learners spend on learning German outside of any educational context (classroom) on their own as well as via the Internet. Out of the 57 participants who completed IDQ, 78% (45 participants) indicated that they had been learning German outside of their college classes, however, when looked at specific informal online activities, the majority of participants indicated most of such activities as rarely or never attempted. Table 1 shows the detailed frequencies of different activities in the German virtual wild environments.
Table 1: Frequencies of the Activities in the Virtual Wild in German

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Frequency/ Question</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you been learning German outside of your college classes?</td>
<td>78% (45)</td>
<td>22% (12)</td>
<td>Very often (once a week or more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quite often (3-4 times a month)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes (1-2 times a month)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely (less than once a month)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often you...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch original German movies or shows with German subtitles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch original German movies or shows with English subtitles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch original German movies or shows with subtitles in my native language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch original German movies or shows with no subtitles at all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen to German music with reading/analyzing lyrics</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen to German music without reading/analyzing lyrics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read the Web in German (written information in German)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) in German</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chat online in German with people I have never met in person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use voice services (MSN, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.) to talk to people in German</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engage in other online activities in German: .....</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how often you contribute to forums in German</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participate in a virtual world where you use German</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use German pseudonyms and avatars</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exchange emails with friends in German</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write a blog in German</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave comments on other people’s blog in German</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2.6 (4.9%)</td>
<td>2.6 (4.9%)</td>
<td>6 (11.2%)</td>
<td>11.6 (21.6%)</td>
<td>31 (57.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1

Research Question 1 is “What is the difference in the overall language gain between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities?” It was examined to address the following hypotheses.

- Null Hypothesis 1 (H01): There is no difference between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities in their overall language gain.

- Alternative Hypothesis 1 (H11): There is a difference between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional, textbook-based activities in their overall language gain.

To address this question and hypotheses a non-parametric Mann-Whitney test, measuring the ranks of the language gain scores between the CG and EG, was conducted. This test was selected due to a small an unbalanced sample. First, the overall language gain score was calculated which constituted the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores (the overall scores for the both parts of each test) for all participants who completed the study. Two participants in CG who completed all tests but only five hours of the activities were excluded from the calculations to ensure valid results. One participant in EG completed all tests and ten hours of the study, however, she submitted empty links to her audio responses which resulted in significantly lowering her scores. For this reason, she was also excluded from the calculations. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the CG and EG and Figure 4 illustrates the language gain scores in both CG and EG. Descriptively, both groups achieved language gain,
however, no differences between the language gain score was found between the groups as shown in Table 3 and Table 4 (p=.214).

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error Means Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Condition</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Gain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>13.326</td>
<td>6.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.64</td>
<td>15.312</td>
<td>4.617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Language Gain Scores in the CG and EG
Table 3: The Ranks of the Experimental and Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Condition</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Gain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>97.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Test Statistics for Mann-Whitney Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 is “Does the trend over time in participants’ emotions differ depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group?” This question examined the following two hypotheses.

- Null Hypothesis 2 (H₀₂): There is no trend over time in participants’ emotions differing depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group.
- Alternative Hypothesis 2 (H₁₂): There is a trend over time in participants’ emotions differing depending on whether participants are in the control or experimental group.

To address this question and hypotheses, a mixed design repeated measures ANOVA test was conducted. While 30 participants took the Emotion Form (EF) survey, many took it only a
few times. To achieve the most reliable data, a common denominator was computed resulting in selecting only 16 participants who also completed the full 10 hours of study. These participants completed at least 17 EFs, meaning they reported their emotions and activities at minimum 17 times during the study. Six representative points were selected, beginning with the first point in time and continuing every three points in time after that (so the selected time points were: the first, fourth, seventh, tenth, thirteenth, and sixteenth). These points of time are represented in the descriptive statics as Time Point 1=time1, Time Point 2=time4, Time Point 3=time7, Time Point 4=time10, Time Point 5=time13, Time Point 6=time16.

First, the homogeneity of variance within subjects assumption was tested with Maulchly’s Sphericity Test (see Table 4). This test indicated that the assumption of sphericity has not been violated (p>.05) and this univariate assumption was met.

Table 5: Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within Subjects</th>
<th>Mauchly's W</th>
<th>Approx. Chi-Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Greenhouse-Geisser</th>
<th>Epsilon&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Huynh-Feldt</th>
<th>Lower-bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>17.404</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the multivariate test (Table 6) was computed and indicated that all assumptions of normality have been met from any perspective (i.e., Pillai’s Trace, Wilks’ Lambda, Hotelling’s Trace, and Rosy’s Largest) due to p>.05. Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices has not been computed because there were fewer than two nonsingular cell covariance matrices, meaning the two levels comprising Condition share more of the variance than they explain (i.e., there is no sufficient variation between the two levels of Condition), which is causing the
problem of singularity and the inability to compute a covariance matrix. The homogeneity of variance between subjects was tested with Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances (Table 7). This test indicated there is homogeneity/equality of variance (p>.05) between the two Conditions on each of the six Time points (time 1 – time 16).

Table 6: Multivariate Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Hypothesis df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Noncent. Parameter</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillai's Trace</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>.838²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>4.191</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.705</td>
<td>.838²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>4.191</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>.838²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>4.191</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>.838²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>4.191</td>
<td>.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time * Condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillai's Trace</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.105²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.105²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.105²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.105²</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The test within-subjects effects, as seen in Table 8, indicated no statistically significant difference in the participants’ emotions over time (p=.675). Because of no statistical significance as well as the small sample sizes, the power of .218 is also very weak, indicating that only 21% of the time an effect of the factor can be observed. The data on the interaction between Time*Condition indicated that it was not statistically significant (p = .989) and has the very
weak power of .075. These results suggest the participants’ overall emotions stayed consistent over the duration of the intervention.

Table 7: Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time1</td>
<td>2.732</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time4</td>
<td>1.167</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time7</td>
<td>2.086</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time10</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time13</td>
<td>1.257</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time16</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Test of Within Subjects Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Noncent. Parameter</th>
<th>Observed Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>Sphericity Assumed</td>
<td>3.059</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>3.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse-Geisser</td>
<td>3.059</td>
<td>3.596</td>
<td>.851</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td>.625</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>2.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huynh-Feldt</td>
<td>3.059</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>3.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower-bound</td>
<td>3.059</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>3.059</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time * Condition</td>
<td>Sphericity Assumed</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse-Geisser</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>3.596</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huynh-Feldt</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower-bound</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error(time)</td>
<td>Sphericity Assumed</td>
<td>67.597</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse-Geisser</td>
<td>67.597</td>
<td>50.343</td>
<td>1.343</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huynh-Feldt</td>
<td>67.597</td>
<td>70.000</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower-bound</td>
<td>67.597</td>
<td>14.000</td>
<td>4.828</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As observed in the test of between-subjects effects shown in Table 9, there was also no statistically significant difference (p>.05) in the participants’ emotions across time between the experimental and control groups.

Table 9: Test of Between-Subject Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
<th>Noncent. Parameter</th>
<th>Observed Powera</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1989.753</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1989.753</td>
<td>251.747</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.947</td>
<td>251.747</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>110.653</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.904</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 indicates a very small difference on the score for the overall emotions, varying between 4.8 and 5.44 with the strongest change in 3 level.

Figure 5: Estimated Marginal Means of the Emotions Over Time
Figure 6 shows the same variation over time with the two groups, EG and CG, split. The graph illustrates the lack of differences between the two groups on any level: linear, quadratic, cubic, and further which indicate the different time points during the training. It can be here observed how the trends of emotions stay consistent over time and do not significantly differ between the groups.

Finally, Figure 7 represents the mean scores by Time*Condition. The graph illustrates the inferential tests data that indicate no difference in the overall emotions between the EG and CG, meaning that both groups felt quite similarly during the overall time of the experiment.
Figure 7: Estimated Marginal Means of Emotions over Time for CG and EG

Based on the above information, I failed to reject the null hypothesis for the second research question, indicating there is no difference between participants engaging in the uncontrolled authentic activities and participants exposed to more traditional textbook-based activities in their overall emotions and there is no trend over time in the participants’ emotions differing depending on whether the participants were in the control or experimental group.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked “Is there a correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group?” The following hypotheses were also examined.

- Null Hypothesis 3 (H03): There is no correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group.
• Alternative Hypothesis 3 (H$_3$): There is a correlation between language gain and overall emotions within each group.

To address this question and the hypotheses, a correlation test between the overall emotion scores and the language gain scores was computed. First, an average mean of emotion scores was computed in SPSS for the six time points (described as Time1, Time 4, Time7, Time10, Time13, and Time16). Table 10 shows the frequencies table for the average mean scores for the emotions.

Table 10: Frequencies of Emotion Average Across Participants in Both Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the correlation between the overall language gain scores and the overall emotion average scores was computed using bivariate correlations. Table 11 shows the results of that test indicating that no correlation between the language gain and emotion average scores for either group was found, where $p=.882$. 
Table 11: Correlation Between Language Gain and Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Gain</th>
<th>Language Gain</th>
<th>Emotion Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EmotionAverage2</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The current study was an investigation of the informal virtual environments as a medium to learn a foreign language. The primary purpose was to expand the practice of online informal learning of English (OILE) to another language, in this case German, and to investigate whether such a transfer is possible and if it confirms the results reported in English. In particular, a question was raised about whether incidental learning in such virtual environments can create higher language gain results than exposure to more traditional textbook-based practices. Additionally, emphasis was put on the emotional side of learning in both environments. Based on current research (e.g., Boakearts & Pekrun, 2015; Fredrickson, 2013), emotions profoundly affect learners’ engagement and achievement. This study investigated what emotions are present in both the informal learning environment (experimental group) and more traditional environments (control group) and how they influence learners’ achievement. Given these premises, the goal of the study was to assess whether informal learning in virtual environments fosters benefits to language learners that are not attainable in traditional educational practices as well as whether these strategies can inform the traditional practices to eventually counter the low retention in the foreign language classes.

This chapter includes a discussion of the findings, the study’s limitations, and suggestions for the future research.
Learners’ Familiarity with the Virtual Wild Environments

The participants who signed up for this study and took the IDQ were 57 German learners with a high level of interest in the language (as confirmed by the IDQ). When asked why they learn German, the majority indicated they love German, others listed a high interest in this particular language or a German heritage. Given this information, the study sample was a unique group of learners who already wanted to study the language; had, sometimes extensive, experience with it; and were strongly motivated to learn. Nevertheless, only 16 participants persevered enough to complete the full 10 hours of the program.

The results of the IDQ indicated that 79% (45) of participants admitted they have been learning German outside of their college classes, while 21% (12 participants) indicated they have not been engaging in any such practices. This question, however, referred to any type of activity beyond the classroom door and provided very little information, if any, on how much of this time and in what frequency this engagement had taken place in online informal environments. Since learners’ engagement in activities online garnered the most interest in this study, it is necessary to look at specific questions containing OILL-like activities.

As Table 1 (Chapter 4, page 59) indicates, only 2.6 (4.9%) of participants selected engaging in some kind of informal activity online very often and the same number of learners quite often. Only 6 participants (11.2%) engage in some OILL-like activities sometimes, and the remaining 11.6 (21.6%) are engaged rarely and almost 60% (31) participants never did anything online with their most favorite, or one of their most favorite, languages. While low numbers in these questions were expected, the overall 80% of intermediate and advanced German learners never or rarely engaging in any types of easily available entertaining activities is surprising,
especially with the rich affordances of technology and access to a great number of movies, music, shows, videos, games, websites, forums, and other materials. It is important to point out that these statistics come from German learners who are highly interested in learning the language and in enhancing their skills and who were eager to dedicate two weeks to an intensive German course (even if the majority did not complete the study). What would these numbers look like among German learners who are either beginners or do not perceive German as their passion?

While the reasons for these numbers may lie in reliance on an educational environment (i.e., a class) as the exclusive medium of knowledge as well as the common lack of trust in the informal uncontrolled environments (Sockett, 2014), it is important to acknowledge that it is also difficult to immerse oneself into a completely unfamiliar “wild” environment, especially for beginning or intermediate language learners. Moreover, English is the dominant language of the Web worldwide and for native English speakers (which was the case for the majority of participants in this study) who are learners of other languages, it is particularly difficult to fight through the automatic translations and an array of tools and extensions that make browsing in a community in which English is a dominant language a monolingual experience and can almost give an impression there is no other language in the world.

The purpose of the IDQ was not only to gather information about the participants’ demographics but most of all to investigate their familiarity with the virtual informal possibilities to learn German and their exposure to them. The research on OILE (Kusyk & Sockett, 2012; Sockett, 2014; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012, 2015) involves measuring the frequencies of what OILE-like activities learners of English engage online. While the OILE research focuses mostly on these statistics and reports of learners learning English in the virtual wild on their own, it was
important for this study to show that these types of practices may not be as frequent for learners of other languages and/or in the U.S. This assumption, confirmed here with the data from the IDQ, suggests an overreaching lack of the use of constructivist model of learning which involves the learner’s active participation through social interaction (crucial especially when learning a new way of communication in a new social community) and making a decision about the content and process of learning (Benson, 2001). Like in a Science class, students engage in experiments involving real substances or even animals, so a foreign language class should not be stripped from an interaction with authentic and not altered substances of the target language. It is certainly possible to learn another language this way, but this will be achieved by only a fraction of highly motivated and passionate individuals (the majority of whom will then probably become language teachers).

As the low frequencies of learners’ engagement in the online authentic resources indicates, learners themselves do not seem to be able to change these “safe”, guided practices they have been taught for many years and to simply decide to explore the “scary” virtual wild on their own. The qualitative data suggests that learners simply do not know how to approach the virtual wild, where to look for resources that may interest them, and what to do with them. As with any learning, here too, an approach from Vygotsky’s perspective is needed and as the ZPD theory suggests, learners must be lead through the steps of getting involved with the virtual wild through an interaction with more knowledgeable peers (i.e., the language teacher, other students in a group, perhaps a native speaker found online, etc.) until the learner can gradually develop an independent problem-solving mechanism (Vygotsky, 1978) and figure out for her- or himself
how these organic resources may be helpful or even only enjoyable as an authentic experience with the target language.

Language Gain

The first research question asked about the differences in the overall language gain scores between the experimental group engaged in OILL activities and the control group engaged in more traditional textbook-based activities. Based on Cole and Vanderplank (2016) suggesting that autonomous learners learning English through OILL-like activities significantly outperformed learners attending intensive private courses in English, it was expected that the German learners enrolled in this study would achieve similar results and that OILL would show an advantage in comparison with the more traditional practices. Although no higher language gains scores were found in the EG, both groups showed language gain from the beginning to the end of the training. This indicates that unstructured immersion in the virtual wild is at the minimum as effective for learning a foreign language as is explicit instruction and practice of grammar and vocabulary, even over a period as brief as 10 hours.

Traditional pedagogy and many language teachers reject the idea that incidental learning may be effective, and in fact, it may be counterintuitive to claim that unstructured unorganized chunks of incidental input of different quality could be as effective as a carefully preplanned curriculum which conceptual organization has been built for many years. Even if going back to the revolutionary ideas challenging the grammar organization of the items introduced in a typical language course curriculum like the Audiolingual Method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), the majority of programs (even those focusing on communication) have been developed according to the grammatical organization beginning with easy concepts (i.e., a regular conjugation of verbs,
the nominative (first) case for nouns, or sentence structure combined from only one verb in the present tense) to more and more complex ones. This results in e.g. learning a sentence like “Sie trägt gern Hosen” (She likes to wear pants.) as one of the pleasurable or leisure activities just in order to introduce the irregular conjugation of verbs (Tschirner & Nikolai, 2017). Another example can be one of the most basic phrases one should learn in German, “Es geht mir sehr gut” (“I’m very well” or lit. “It is going very well to me”), which from the English point of view is a very awkward structure and involves complex grammar concepts such as a personal pronoun in the third case, dative (mir), an adverb (sehr), an adjective (gut), and an impersonal pronoun (es). All these concepts, except for the regular verb “geht” (goes, is going) are introduced much later in a traditional course. As a consequence, one of the most typical mistakes in the beginning German courses is the sentence “Ich bin gut” (lit. I am good), which is a linear translation of the American-English “I’m good” but in German implies that one is good at something or is a behaving person (mostly in reference to a child). This is not to say that all these complex grammar structures should be taught explicitly in the first days of a beginning German course. Instead learners should be exposed to a natural input that, with time, produces a feeling for language structures or sayings without the need to analyze and translate every element of them to understand an expression.

Bybee (2010) insists that one learns a language through imitation and repetition. Almost everybody agrees that the most effective way to truly learn a language is through real-life immersion in it with its incidentality, messiness, and almost terrifying number of colloquialisms and errors. Contrarily, when it comes to learning outside of communities where such immersion is easily available, the common belief, that of the teachers as well as learners, is that the most
effective learning happens when the elements of the language are stripped from the messiness of the real life and organized toward an almost alphabetic order of linguistic concepts. This approach ignores the common sense, many years of extensive research in linguistics, as well as the never improving attrition rates in the language classes and the general interest in taking a language class that rarely leads toward proficiency. This study shows that even if OILL does not produce higher results for learning than the traditional approach, it does foster language gain and, in addition to that, it fosters much stronger retention rates.

The results of this study are also consistent with the theory of language learning from the perspective of usage-based linguistics. According to UBL, language is learned through exposure to usage-events, meaning social situational instances where communication takes place, and is shaped through this exposure. Despite the efforts of language teachers and textbook writers, these instances are very limited to be created or recreated in a classroom environment, especially given time and curriculum guidelines constrains. OILL is a solution that has a potential of addressing these limits and more. Learners, if delivered the guidelines on how to approach in the virtual wild, can immerse themselves in true usage-events that are, in addition, aligned with their unique interests and skills (and have, therefore, an even greater potential of eliciting positive emotions and engagement as well as a more constructivist learning). As this study indicates, they will experience positive emotions while doing it, they will feel motivated and engaged, and they will learn the language. At the same time, an organization of such materials (which are also mostly free) and guidelines for using the virtual wild resources would require a minimal effort from the teacher. Given these premises, OILL has a potential to not only address the gap between
the UBL theory and its practical application possibilities but also positively influence the low retention rates in FL classes.

Emotions

The second research question asked about the trend over time in participants’ emotions depending on whether participants were in the control or experimental group. The mixed design ANOVA test indicated no differences over time in the participants’ emotions and no differences between the two groups, meaning the emotions were constant throughout the intervention regardless of the condition. Given the general assumption that doing activities like watching movies and shows or listening to the music elicits more positive emotions than doing worksheets and quizzes as well as Sockett’s claims that OILE-like activities foster a positive environment with no affective filter; these findings are somewhat surprising and can be explained in a few ways.

First, given the strongly motivated sample, even traditional activities might have been experienced by these learners as enjoyable. While participants in the EG had a freedom to choose any activities and even do activities outside of Coursesites, the CG group had still a lot of freedom in selecting the activities from a wide array of choices. For example, they were free to choose between easier and more difficult activities (designed to address different levels of participants) or the types of activities (i.e., they could select only readings or videos, and not grammar exercises, etc.). They were also free to stop any exercise at any point and therefore, potentially stop any negative feelings that an exercise might have elicited. In other words, given the sample characteristics and the fact that only very persistent participants continued with the
study as well as a lot of freedom in choices and time spent online that participants in both groups had, it is possible that the truly negative emotions were simply never recorded in any of the groups and these could be only available from the participants who withdrew from the study. Indeed, as observed when sending out the EF during the participants’ log-in time and preliminary viewing of the EF results, I noticed that often when participants reported being bored or frustrated, they tended to stop the activities and clock out. This may suggest that the participants stayed logged in as long as the activities, and perhaps also their general mood at that time, felt good and as soon as negative emotions appeared, they logged out. This could have resulted in consistent positive mood over time (always between 4.8 and 5.44 where 5 indicated slightly positive and 6 moderately positive) in both groups. A comparison of the time each group spent on the activities could give more information about whether there could be any differences between the groups in the time span of engagement in the activities. Also, an analysis of the emotions and other measures delivered through EF for only the last EFs that proceeded the log-out of a participant could yield more information whether the emotions were in any way correlated to the point of stopping the exercises.

The data collected on the other parts of the EF, especially the qualitative parts (e.g., asking participants to indicate what they were doing and thinking about or what other thoughts they would like to share) indicate that the score on the positivity scale (provided as a Likert scale from 7-very positive to 1-very negative) might have been also influenced by factors that did not necessarily have a lot to do with the type of learning these participants were exposed to. For example, one participant has selected the number 7 (very positive) every time regardless of what she was doing, while another participant selected 1 (very negative) and 2 (moderately negative)
several times when reporting worrying about her cat doing damage while she was engaged in the German activities, which clearly did not reflect her emotions connected to the learning activities but rather to the outside situation. More analysis of the circumstances for these selections as well as other responses (e.g., the selection of eight specific emotions included in the EF) are needed. This information may also suggest that the EF instrument may need more explanation to the participants or modifications for future research.

Another possibility is also that, even if the research on emotions indicates that positive emotions broaden perception, attention, motivation, reasoning, and social cognition (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009), asking learners to indicate what emotions they are feeling during activities may not be the best way to assess how they indeed perceive the specific activities. Using the ESM tool to address certain feelings and emotional circumstances in the moment is a highly effective tool and yields information that would not be attainable in any other way. However, perhaps using different measuring items or asking different questions, even such pertaining to grit, motivation, or engagement may deliver more information on the emotional aspects of a learning process. A deeper analysis and perhaps more experimenting are needed to establish the best tool for measuring the emotional side of learning a language.

Emotions and Language Gain

The third research question was whether there is a correlation between the language gain and the overall emotion score within each group. The statistical test indicated that no correlation could be found between the two scores. This can be explained in a few ways. First, it is probable that the emotions as registered by the overall emotion scale on the EF have simply not shown the
influence on the participants’ progress in learning German due to its limits. The scale was very general and as noted above, could have been affected by the specificity of the sample participating in the study and by the freedom of choices between the activities and freedom of stopping the activity at any time. Another reason for no correlation could lie in the lack of specificity of the questions about emotions, especially that only the general question about the overall feelings was taken into consideration. The question, “Overall, how did you feel in the moment you were prompted to take this survey?”, might have been too general and might have elicited answers not very related to the actual German activities and the process of learning. For example, one participant reported feeling “slightly negative just because [she] was imagining the smell of a hamburger from McDonalds” or, at another time, she selected ‘slightly negative’ and explained: “[The cat] did break something.” To avoid such responses, a more specific question should have been posed, e.g. “Overall, how did you feel about the activity in German you were engaged in when you were prompted to take this survey?” or perhaps an even stronger option “Overall, how did the activity in German you were engaged in when you were prompted to take this survey made you feel?” More explicit information should have also been included in the EF survey, emphasizing that all emotions reported should be in reference to the activities in German in which the learner is engaged at the moment.

It may also be possible that while positive emotions were shown to elicit learning, they are not necessarily the decisive causal element ensuring that more learning happens during certain activities. This may especially be the case when a training involves highly motivated and persistent students who want to learn by any means available and who feel rather positive regardless whether they watch a German movie or complete a German vocabulary quiz.
Nevertheless, the qualitative data retrieved from the EF as well as attrition differences suggest there may have been emotional differences not detected by the EF, perhaps due to confusion about what the participants were supposed to report. A deeper analysis of the remaining data recorded with EF may yield information that would explain the lack of correlation between the language gain and emotions more clearly and that could also confirm if this correlation can be found in reference to the other EF questions (i.e., the eight specific emotions). The qualitative analysis of the written comments may also yield more information on the circumstances in which the participants indicated a specific level of positivity or negativity on the given scale.

Attrition

Perhaps the strongest and most noteworthy finding in this study is the attrition of the participants. Seventy-five percent of participants who completed the full study were in the experimental group, while only 25% were in the control group. This difference between the groups is astounding and raises implications on the general statistics of students enrolled in FL classes and their retention. First, it mirrors reports of the low (and decreasing) retention of students in the FL classes across the country. Regardless of the fact that the sample consisted of highly motivated German learners with a lot of experience and persistence to learn, only a few of them were able to complete the entire 10-hour program. This result implies that even highly motivated or interested students have difficulty sticking to the class in which they have a chance to learn a language they truly like. Meanwhile, the common expectation of educational institutions and teachers is that overly traditional language classes will attract and keep students
with different levels of intrinsic motivation or love for the language. Based on the attrition results in this study, it is hardly surprising that so many students drop out during the first semester of a language class and so few of the remaining ones continue beyond the first semester. The data on emotions indicate that the four learners in the CG who completed the study were quite happy during the activities, just as the 12 in the EG. However, it must be pointed out that there were only four who even wanted to engage in the activities, suggesting these learners might be so strongly motivated that it did not matter to them if they watched a movie or took a grammar quiz.

Another assumption as of why the dropout rates were so big in the control but not in the experimental group may be connected to the same factors that many students often complain about in the traditional classes but the arguments are not really taken into consideration or do not have any current solutions. Especially students who drop or do not continue language courses say that learning a language is hard and overwhelming, that they have to do it all on their own, and that the format of the class is just not something they would expect.

The common perspective, especially that of language teachers, is that many students find learning a language hard. Students come to an FL class with an expectation to experience the language, to interact in it, and discover how great it is to communicate in a different tongue, but too often they are left with extensive vocabulary lists to memorize and have to sit through lectures on overwhelming grammar rules they cannot relate to (especially English native speakers) they have to then practice with repetitive drill-exercises to be able to prepare for a test on not so much the language but more on the rules and exceptions to them. Language teachers feel for the students but want them to persevere – just like they did when learning the language that they teach. But most of all the majority of the teachers simply do not know how to make it
less hard or less overwhelming, especially since they have learned the language in a similar way and were successful in it. The attention to OILL has a potential to address this issue and not only make learning a language more attractive, as implied by the attrition statistics, but also to do it with a relatively small effort for the teachers and the students and that without spending hundreds of dollars for constantly renewing editions of the same grammar-guided textbooks.

In the current common teaching practices, a lot of emphasis is put on controlled input, and when authentic materials are being used in class, they are modified or adapted to the class curriculum (mostly to a grammar topic). For example, a song by a German group Clueso “Gewinner” is introduced in the first chapter of a commonly used German textbook Kontakte (Tschirner & Nikolai, 2017), as a mean to practice regular verbs. No attention is being paid to very idiomatic expressions like e.g. “Ich bin dabei” (I’m about to) or “Es kommt nicht darauf an” (It’s not about that) which, due to the linguistic complexity, are avoided in the beginning courses despite the high frequency of occurrence in the actual language. Moreover, a song being a very subjective artistic expression is a subject to strong emotional involvement – some students may love it, some will despise of it (and possibly will not learn much because of these feelings). As Sockett (2014) contended and this study found (although mostly through the qualitative data), learners like to have a choice, and while one participant has been only watching German movies, another one found them too difficult and not involving, and yet another person mostly listened to the music and extensively analyzed the lyrics. These data, although beyond the scope of this paper, imply that it is not about using a song in the classroom with an array of exercises with it, but rather it is giving learners an option to choose an activity or resources that truly interest them for themselves. Thus, teachers should try to adopt OILL strategies as a supplement to a regular
curriculum as much as they can to potentially enhance learners’ language gain (since a positive language growth was shown in this study) and their motivation to learn and to continue learning.

Implications for Pedagogy

There are several implications of how OILL can be used in a regular classroom, and, given the results of this study, all ways have a potential to bring in positive results on a cognitive and emotional level. An important point in any attempt to include OILL in a learning experience is remembering that learners mostly do not know how to operate in the virtual wild. It is imperative for teachers to gradually introduce the learners to OILL and work with them on different ways of how they can use different resources. This is a crucial first step regardless of which level the learners are at. Dedicating a part of a class (or of a few classes) on introducing the possibilities of the virtual wild to students, showing them different resources, teaching them strategies and ways, depending on their level in the L2 and skills, what can they do with songs, movies, shows, games, etc. or any similar introduction must be the first step of any implementation of OILL to a class.

Next, it is important to take into consideration that learners will be mostly reluctant in searching for materials online, especially at lower levels where their language skills may significantly limit their possibilities. Therefore, creating a space with such materials, links, and instructions on how to find more resources could foster great opportunities for learners to explore the virtual wild and to get interested in it. Optionally, to ensure learners’ engagement in getting to know these resources is to create assignments involving the virtual wild, e.g., asking students to create a short class presentation or a report that they could share with other students on what
they have found most interesting among such resources (including anything that they discovered on their own) or similar.

Most of all, however, teachers should give OILL a chance and allow and encourage students to explore the virtual wild with its messiness and incidental nature, without the fear that it will hinder students’ language learning progress. Despite of a very structured input in class, any input in L2 is extremely valuable and students should use the extremely rich array of possibilities online to experience the real language and culture.

Implications for Future Research

This study, being the first like that on many levels, presents several implications for future research. Perhaps the most attention should be focused on how OILL compares to the activities in the actual classroom. In this study, due to time and resource restrictions, both experimental and control environments were delivered fully online where the CG’s activities implemented more of homework-like exercises and did not include many options for a similar interaction that happens in a physical classroom. Future research should investigate how an actual classroom-like experience, with all elements of it, i.e., homework, grading, assessment, etc., compares to the OILL practices. It would be advisory that such intervention is conducted over a longer time period (e.g. a few months or even a full semester). In such an intervention it should also be ensured that learners exposed to OILL would have many more resources available than the current study, including resources of a more interactive nature (consisting not only of input but also output activities), e.g. spaces for an interaction with native speakers, etc.
When conducting a similar study, it would also be advisory to let participants compare the two ways of learning. In the current study, all participants were given access to all materials at the end of the intervention, however, not many of them used this opportunity. Making the experiment longer and giving participants the option to switch the condition could yield interesting insights as to how students compare the two environments and in which they feel they learn more in correlation of their actual language gain scores.

Another aspect that needs more research is the emotional side of this study. While not all results have been introduced in this paper, there are a lot of implications as to how the emotional aspects could be assessed better to deliver more reliable results. Measuring not only learners’ emotions but also their motivation or engagement could yield interesting data on OILL’s characteristics beyond the cognitive ones and if it can deliver any implications on addressing the FL anxiety.

Finally, surveying learners in more detail on how they perceive OILL-like activities and what makes them engage in or avoid the virtual wild as well as surveying teachers on their attitudes and beliefs towards OILL could yield further information on what stands on the way to use the unending free resources to easily and enjoyably learn another language.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was the small and unbalanced sample size. A higher number of different learners, including also learners who are not as strongly motivated and passionate as the ones who completed the study, could have yielded more information on the differences (if any) between the groups at more reliable rates. It could also bring more data on
the emotional aspects of the study, perhaps also on more negative emotions that might have remained undiscovered among participants who withdrew from the study.

Another limitation of the study was the complexity of the design for the researcher and for the participants. The study would have benefited from more on-point technology tools addressing the specific needs of this research, they would simplify the data collection process, and potentially make it easier to follow for some less tech-savvy participants. Especially in reference to the reliability of Coursesites that presented multiple difficulties (e.g., not delivering the automated emails as it was supposed to) or the way of delivering the EF, more reliable and automated solutions would significantly help in the data collection.

Future research should take these facts into consideration. However, despite the constraints of sample size and resources, this project still provides valuable insights into the potential of OILL.

Conclusion

The experimental design of this study was steered by the question of whether the online informal learning of English (OILE) is transferable to other languages. As Sockett (2014) argued this transfer would present too many difficulties. However, this study successfully contradicted this claim by showing that such a transfer is not only possible but also quite successful. Learners reported feeling positive in the OILL environment, registered a positive language gain as a result of the intervention, and 57% of the enrolled participants assigned to EG (as the opposite of only 26% of participants enrolled in the CG) completed the full study.
Additionally, this study indicated that very few students are familiar with or active in any types of activities in the virtual wild, with the exception of listening to German music. This important finding suggests that learners do not have opportunities to explore more of the immersive usage-based learning ways because they either do not know such resources exist or they do not know how to approach them. It is crucial that learners are, at the very least, introduced to the world of OILL possibilities to be at least able to decide for themselves whether this is something that could help them stay interested in and enhance their learning.

Findings should be considered preliminary due to the small sample size and uneven groups, nevertheless, the study shows that OILL presents a promising remedy to the abysmal state of U.S. foreign language education and should be given more attention in the FL pedagogy.

Even if OILL does not produce higher language gain scores than more traditional learning approaches, it attracts and, most of all, keeps three times more students learning another language.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INTEREST AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (IDQ)
Q1 Please enter your ID number given to you during registration: ______

Part I: You will now answer a few questions about your general background.

Q2 What is your gender?
Male
Female
Other

Q3 What is your age?
18-25
26-30
31-40
41+

Q4 What is your first or native language that you consistently use?
English
Spanish
French
Italian
Chinese
Korean
Russian
Arabic
Hindi/Urdu
Other: __________

Q5 What other languages do you know and how well?
(Multiple select between: Fluent/Proficient, Advanced, Intermediate, Novice/Beginner)

English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Hindi/Urdu,
Other1: ________, Other2: ________

Q6 What is your major and minor(s)?

Part II: You will now answer a few questions about your background in German.

Q7 How long have you been learning German?
1 semester
Q8 Why do you learn German? (check all that apply)
- I need credits in a language/German
- I love German
- My partner/spouse is German
- I have a German heritage and want to explore it deeper
- I wanted to learn some foreign language and German seemed the most interesting one
- I want to understand what Rammstein (or others) sing about
- Other _____________________________________________________________________

Q9 What is your first and most important reason to learn German?
____________________________________________________________________________

Q10 What is your second most important reason you learn German?
____________________________________________________________________________

Q11 Have you been learning German outside of your college classes?
Yes
No

Display This Question: If Have you been learning German outside of your college classes? = Y
Q12 If yes, how have you been learning it? (please, be specific)
____________________________________________________________________________

Part III: You will now answer questions about what kind of activities in German online you engage.

Q13 Indicate how often you:
(5-Point Likert scale: 1 - Very often (once a week or more), 2 – Quite often (3-4 times a month), 3 – Sometimes (1-2 times a month), 4 – Rarely (less than once a month), 5 – Never

- watch original German movies or shows with German subtitles
- watch original German movies or shows without German subtitles
- watch original German movies or shows with English subtitles
- watch original German movies or shows with subtitles in my native language
- watch original German movies or shows with no subtitles at all
- listen to German music with reading/analyzing lyrics
- listen to German music without reading/analyzing lyrics
- read the Web in German (written in formation in German)
- contribute to forums in German
- use social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) in German
- chat online in German with people I have never met in person
- use voice services (MSN, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.) to talk to people in German
- participate in a virtual world where I use German
- use German pseudonyms and avatars
- exchange emails with friends in German
- write a blog in German
- leave comments on other people’s blog in German
- engage in other online activities in German: ________________
APPENDIX B

GERMAN PERFORMANCE TEST (GPT)
GPT Part I (self-grading test)

Description:
This is a test of your spontaneous German language skills meaning language that comes to your mind in the very moment of a situation and that you produce without much wondering or hesitations.
It is important that you are as relaxed as possible when taking it. Because it measures language skills on different levels, some questions may be very easy while others may appear very hard. Please remember that you cannot fail this test. It serves only as an informational background for your thoughts and reactions to different activities during this study.

Instructions:
Please do not use any outside help of a dictionary, automated translator, or similar, or another person’s help. Your responses should be quick and spontaneous. If you are not sure of an answer, please chose “not sure” option or leave the answer blank. Your score will not in any way affect your participation in this project.
You have a limited time to complete the test so make sure you follow the directions of how much time you should use for each question/ question group.

Timed Test:
This test has a time limit of 49 minutes. This test will save and submit automatically when the time expires.
Warnings appear when half the time, 5 minutes, 1 minute, and 30 seconds remain.

Multiple Attempts:
Not allowed. This test can only be taken once.
Q1: Read the following newspaper advertisement. Select the best response for each question. You should spend max. 3 minutes on this exercise.

„November-Sonne“ bei der Bahn: Für nur 29,– Euro quer durch Deutschland.


Auch der Herbst hat seine schönen Tage.


1. Wo können Sie mit dem Ticket reisen?
   a. Nur in Deutschland.
   b. Nur in Ihrer Nähe.
   c. In Deutschland und im Ausland.
   d. Not sure.

2. Bis wann können Sie reisen?
   a. Bis Mitte Dezember.
   b. Bis Mitte November.
   c. Bis Ende Dezember.
   d. Not sure.

3. Man bezahlt 29 Euro für…
   a. eine Fahrt in der zweiten Klasse.
   b. viele Fahrten an einem Tag.
   c. Not sure.
   d. eine Fahrt hin und zurück.
Q2: Listen to the following conversation. Then, indicate if each statement is true or false. The entire exercise with the following three questions should not take longer than 2 minutes. [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/-RauKX8gElo]

1. Ulla war nicht in der Schule.
   a. richtig
   b. falsch
   c. not sure

2. Christoph hat Kopfschmerzen.
   a. richtig
   b. falsch
   c. not sure

3. Christophs Bruder war letzte Woche auch krank.
   a. richtig
   b. falsch
   c. not sure

Q4: You’re going shopping. Which floor do you need to go to? Select the best response for each question. Dedicate max. 4 minutes for this exercise.

### KAUFHAUS WALDHEIM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stock</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gartenbedarf / Gartenmöbel / Sonnenschirme / SB-Restaurant / Abholung bestellter Waren / Kundenservice / Reisebüro / Fundbüro / Garderobe / Toiletten / Wickelraum / Erste Hilfe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Computer / Technik / Software / Foto / Optik / CDs / DVDs / Blu-Rays / Radio / TV-HIFI / Autozubehör / Fahrräder / Sportartikel / Strandmode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Betten / Matratzen / Bett- und Tischwäsche / Handtücher / Gardinen / Dekostoffe / Herrenbekleidung / Spielwaren / Kinderwagen / Kinderbekleidung / Schreibwaren / Bücher / Zeitschriften / Zeitungen / Glückwunschkarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Damenbekleidung / Junge Mode / Nachtwäsche / Schuhe / Schmuck / Uhren / Brieftaschen / Stock und Schirm / Accessoires / Alles für die Küche / Glas / Geschirr / Beleuchtung / Elektroartikel / Souvenirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EG</td>
<td>Kosmetik / Parfümerie / Putz- und Waschmittel / Handarbeiten, Kurzwaren, Hobbybedarf / Lebensmittel / Feinkost / Weine / Schokolade und Kaffee / Tabakwaren / Friseursalon / Geldautomat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Sie brauchen einen Regenschirm.
a. 1. Stock
b. 4. Stock
c. Anderes Stockwerk
d. not sure

2. Sie möchten einen Reiseführer über Berlin kaufen.
a. 2. Stock
b. 3. Stock
c. Anderes Stockwerk
d. not sure

Q5: Listen to the following radio program. Select the best response for each question. Dedicate no more than 3 minutes (1.5 minutes for repeated listening and 1.5 minutes for answering the two following questions). [Link to the audio: https://youtu.be/m8ngFwMHqSc]

1. Wer gratuliert zum Geburtstag?
b. Josefs Familie.
c. Josef, ein junger Mann.
d. Not sure.

2. Wer oder was läuft auf der Straße?
a. Ein Autofahrer
b. Ein Straßenarbeiter
c. Ein Tier
d. Not sure
Q6: Which advertisement best applies to the following situation? Select the best response for each question. Dedicate no more than 4 minutes.

*Mirjeta hat keine Zeit für einen Kurs, möchte sich aber regelmäßig über Neuigkeiten aus Deutschland informieren.*

- A
- B
- C
- D
- Not sure
Q7: You are reading comments on a magazine article about a potential ban on violent computer games (also known as “shooter games”). Dedicate no more than 5 Minutes for this exercise.

Decide whether each person is in favor of such a ban by selecting “Ja” or “Nein” for each person.

1. Niko:
   a. Ja
   b. Nein
   c. Not sure

2. Stefan:
   a. Ja
   b. Nein
   c. Not sure

3. Dagmar:
   a. Ja
   b. Nein
   c. Not sure
Q8: Read the following newspaper article. Select the best response for the following question. Dedicate no more than 3 minutes for this exercise.

**EIN DORF FÜR GRÜNE ENERGIE**

Das Dorf Feldheim in Brandenburg macht sich unabhängig von Öl und Kohle.


1. Die Bio-Gasanlage…
a. produziert Strom und Wärme.
b. gibt es seit einem Dreivierteljahr.
c. gehört Eckhard Meier.
d. Not sure.

Q8: Listen to the following recording. Select the best response for each question. Dedicate max. 3 minutes for this part. [Link to the audio: https://youtu.be/JootTYUGcTE]

1. Sie hören eine Information für eine Reisegruppe.
a. Richtig
b. Falsch
c. Not sure

2. Welcher Zug fällt aus? Der Zug nach…
a. Genf
b. Bern
c. Lausanne
d. Not sure
Q10: Reconstruct the following text by filling in the missing words. Make sure you spell the words correctly and use a proper capitalization whenever needed. Dedicate no more than 3 minutes. If you are not sure what is the correct answer, leave the blank empty.

**Salat? Typisch Frau! – Steak? Typisch Mann!**

Im Restaurant bestellt SIE einen Salat mir Putenstreifen, ER bevorzugt ein Steak Bratkartoffeln. Sie trifft sich mit ihrer Freunden im indischen Restaurant, es deftig und rustikal. In kaum einem Bereich des alltäglichen Lebens gehen das Verhalten und die Gewohnheiten von Mann und Frau so weit auseinander wie Essen. Das hat zwar auch mit biologischen Unterschieden zu , mehr jedoch mit Traditionen und Vorurteilen.

Q11: Read the following text. Then, select the best fitting word for each number in parentheses. Spend no more than 4 minutes for this exercise.

**LERNEN MIT PC UND INTERNET – UNABHÄNGIG VON ZEIT UND ORT**

Alles online! PC und Internet werden im Rahmen von E-Learning (Lernen mit Internet) eingesetzt. In der Praxis (21) das für die Teilnehmer, dass sie von zu Hause oder vom Arbeitsplatz aus lernen können.

(21)
e. verheißt
f. vermittelt
g. bedeutet
h. befindet
i. Not sure

(22)
a. öffnet
b. macht auf
c. beginnt
d. eröffnet
e. Not sure

(23)
a. von Sinnen
b. im Vorteil
c. eine Bedeutung
d. von Vorteil
e. Not sure

Q12: Fill in the following blanks. Make sure you spell words correctly and use capitalization as needed. If you are not sure what is the correct answer, leave the blank empty. Dedicate no more than 5 minutes.

An den Taxi-Verband in Fürth

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

heute ______ ich mich an Sie, um einen Ihrer Mitarbeiter zu loben. Es kommt ja heutzutage nur noch ______ vor, dass man sich auf hilfreiche Mitmenschen ______ kann. Herr Köbe gehört Blank 4 diesen hilfsbereiten Menschen.

Ich hatte gestern Nacht auf der Heimfahrt mit dem Taxi meine Aktentasche auf den Rücksitz ______ und dort liegen lassen. Der Fahrer hätte die Tasche ohne Weiteres wegwerfen, für sich ______ oder sonst etwas damit tun können. Stattdessen war es ______ wichtig, sie mir persönlich zu übergeben. Da es schon spät war, hat er sich nicht sofort bei mir gemeldet, sondern bis zum nächsten Morgen gewartet, um mir die Tasche nach Hause zu bringen. Wenn nur alle so denken und ______ würden wie Herr Köbe!
Q13: Listen to an excerpt from this radio report on student housing. Decide whether the following statements correspond to the contents on the report. Select the best response for each question. Dedicate no more than 5 minutes for this part (3 minutes for listening and 2 minutes for answering the questions). [link to the audio https://youtu.be/DlwjuDHjT8U]

1. Der Bau von Studentenwohnheimen geht wegen fehlender öffentlicher Mittel zurück.
   a. Ja
   b. Nein
   c. Not sure

2. Wohnheimplätze sind besonders bei Erstsemestern begehrt.
   a. Ja
   b. Nein
   c. Not sure

3. Die Zahl der Langzeitstudenten verschärft das Wohnproblem.
   a. Ja
   b. Nein
   c. Not sure
GPT Part II (writing and speaking test, manually graded)

Description:
This is the second part of your German Performance Test (GPT). In this part you will engage in writing and speaking tasks. Each task will be displayed separately and you will have a time limit for each.

Please make sure that:
- you are in a quite place and you have a working microphone or a headset as you will be asked to record your voice and watch a youtube video
- you have tested Vocaroo (or any other audio recording application) that will allow you to record an answer and submit in the response window as quickly as possible.
- you do NOT use any dictionaries, automatic translators, and you complete all tasks on your own
- you have a dedicated time of 100 minutes (1 hour and 40 minutes) and you will be able to finish this test in one sitting

Instructions:
This test will consist of two parts: the written response and the spoken response (including written and spoken questions). You have a limited time to complete this test so please plan accordingly. You must finish this test in one sitting.

As the test is designed for a wide range of levels, there may be questions you don't understand or cannot answer. This is completely OK. If this happens, just leave the answer blank or say something indicating that you don't understand the question.

Timed Test:
This test has a time limit of 1 hour and 40 minutes. This test will save and submit automatically when the time expires.
Warnings appear when half the time, 5 minutes, 1 minute, and 30 seconds remain.

Multiple Attempts:
Not allowed. This test can only be taken once.
Q1: Sehen Sie sich den Ausschnitt aus dem Film “Modern Times”. Dann beschreiben Sie so genau wie möglich, was in dem Film passiert ist.

Watch (once or twice) the excerpt from the Charlie Chaplin movie "Modern Times". Then, describe what you have seen in the most detail possible, using as much language as you can. You have 20 minutes time for this task. (9 minutes for watching the movie excerpt twice and 11 minutes to write the description)

Please do not use any dictionaries, automatic translators, or help from someone else. This exercise should reveal your spontaneous German skills in writing.

[Link to the excerpt of the movie: https://youtu.be/N4sjKJvUia0]

Q2: You will now see two questions. Respond to them in speaking using the Vocaroo platform or any other recording application that allows you to easily upload your response. Please make sure you use as much language as you can, but also speak freely and spontaneously. As this test is designed for a wide range of levels, there may be questions you don't understand or cannot answer and this is completely OK. If this happens, just leave the answer blank or say something indicating you don't understand.

Please choose "YES" now to confirm you read this description.

a. YES
b. NO

Q3: Read the following question below and open VOCAROO to RECORD your response as an audio.

Start speaking immediately and speak about whatever comes to your mind. Your response should NOT be prepared or rehearsed. You have only 5 minutes for this response (your recording should not be longer than that but if it happens to be, leave it as it is).

When recorded, copy and paste the link to your recording in the answer field.

1. Beschreiben Sie kurz eine Person aus Ihrem Leben, Ihren besten Freund oder Ihre beste Freundin, einen Familienmitglieder, einen Partner oder eine Partnerin, usw. Wie heißt er oder sie? Wer ist er oder sie? Was macht er oder sie? Wie sieht er oder sie aus? Welche Charaktereigenschaften hat er oder sie?

Q4: In the third part of this test, you will hear 7 questions. Each will be presented separately. Your task is to respond to the heard question at the best of your ability but using only the language that spontaneously comes to your mind. Please speak as much as you can in the time frame provided. If you don't understand a question, just skip it or say you don't understand it. Submit your responses as audio recordings through Vocaroo (or another audio recording application).

Select YES for confirming you read this description.

a. YES

b. NO

Respond to each the following question in speaking submitting your audio recording in the answer field. You have 5 minutes for every question.

[Questions were not displayed to participants visually but only as audio recordings]

1. Sagen Sie mir etwas über sich selbst: Wie heißen Sie? Wo wohnen Sie? Was machen Sie?
   [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/6M5VdoaQCNw]

   [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/051y-FncNIc]

3. Beschreiben Sie Ihren Tag gestern. Wann sind Sie aufgestanden, was haben Sie dann gemacht? Wann sind Sie ins Bett gegangen?
   [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/MDYkFdT-Wdc]

4. Beschreiben Sie Ihre Hobbys. Wofür interessieren Sie sich und warum? Was gefällt Ihnen an diesen Interessen am meisten?
   [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/zeXpE5FSAxk]

5. Wie hat es Ihrem Lieblingshobby begonnen? Erzählen Sie, wie und warum Sie sich damit interessiert haben.
   [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/PYSUObQDHZ4]

6. Erzählen Sie über Ihre Stadt, wo Sie wohnen. Wie sieht die Stadt aus? Was passiert da jetzt, wovon Leute viel sprechen?
   [Link to audio: https://youtu.be/5aVUhCFmr1Q]

**Q5:** You will now see the descriptions of two situations/role-plays. Both will be described in English and you will need to respond to them in German. Follow the instructions for each situation. You will respond only in speaking as well.

Click YES to confirm you read this description.

a. YES
b. NO

**Situation 1:** You are looking for an apartment-mate. Ask several (not less than 5) questions that will help you to decide if this person will be a good apartment-mate for you. You have 5 minutes for this task.

**Situation 2:** You borrowed a friend’s car and had a slight accident. Call your friend, explain what happened, describe the damage, and offer a solution. You have 6 minutes for this task.

**Complication to Situation 2:** When talking to your friend and explaining the situation with the car, your friend reacts in a concerned way as they have now a problem due to your accident. Listen to your friend's explanation and offer a solution to the problem. Use as much language as you can. You have 5 minutes for this task.


[Link to audio: https://youtu.be/IlkeuE-dcuU]
10 points (superior)

The writer can produce informal and formal writing on practical, social, and professional topics treated both abstractly and concretely. Can present well-developed ideas, opinions, arguments, and hypotheses through extended discourse. Can control structures, both general and specialized/professional vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, cohesive devices, and all other aspects of written form and organization with no pattern of error to distract the reader.

- demonstrates the ability to explain complex matters, and to present and support opinions by developing cogent arguments and hypotheses
- demonstrates an effective use of structure, lexicon, and writing protocols.
- able to organize and prioritize ideas to convey to the reader what is significant, the relationship among ideas is consistently clear, due to organizational and developmental principles (e.g., cause and effect, comparison, chronology)
- demonstrates an extended treatment of a topic which typically requires at least a series of paragraphs
- demonstrates a high degree of control of grammar and syntax, of both general and specialized/professional vocabulary, of spelling or symbol production, of cohesive devices, and of punctuation. Their vocabulary is precise and varied
- able to direct their writing to their audiences; their writing fluency eases the reader’s task
- demonstrates no pattern of error; however, occasional errors may occur, particularly in low-frequency structures (when present, these errors do not interfere with comprehension, and they rarely distract the native reader)

Advanced, 9-7 points

The writer can write routine, informal, and some formal correspondence, narratives, descriptions, and summaries of a factual nature in all major time frames in connected discourse of a paragraph in length. Writing is comprehensible to all native speakers due to breadth of generic vocabulary and good control of the most frequently used structures.

9 points

- able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and detail
- can handle informal and formal correspondence according to appropriate conventions
- can write summaries and reports of a factual nature
- can also write extensively about topics relating to particular interests and special areas of competence, although the writing tends to emphasize the **concrete aspects** of such topics
- can narrate and describe in the major time frames, with solid control of aspect
• able to demonstrate the ability developing arguments and constructing hypotheses, but is not able to do this all of the time
• good control of a range of grammatical structures and a fairly wide general vocabulary (often remarkable ease of expression, but in more complex structures patterns of error appear)
• linguistic limitations may occasionally distract the native reader from the message

8 points
• able to meet a range of work and/or academic writing needs
• demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe with detail in all major time frames with good control of aspect
• able to write straightforward summaries on topics of general interest, the writing exhibits a variety of cohesive devices in texts up to several paragraphs in length
• good control of the most frequently used target-language syntactic structures and a range of general vocabulary (most often, thoughts are expressed clearly and supported by some elaboration)
• writing incorporates organizational features both of the target language and the writer’s first language and may at times resemble oral discourse
• is understood readily by natives not used to the writing of non-natives

7 points
• able to meet basic work and/or academic writing needs
• demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in major time frames with some control of aspect
• able to compose simple summaries on familiar topics
• able to combine and link sentences into texts of paragraph length and structure but the writing may not be substantive
• demonstrate the ability to incorporate a limited number of cohesive devices, and may resort to some redundancy and awkward repetition
• rely on patterns of oral discourse and the writing style of their first language
• understood by natives not accustomed to the writing of non-natives, although some additional effort may be required in the reading of the text
**Intermediate, 6-4 points**

The writer can meet a range of simple and practical writing needs, e.g., simple messages and letters, requests for information, notes, etc. Can communicate simple facts and ideas in a loosely connected series of sentences on topics of personal interest and social needs, primarily in the present. Because of vocabulary limitations and errors in basic structures, writing is comprehensible to those accustomed to the writing of non-natives.

**6 points**

* can write compositions and simple summaries related to work and/or school experiences
* can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations
* narrations and descriptions are often but not always of paragraph length, and they typically contain some evidence of breakdown in one or more features of a higher level/score (for example, the writer may be inconsistent in the use of appropriate major time markers, resulting in a loss of clarity)
* even with numerous and perhaps significant errors, it is generally comprehensible to natives not used to the writing of non-natives, but there are likely to be gaps in comprehension

**5 points**

* able to meet a number of practical writing needs
* can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, and other personal topics
* writing is framed in present time but may contain references to other time frames
* show evidence of control of basic sentence structure and verb forms
* writing is best defined as a collection of discrete sentences and/or questions loosely strung together
* little evidence of deliberate organization
* can be understood readily by natives used to the writing of non-natives but when the writer attempts higher level writing tasks, the quality and/or quantity of their writing declines and the message may be unclear

**4 points**
• able to meet some limited practical writing needs
• can create statements and formulate questions based on familiar material
• most sentences are recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures: short and simple conversational-style sentences with basic word order
• written almost exclusively in present time
• writing tends to consist of a few simple sentences, often with repetitive structure
• topics are tied to highly predictable content areas and personal information
• vocabulary is adequate to express elementary needs
• there may be basic errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and in the formation and use of non-alphabetic symbols
• understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives, although additional effort may be required
• when attempting to perform writing tasks at a higher level, the writing will deteriorate significantly and the message may be left incomplete

Novice, 3-1 points

Can produce lists, notes, and limited formulaic information on simple forms and documents. Writing is typically limited to words, phrases, and memorized material.

3 points
• able to meet limited basic practical writing needs using lists, short messages, postcards, and simple notes
• able to express themselves within the context in which the language was learned, relying mainly on practiced material
• writing is focused on common elements of daily life
• able to recombine learned vocabulary and structures to create simple sentences on very familiar topics, but are not able to sustain sentence-level writing all the time
• due to inadequate vocabulary and/or grammar, writing at this level may only partially communicate the intentions of the writer
• writing is often comprehensible to natives used to the writing of non-natives, but gaps in comprehension may occur
2 points
• can reproduce from memory a modest number of words and phrases in context
• can supply limited information on simple forms and documents, and other basic biographical information, such as names, numbers, and nationality
• a high degree of accuracy when writing on well-practiced, familiar topics using limited formulaic language
• with less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy
• errors in spelling or in the representation of symbols may be frequent
• little evidence of functional writing skills
• writing may be difficult to understand even by those accustomed to non-native writers

1 point
• able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases, form letters in an alphabetic system, and copy and produce isolated, basic strokes
• given adequate time and familiar cues, they can reproduce from memory a very limited number of isolated words or familiar phrases, but errors are to be expected

0 points
No response
APPENDIX D

ACTFL ORAL PROFICIENCY TEST RUBRIC
10 points (superior)

Discuss topics extensively, support opinions, and hypothesize. Deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation.

Most formal and informal settings. Wide range of general interest topics and some special fields of interest and expertise.

No pattern of errors in basic structures. Errors virtually never interfere with communication or distract the native speaker from the message.

Extended discourse

- communicates with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives
- discusses their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy
- presents their opinions on a number of issues of interest to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured arguments to support these opinions
- constructs and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities
- uses extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations
- employs a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices
- demonstrates no pattern of error in the use of basic structures (only sporadic errors in low-frequency structures and in complex high-frequency structures, which never distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication)

Advanced, 9-7 points

Narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication.

Most informal and some formal settings. Topics of personal and general interest.

Understood without difficulty by speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.

Paragraphs
**9 points**

- consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames
- can handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics
- may provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear
- can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely
- may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration
- precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech

**8 points**

- participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to work, school, home, and leisure activities, as well as topics relating to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance
- demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future by providing a full account, with good control of aspect
- narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse
- can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar
- communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose
- speech is marked by substantial flow
- vocabulary is fairly extensive although primarily generic in nature, except in the case of a particular area of specialization or interest.
- discourse may still reflect the oral paragraph structure of their own language rather than that of the target language
- contribute to conversations on a variety of familiar topics, dealt with concretely, with much accuracy, clarity and precision, and they convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion
• readily understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives

7 points

• able to participate in most informal and some formal conversations on topics related to school, home, and leisure activities
• can also speak about some topics related to employment, current events, and matters of public and community interest
• demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future
• paragraph-length discourse with some control of aspect
• in narrations and descriptions, speakers combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length, although these narrations and descriptions tend to be handled separately rather than interwoven
• can handle appropriately the essential linguistic challenges presented by a complication or an unexpected turn of events
• responses are typically not longer than a single paragraph
• speaker’s dominant language may be evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of that language
• at times their discourse may be minimal for the level, marked by an irregular flow, and containing noticeable self-correction
• speech is typically marked by a certain grammatical roughness (e.g., inconsistent control of verb endings)
• vocabulary often lacks specificity
• able to use communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution
• sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion
• can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may require some repetition or restatement

Intermediate, 6-4 points

Create with language, initiate, maintain, and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions.

Some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations. Predictable, familiar topics related to daily activities.
Understood, with some repetition, by speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.

Discrete sentences

6 points

- able to handle successfully uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to their work, school, recreation, particular interests, and areas of competence
- can handle a substantial number of tasks associated with a higher level, but they are unable to sustain performance of all of these tasks all of the time
- can narrate and describe in all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length, but not all the time (e.g., failure to carry out fully the narration or description in the appropriate major time frame, an inability to maintain paragraph-length discourse, or a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary)
- can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although interference from another language may be evident (e.g., use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translations), and a pattern of gaps in communication may occur

5 points

- able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations
- conversation is generally limited to those predictable and concrete exchanges necessary for survival in the target culture
- personal information related to self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel, and lodging
- tend to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information
- capable of asking a variety of questions when necessary to obtain simple information to satisfy basic needs, such as directions, prices, and services
- have difficulty linking ideas, manipulating time and aspect, and using communicative strategies, such as circumlocution
- able to express personal meaning by creating with the language, in part by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to produce responses typically consisting of sentences and strings of sentences
- speech may contain pauses, reformulations, and self-corrections as they search for adequate vocabulary and appropriate language forms to express themselves
- generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives
4 points

• able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks by creating with the language in straightforward social situations

• conversation is restricted to some of the concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival in the target-language culture

• topics of basic personal information; (e.g. self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences, and some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases)

• speakers are primarily reactive and struggle to answer direct questions or requests for information

• able to ask a few appropriate questions

• express personal meaning by combining and recombining what they know and what they hear from their interlocutors into short statements and discrete sentences

• responses are often filled with hesitancy and inaccuracies as they search for appropriate linguistic forms and vocabulary while attempting to give form to the message

• speech is characterized by frequent pauses, ineffective reformulations and self-corrections

• pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax are strongly influenced by their first language

• may require repetition or rephrasing, but can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors, particularly by those accustomed to dealing with non-natives

Novice, 3-1 points

Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists, and phrases.

Most common informal settings. Most common aspects of daily life.

May be difficult to understand, even for speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.

Individual words and phrases

3 points

• able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations

• conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs

• respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information
also able to ask a few formulaic questions
able to express personal meaning by relying heavily on learned phrases or recombinations of these and what they hear from their interlocutor
primarily short and sometimes incomplete sentences in the present, and may be hesitant or inaccurate
may sometimes sound surprisingly fluent and accurate
pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax may be strongly influenced by the first language
frequent misunderstandings may arise but, with repetition or rephrasing, can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors used to non-natives
not able to sustain sentence-level discourse

2 points
communicate minimally by using a number of isolated words and memorized phrases limited by the particular context in which the language has been learned
when responding to direct questions, they may say only two or three words at a time or give an occasional stock answer
pause frequently as they search for simple vocabulary or attempt to recycle their own and their interlocutor’s words
may be understood with difficulty even by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives

1 point
no real functional ability and, because of their pronunciation, may be unintelligible
given adequate time and familiar cues, they may be able to exchange greetings, give their identity, and name a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment
cannot participate in a true conversational exchange

0 points
No response
APPENDIX E

EMOTION FORM (EF)
1. Please enter your **study ID** given to you during registration: ________

You will see 6 questions about your thoughts, actions, and emotions in the moment when you were prompted to fill out this survey. Please respond to these questions the best way you can judge your emotions and be as specific as possible.
You may add any additional thoughts or opinions in the last question.

2. As you were prompted to take this survey...
   - What was the main thing you were doing? ______________________________
   - What else were you doing at the same time? ______________________________
   - What were you thinking about? ______________________________

3. Think back on how you got into this activity… Were you doing this activity mainly because you
   - wanted to
   - had to complete some hours of the study
   - had nothing else to do
   - though you should do it
   - other: ________

4. Indicate how much **choice** you felt you had in engaging in this activity:
   - None at all
   - A little
   - A moderate amount
   - A lot
   - A great deal

5. Indicate what **emotions** you felt when you were prompted to take this survey and how strongly you felt them:


   - interested, alert, curious
   - irritated, annoyed, frustrated
   - embarrassed, self-conscious
   - fascinated, in awe, amazement
   - inspired, uplifted
   - proud, confident, or self-assured
   - bored, disengaged, not interested
   - overwhelmed or stressed
6. **Overall, how did you feel** in the moment you were prompted to take this survey?

My overall feelings/emotions were... *(Multiple choice)*:

- Very negative
- Moderately negative
- Slightly negative
- Neither positive nor negative
- Slightly positive
- Moderately positive
- Very positive

7. **What are any other thoughts that come to your mind right now?**