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Intercultural Research
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The continual effect of youth language programs:
A mixed methods research study of the relationship
between childhood language-learning
and intercultural sensitivity

Abstract: There is an assumption in American popular culture that learning more than one language in childhood benefits students beyond the classroom and beyond the formative years, as learning capacity is assumed to be increased and students go on to become more globally aware citizens. Clearly the staffing and funding required to increase language programs in youth development programs is an obstacle, but why then, does there seem to be lack of advocacy for such programs nationwide? Thus, the purpose of the following research design project is to further prove that learning languages at young ages aids development immensely and should be a vital part of childhood development, not extracurricular.

Literature Review:

This mixed methods research proposal stems from the assumption that exposure to foreign languages in childhood positively effects intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity is defined as the extent to which someone can empathize or relate to someone from another culture, which will be primarily measured in this study through testimonial. Before any subjects are asked about their level of intercultural sensitivity, the nature and extent to which they were exposed to foreign languages will help to categorize them.

Firstly, subjects will be categorized by the age at which they were first exposed, signifying language-learning aptitude. This categorization is segmented into the following age brackets: 0-6, 6-9, 9-14, 14-18, and 18 and older, at which point language learning is known to become significantly more difficult, and the extent to which a given subject is interculturally sensitive depends on many more factors than just exposure to languages. This continuous variable will be scored depending on placement. Placement within the first age bracket correlates with children who were exposed to a foreign language before the first grade. Subjects within this bracket are given 5 language aptitude points, and 1 less point for each subsequent ranking. A higher score in this regard resembles a higher language-learning aptitude and a lower score resembles the likelihood of indifference, or even aversion to other cultures.

Secondly, subjects will be categorized by the amount of languages they were exposed to at each of these ages. This continuous variable will be categorized in the following scale: 1, 2, and 3 or more, at which point the amount of languages a child is exposed to rivals the amount of subjects they focus on in school. This is a significant undertaking regardless of the formality by which they are exposed. Learning 1

additional language to the native tongue is scored with 3 points, to signify the departure from cultural solitude, a term used to further define the likelihood of indifference or aversion to other cultures. Learning 2 additional languages is scored with 4 points, and 3 or more with 5 points. In addition to these three categories, no exposure to foreign languages through the age of 18 results in a score of 0.

Thirdly, subjects will be categorized by the formality of language learning. The following three categorizations determine the setting in which a subject was exposed to a foreign language, and furthermore, the likelihood that they were encouraged to use it. The first category is considered exposure-in-passing, wherein a subject was exposed to a foreign language while transient. In this particular category a subject may have been exposed the use of a foreign-language at a distance, but was by no means implicitly linked to the context of use, i.e. while traveling or on vacation. This category is scored with 1 point per language to appropriately account for defacto intercultural sensitivity by way of globalization. **(My assumption here is that over time all of the world's people will become more interculturally sensitive, purely through globalization)**. The second category is community-based, used to signify the likelihood that exposure did not necessarily correlate to use (practice), but that proximity and repetition became factors. This category is scored with 5 points because it is important to note this atmospheric divergence from cultural solitude, and to appropriately balance its affect versus a subject that is well traveled. The third category is hovel-based, used to signify the likelihood that a subject was not only exposed within close proximity to an additional language other than the native tongue, but that the use of this language defines it as a second language and not a foreign language. This category is scored with 10 points, because the use of the second language, albeit in an informal setting, encouraged practice and familiarity with the linguistic nuances of other cultures. The fourth and final category is academic-based, the only formal language-learning category. If a subject was exposed to a foreign language in school, or in some repetitive academic setting, then intercultural sensitivity was introduced and reinforced formally. This category is scored with 5 points for every formal academic year that they were exposed.