

**Advantages of cultural immersion methodology in the foreign language learning process  
and strategies to approach it**

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## **Dedication**

To God, the Holy Trinity, and our Mother Mary, for their constant presence in our dreams, joys, sorrows, and in every stage of our lives.

To our family, our mother, father, sister, and brother, for their unconditional support and the love they give us day by day.

A special dedication to the artist Yeison Jiménez, for being an example of personal growth, resilience, perseverance, and fulfillment of dreams.

Your artistic and life legacy will always live on us.

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### Specialized Analytical Summary

Title	Advantages of Cultural Immersion Methodology in the Foreign Language Learning Process and Strategies to Approach It
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Keywords	Cultural immersion Foreign language teaching-Learning Exchange Motivation Real context Direct exposure
Description	Monograph
Sources	Write the number of References per type: Primary Sources: 8 Secondary Sources: 7 Tertiary Sources: 13
Contents	La inmersión cultural es un método de enseñanza-aprendizaje que ha sido implementado en varias áreas de la educación con la intención de optimizar los procesos educativos de los estudiantes y obtener mejores resultados frente a los objetivos propuestos. Específicamente, en la adquisición de una

lengua extranjera, la inmersión cultural es una herramienta útil que contribuye al proceso de diversas maneras, sin embargo, es necesario que esta sea una estrategia frecuente en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera, así como implementarla de manera correcta, teniendo en cuenta el contexto de los estudiantes y la variedad de enfoques que esta metodología ofrece. La intención de esta monografía es proveer evidencia, así como analizar las ventajas de esta metodología específicamente en la adquisición de una lengua extranjera y las diferentes maneras de abordarla. Dentro del contenido de la monografía, temas como el rol de la inmersión cultural en la motivación e interés de los estudiantes por el idioma, los programas de intercambio para adquirir una lengua extranjera y la exposición directa a la cultura de la lengua extranjera dentro del salón de clases fueron abordados y analizados exponiendo el punto de vista de autores académicos, estudiantes y docentes que estuvieron totalmente involucrados en diferentes procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Gracias a estos testimonios y experiencias fue posible evaluar la metodología en contextos reales dejando atrás supuestos enfocándose en sentimientos, desafíos y resultados auténticos de los involucrados. La identificación de desafíos, áreas de oportunidad, así como los resultados y el desarrollo de los estudiantes en la lengua extranjera proveen información sobre el éxito de la metodología y así mismo contribuyen a reconocer las estrategias que pueden ser implementadas dentro de la inmersión cultural. De igual forma, esta monografía abre la

	<p>puerta hacia novedosas formas de implementar la metodología de la inmersión cultural en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera considerando el contexto e intereses de los estudiantes.</p>
<p>Research Line</p>	<p>The presented monograph is a revision of the cultural immersion's impact in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language. The methodological design was purely qualitative since the focus was the analysis of several authors' opinions, students' testimonies as well as narratives about the acquisition process of a foreign language from the cultural immersion methodology. The investigation line is Ethno Education, culture and communication since it aligns with the research and analysis of interculturality thematics, considering the students' context as well as the singularities of international communities in which a foreign language is developed. The analysis and bibliographic revision do not count with quantitative data, and the investigation line was descriptive since in the entire bibliographic support we count with narrations of educative processes, experiences and points of view.</p>
<p>Conclusions</p>	<p>According to bibliographic analysis and research, cultural immersion has evidenced to be one of the best methods of foreign language learning since it does not only contributes to enhance the communication skills such as speaking, listening, writing and reading but optimize motivation and interest of students for the foreign language and its culture evidencing outcomes in wider contexts and in a minor amount of time.</p>

	<p>The investigation approached different strategies to implement within the cultural immersion methodology; cultural exchange programs such as Erasmus and Au pair are two of the most common. The outcomes are evidenced in the foreign language development from different disciplines as well as in the knowledge of the culture where the interexchange is happening. The constant need and contact learners have with the language and culture offer the proper complement to their academic process through real contexts while encouraging a sense of belonging for the country where the language is spoken.</p> <p>The foreign language experience is also analyzed from the classrooms. Strategies and resources such as traditions, national holidays, music, ICT, etc. were documented as functional materials to implement within the cultural immersion methodology, standing out the importance of considering the students' context as well as the culture of the approached country.</p>
Advisor	Esteban Ricardo Jimenez Bedoya

### **Abstract**

Cultural immersion is a teaching-learning methodology that has been implemented in several areas of education with the intention of optimizing the educative processes of students and count with better outcomes by the time to fulfill the proposed objectives. Specifically, on foreign language acquisition, cultural immersion is a useful tool that contributes in different ways to the process, nevertheless; is necessary to make this a frequent strategy within the foreign language teaching-learning procedures as well as to implement it in the correct way considering the students' context and the variety of approaches this methodology offers.

The intention of this monograph is to provide evidence as well as analyze the advantages of this methodology specifically in the acquisition of a foreign language and the different strategies to approach it. Within the monograph content, topics such as the role of the cultural immersion in the motivation and interest of students for the language, the interexchange programs to acquire a foreign language and the direct exposure to the foreign language's culture inside the classroom were approached and analyzed exposing the point of view of academic authors, students and teachers who were fully involved in the process of the teaching-learning of a foreign language. With these testimonies and experiences, it is possible to assess the methodology from real contexts leaving behind the assumptions and focusing on authentic feelings, results and challenges of the ones involved. The identified challenges, areas of opportunities as well as the outcomes and development of the students with the foreign language provide information about the success of the methodology and likewise contribute to recognizing the strategies that may be implemented within the cultural immersion. This monograph also opens the door to novel ways of applying the cultural immersion methodology in the foreign language teaching-learning process considering the contexts and interests of students.

**Key Words:** Cultural immersion, foreign language teaching-Learning, exchange, motivation, real context, direct exposure

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## **Introduction**

Nowadays with the globalization phenomenon the foreign language acquisition has become a necessity in many areas and environments not only for the people and their professional development but also for the societies and sustainable development of these. With that in mind it is important to consider the educational processes implemented for the people to acquire a foreign language in a successful way. As foreign language teachers we need to observe, analyze and evaluate the methodologies, strategies and approaches to determine the functionality and outcomes of these, to implement improvements as well that help with the foreign language fulfillment.

### **Significance of Study**

Foreign language learning is one of the most important stages in the education of students. Learning a second and even nowadays a third language has become a need due to what globalization is proposing in any area of study. Due to the previous effective methods are a must in all the foreign language educative processes. For most of the students this area becomes a difficult need, and it could even generate stress and an apathy feeling that could turn the process into an issue from the student's point of view.

Considering the previous, it is necessary to explore new methodologies that contribute to the language acquisition process in friendly and efficient ways. Not only focusing on the foreign language but also when it comes to education in general, traditional methods have been enhanced, modified or even completely changed, showing positives outcomes for the students' development.

From the multiple methodologies that have been applied in the foreign language-teaching process cultural immersion has not had enough recognition and implementation within the educational process. It is because of the previous that it is imperative to provide visibility to this specific methodology with the intention to apply it. For that, it's important to understand how this methodology works, advantages and opportunity areas, ways to implement it as well as the study and analysis of real cases, that help us to approach it in a constant and correct way and like this to obtain success results in the acquisition of a foreign language.

### **Statement of the Problem**

From our experience as foreign language students and teachers we can say one of the best methodologies to acquire a foreign language is to involve the learner in the culture of the language to learn. Cultural immersion is a methodology that has been implemented in different pedagogical areas with evidence of successful outcomes, in contrast with the acquisition of a foreign language this methodology becomes very useful and suitable since language and culture are directly related. "Language and culture are inseparable entities, with language not only reflecting culture but also actively contributing to its formation" (Brown, 2007).

The succeeding monograph will manifest a complete analysis of several critical factors, strategies and results of implementation and application of cultural immersion as a methodology to the process of acquiring a foreign language. This academic product will focus on four main contents with the intention of successfully fulfilling the proposed objectives.

The previous mentioned contents will cover topics such as the language learning and motivation improvement in terms of cultural immersion application, how this contributes to language development, grammar, communication skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing),

interest and engagement, etc. which strategies are the adequate to implement and wonder if these are achieving the teaching-learning objectives in the intended time.

Exchange programs will be approached as a strategy for cultural immersion on foreign language acquisition considering these offered a complete awareness of the language application directly on real context situations furthermore focusing on the foreign language as a necessity of the learner to survive and socialize when is being faced with a totally new environment.

Along with the real context situations we may also analyze the direct exposure on the classroom as an strategy of cultural immersion where we evaluate the traditional ways of teaching and compare these with the exposure of the culture in the classroom making use of strategies that involve identity factors of the foreign language environment such as history, food, costumes, places, music, etc.

“The language is studied not only by a set of words and grammatical rules, but also by it the worldview, values, customs and historical experiences of a particular people” (Azimjonovna, 2025, p. 253). This perspective is often belittle on the learning process of a foreign language since is often seen as an obvious statement and another strategy more without deepen on it and take the real advantage this can offer, nonetheless, according to the presented below the cultural immersion is an essential approach that can make a mayor difference for the learner as well as for the teacher when acquiring, improving and mastering a new language.

## **Objectives**

### **General Objective**

To evaluate cultural immersion as a foreign language teaching-learning methodology by examining its benefits, advantages, approaches, and strategies.

### **Specific Objectives**

To compare cultural immersion with traditional methodologies in foreign language acquisition by highlighting its distinctive approaches and advantages

To examine how cultural immersion influences students' interest and motivation in foreign language learning

To Highlight the contributions of interexchange programs in a deeper learning and understanding of the foreign language, culture and country, as a whole.

## Literature Review

Several studies have confirmed that the most successful approach for the foreign language acquisition process is cultural immersion. This is because in any place of the world language and culture influence each other. According to Karlik (2023) "Language and culture are inseparable", people witness it constantly, when specific sayings, expressions and slang are characteristics in determined region. However, the previous it is only one of multiple examples to bring when it comes to the cultural usage for the teaching-learning process of a language, as Azimjonovna (2025) mentioned language is culture, tradition, values and the worldwide view of people related with it.

Following the cultural immersion study line, it is imperative to highlight that the process and strategies to implement this methodology need to be properly executed. Considering factors such as the interest and motivation of students for the foreign language may make a difference, Gürlek (2016) noted that when students have positive attitudes towards the language and culture of the target language, to get success in learning the language will be easier. Likewise, direct exposure to the culture of the language inside or outside the classroom provides a completely different experience for the students. Compared to the traditional methods, focusing on the teaching-learning process in real life contexts prepare students to survive within the society of the foreign language, besides, the learning process will be extended and found beyond the language lessons. Savage and Huges (2014) evidenced the previous with a student's testimony learning Chinese: "Being surrounded by Chinese characters really made a difference. I learned more characters and improved my Mandarin 'pinyin' this year."

The research and analysis of the authors presented in this monograph indicate that cultural immersion is one of the most effective methodologies for foreign language acquisition. It

also provides a deeper understanding of the reasons behind this effectiveness, revealing various experiences, strategies and factors that should be considered to make the learning process more efficient.

## **Methodology**

The presented monograph is a revision of the cultural immersion's impact in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language. The methodological design was purely qualitative since the focus was the analysis of several authors' opinions, students' testimonies as well as narratives about the acquisition process of a foreign language from the cultural immersion methodology.

The analysis and bibliographic revision do not count with quantitative data, and the investigation line follows the Ethno Education, culture and communication characteristics with an analysis focused on interculturality thematics, considering the students' context as well as the singularities of international communities in which a foreign language is developed. The study type can be considered as descriptive since in the entire bibliographic support we count with narrations of educative processes, experiences and points of view.

The investigation methodology followed a path in which at first instance the bibliographic selection was conducted focusing on books, academic articles and relevant testimonies prioritizing academic recognition and the cultural immersion as methodology of foreign language acquisition. As it could be seen forward in the monograph, academics articles are not centered only in the learning of favored languages like English or French but also in languages and cultures of Asian countries in order to have a more extensive point of view.

After selecting the most relevant bibliographic references, a process of bibliographic citations selection was conducted aiming at the main topics and subtopics that were intended to be addressed aligning with the intention to disclose the advantages of cultural Immersion methodology in the foreign language learning process and strategies to approach it and that provided solid arguments to the discussion. The previous process led to approach topics such as cultural exchange programs, direct exposure in the classroom, proficiency, motivation and

interest in the foreign language in which color and visual codes were implemented highlighting key concepts, strategies and authors' opinions to ease the main ideas identification.

The selected data and citations were critically examined, identifying patterns, trends and differences between the authors' perspectives. Ultimately, the analyzed information was integrated into a coherent and structured text, following the academic criteria and keeping consistency within the topics.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Cultural Immersion as a Foreign Language Acquisition Method**

Language is in culture and culture is in language, each country, community and society own specific identities that differentiate them and make them unique. The culture of a place emerges from what people on their individuality grant to it. It is in this way that a community is raised and built. Accents, slang, corporal expressions, sayings and more extensive ways of expression like music, art, celebrations, even rules or habits, are part of what the culture of a place means.

As per the fact that language is in culture, it is imperative for the acquisition of a different language to include a cultural background on the teaching-learning process, according to Karlik (2023) “Language and culture are inseparable” (p.5), as they are related one with another due to different factors that allow that the outcomes on the language acquisition make a better sense when talking about communication and social skills. Due to the previous many authors have agreed about the need to approach a foreign language acquisition process from the cultural immersion methodology. Cultural absorption helps learners understand the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language, such as politeness, joking, and context of specific expressions, which are strongly influenced by culture. “Immersion experiences, including direct contact with the host culture or engagement with native speakers, provide authentic contexts for language use and enhance intuitive language skills” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Based on this perspective, the present analysis focuses on how cultural immersion can be systematically implemented in educational settings to improve both linguistic proficiency and cultural exchange competences.

This methodology has been used not only in foreign language teaching as well as in many other disciplines, contributing in a very positive way to different teaching-learning processes. A clear example of this is the education of historical contexts in many Asian countries. From an early age, children are constantly involved in their traditions, history and customs through firsthand experiences. In most of these countries, people possess extensive knowledge of their ancestors and their practices, which simultaneously fosters a sense of belonging and desire to deepen their understanding on these topics. Given the broad scope of the culture, this approach can be applied to different disciplines, significantly enhancing learning. This approach has made different ways of art such as music, dance, and theater more accessible while also contributing to the exchange of knowledge in more complex fields such as medicine, biology and finance. Specifically on language training, cultural immersion provides not only outstanding language skills but also social abilities and the chance to understand foreign cultures from a closer perspective which many times may generate a particular bond within the student and the target language. Here is when what Azimjonovna (2025) make sense when expressed “Language is not just the sum of words, but also the culture, tradition, values and worldview of people associated with it” (p.255).

### **Language Proficiency through Cultural Immersion**

The complete expertise of a language is a skill that is acquired through time, even in our mother language we are constantly learning and getting new information from our context and the people and places where we coexist. When learning a foreign language, it is necessary that learners put aside the known and be open to acquiring new ways of learning as they are going to be immersed in a completely different world seen from language perspective. It is at this point where the culture becomes one of the protagonists of the teaching-learning process, in the same way that as mentioned previously we are constantly learning new forms of communication on our own language by coexisting daily in our society, learners will have a major exposure to the target foreign language if they are constantly involved in that culture. As Hossain (2023) stated, “Learning English becomes more than an academic pursuit; it becomes a journey of understanding and adapting to the diverse contexts in which the language is spoken” (p.3).

Several studies and investigations have shown positive outcomes in different language learning processes, contributing to communicative competence and so on to the proficiency and fluency of the target language. For instance, Byram and Feng (2004) found that students who participated in intercultural communication courses developed a better understanding of both their own and the target culture, leading to improved language proficiency and intercultural communicative competence. Similarly, a study by Sercu (2005) involving European language learners showed that those who received culturally integrated language instruction were more adept at using language appropriately in various cultural contexts.

The main goal of students who are engaged in the learning of a new language is the capability of fluent communication with native people, whether if their intention is to achieve professional growth, to have access to foreign resources or simply socialize, the assertive

communication will always be the students' objective. Given this, we will also have to consider that cultural differences from one country to another are boundless and many limitations, confusions and misunderstandings can be presented when the awareness of the culture is not well known by the learner. Specifically in English, simple situations like asking "what are you up to?" instead of "what are you doing?" could become a considerable barrier for a student in a real life context, these kind of expressions are not commonly taught in an English class, most of the times the educators adhere to curriculums that are not often updated and most important that do not take into account the cultural nuances, utterances or contexts where the foreign language is developed.

In contrast to the previous, when cultural immersion is used as the main methodology of the teaching-learning process of a foreign language students will be constantly exposed to unlimited ways of expressions discovering not only basic ploys as the previously revealed ("what are you up to?"/"what are you doing? ") but also major variations that can make a big difference during important circumstances regarding assertive communication, an example of that can be that some words or expressions that learners often use on their mother language might be rude or awkward on the cultural context of the target language. Furthermore, the knowledge of these nuances could contribute to the confidence of students when using the foreign language considering the statement of Dang and Nguyen (2024) "Students noted improvements in specific language skills, particularly speaking and listening, through exposure to cultural content. Role-playing different cultural scenarios in class was highlighted as a particularly effective method for building confidence in using" (p.5350).

Due to the methodology itself cultural immersion can even contribute to the learner acquiring knowledge in a faster way, the difference within students learning a language focused

on traditional methods contrasted to the ones who are constantly immersed in the culture of the language show an advantage in relation to the speed of knowledge acquirement and retention. For example, all the students nowadays have access to technology, apps and online resources which are used by them regularly every day, if students set up all their social media, apps, or cellphone features on English language, will naturally obtain new vocabulary in a faster way, vocabulary which students will continuously see. In this way they will be able to obtain not only new vocabulary but also know their usage forms, pay attention to the spelling hence the pronunciation, etc., just as Root (2014) states “integrating cultural elements into language instruction enables learners to develop a more comprehensive comprehension of the language's structures and usage in various social situations”. Eventually this will become an instinctive behavior, and the foreign language will be always present in one of their closest contexts. This method seems to be more natural, faster and trustworthy for students that simply to memorize the words, their pronunciation and writing in a mechanic way justifying like that what Dewey (2008) noted “Students who studied in programs of immersion in their own country improved their fluency and learnt more grammar and vocabulary than those who studied in regular courses in their own country.”

Learning a foreign language for students can be an overwhelming process due to cognitive effort that is required. The massive information that is necessary to acquire, retain and constantly develop within the different communication skills, could cause the students to have an oppressive view of the teaching-learning process. It is under our control as educators to ease the process implementing suitable methodologies and strategies that always take into account students' needs and contexts and as exposed previously cross-cultural experiences are one of the best approaches that can be applied to lead them to the language proficiency considering that;

Hugo and Ambrose (2019) stated “Our students are more directed and involved in instruction when what they are learning is useful and meaningful and can be applied to their everyday lives. It has been said that people retain: - 10% of what they read - 20% of what they hear - 30% of what they see - 50% of what they see and hear - 90% of what they say and do” (p.64).

## **Impact of the Cultural Exposure on the Interest and Motivation of Students for the Acquisition of the Foreign Language**

Nowadays educational processes in general have become very challenging due to several factors that cannot be avoided during the classes or even during the whole teaching-learning process. Factors such as technology and its reachable tools, the current development of young students and many other distractions become barriers for educators and the contact with the learners. Keeping the attention and interest of learners during a class is essential for the academic process to be developed and yet this process can be constantly disrupted due to the previously mentioned reasons, resulting in negatively affecting the whole educative process. Particularly, in languages, the engagement of students with their process is essential since as mentioned before the language is a knowledge that needs to be nourished constantly and in different ways. A language learner will consistently discover new things, new expressions, new nuances, new accents, new slang, etc., and on these stages the genuine interest plays an important role.

For many people the process of acquiring a foreign language has a negative perspective, it might be seen as a tedious activity and most of the times, the idea to be fluent and have assertive communication on a different language becomes an "impossible goal" generating stressful and frustrating feelings towards the language ending most of the times in the withdrawal of the process. Nevertheless, Gürlek (2016) noted "If students develop positive attitudes towards the language and culture of the target language, it will get easier to be successful in learning language" (p.21) to have a culture approach within the strategies to implement could most of the times generate interest of students for the language. The immersion of culture aside of contributing to the language knowledge and cognitive process will also create a sense of belonging of the students with the regions where the cultural approach is being located, they will

start to value the traditions, costumes and identity of that specific place making of this a good start to supply that engagement and interest that is require when learning a foreign language.

Kuimova, Burleigh, Maldague and Startseva (2017) stated “increases knowledge in the major, improves language skills and facilitates making new friends. In addition, teachers noted that students became more curious, industrious and motivated, and showed better academic performance” (p.187) which evidences the positive effect of the cultural factor on the language classes. Cultural immersion methodology offers a wide variety of strategies and contexts where the teaching-learning process can be adapted and aligned with the specific purposes of educators and students. In the case above the academic exchange was one of that strategies and the outcomes were beneficial in the cognitive scenario as well as in the engagement and motivation of students for the language, something to remark is that the exchange they had, also contributed into the curiosity of students, their wish to know new things about the culture drove them to search up for opportunities of interaction and communication, constantly using the foreign language in different contexts.

This may also be described as a cyclical process; Baker (2015) noted that “When learners see the practical applications of their language skills in real-world cultural contexts, their motivation to learn increases”. Once a learner is exposed to cultural contents Risager (2018) pointed: “such as exploring traditions, cuisine, and media from the target culture, can spark students' interest and provide a more immersive and enjoyable learning experience” while this is happening, students are noticing about any progress, advance or even difficulties or opportunity areas in their process, they own their learning and focus on the positive outcomes to keep applying them as well as their fragilities to strength them in a confidence way due to the understanding they now have for the culture of the language.

The fact that this academic exchange is described as a cyclical process does not imply that it will make the process repetitive and monotonous, due to the diversity the cultural immersion may offer for the teaching-learning process of a foreign language, educator and students have the freedom to navigate through several topics, one could even said the options are boundless and depending of the focus of the subject it can be even more amplified. This variety is the key to keeping the interest and motivation of students by the foreign language. In effect, cases have been observed where the culture of a country or a specific aspect of it is the primary element that captures the learner's attention and since the language and culture are interconnected it is in that way that learners discover an interest in having a better knowledge of the language that is spoken in that place. Specific precedents of the above could be the interest on Japan due to the big Manga culture there, the interest for English language from people that like soccer teams in Europe, or a most recent and recognized phenomenon the massive interest for the Korean language due to what is called 'Hallyu' (한류) or 'the Korean wave' which is a global spread of the South Korean culture due to the huge and growing interest of foreigners for aspects such as the Korean skincare, the K-pop music, K-dramas, etc. Just as Karlik (2023) mentioned “by studying the culture of the language, learners can gain a deeper appreciation of its significance and relevance, which can increase their motivation to learn. For example, a student learning Chinese may find the language more meaningful and exciting when they learn about the rich history and cultural heritage of China” (p.7)

The genuine interest of students for these aspects of a foreign culture represents an advantage that can be used in several ways for the educators; Liu (2014) conducted a study with Chinese university students learning English, discovering that those who were exposed to cultural aspects of English-speaking countries exhibited higher levels of motivation and

engagement in their studies. This increased motivation was linked to a deeper interest in the language and a desire to connect with the culture associated with it.

The process of acquiring a foreign language unfolds a whole new world for the learners which might be overwhelming, in most of the cases, introducing culture knowledge and experiences of the foreign language could make a big difference on the teaching learning process making it friendly and natural, as Canagarajah (2013) and Kramsch, (1993) mentioned “Cultural competence enhances learners’ ability to engage in intercultural communication, adjusting their language use to different cultural contexts and avoiding potential misunderstandings”, the relationship within both cultures (learner’s culture and foreign language culture) often becomes an incentive since they can start to easily notice differences and similarities, compare them and in that way to be part of a new community when understanding usual expressions, sayings, jokes, etc. Hugo and Ambrose (2019) “Aside from that, it keeps learning interactive and fun. You do not have to pour over boring texts for hours and still be unable to retain anything”. (p.59)

The impact of the cultural exposure methodology not only in the foreign languages educative process but also in many other areas provides an extensive source of strategies that contribute to the language learning through an interdisciplinary context which will address as well to a positive perspective and attitude from learners to their process. Azimjonovna (2025) mentioned that “Through culture, the language learner discovers new worldviews, learns the way of life, and traditions of other peoples. This increases interest in learning and makes the learning process more vibrant.” (p.256)

### **Cultural Interexchange Programs as Strategies for Foreign Language Acquisition**

Within the many strategies that cultural immersion methodology offers, immersion abroad is one of the most effective ones. Savage and Hughes (2014) stated “Research into language acquisition resulting from study abroad immersion experiences has generally shown that overseas immersion opportunities positively affect second language development” (p.104). This strategy triggers to launch the previous acquired knowledge, and it offers the opportunity for students to develop their language skills within an authentic and direct environment. Immersion abroad contributes to the cognitive process as well as the engagement of the students for the language by introducing a new element in their learning process: the necessity of constant communication to survive or get through the daily basis, such as going to the store, requesting directions, socializing, etc. Pellegrino (1998), (2005) suggested that “learner attempts to interact with native speakers involve a great deal of social personal risk. Students in this study who successfully negotiated the communicative process with native speakers overcame their initial fear and made the effort to communicate despite the myriads of language mistakes”.

Additionally, the continuous interaction of learner with the local people provides specific information of the region where the foreign language is developed, such as slangs, accents, expressions, these pieces of information promote an extensive cultural understanding where communication becomes easier and natural, eventually the students will feel confident within a context where they can freely manage their role as another member of that society. Research made by Wilkinson (2002), pointed out that “American students participating in study abroad programs in Spain reported substantial gains in language proficiency and cultural knowledge. The immersive environment forced students to use the language authentically and adapt to

cultural nuances, resulting in a more profound and practical understanding of both the language and culture”.

The demanding scenario of being in a foreign country and the strategy of foreign immersion are the key. Even when the foreign language requires a mayor effort from learners due to the need to acquire a whole new writing system, the immersion abroad may be even further beneficial. When we talk about a language such as Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Arabic, etc., being involved in contexts where the writing systems are constantly present will help the students to approach them in different ways. For instance, it is very common that in Asian countries like Japan, Korea and China the streets are cram with all kinds of signs promoting different stores, services, restaurants, etc. In this case students will be continually exposed to the characteristic vertical way of these oriental countries’ writing as well as the characters, signs or letters that give structure to the language itself, avoiding the annoying process of being repetitive and memorizing. This can be supported with several of the testimonies of students in Savage and Huges (2014) study where skills on Chinese of a group of students were analyzed after a foreign immersion on China: “I believe I am a lot better at writing and remembering characters, especially the ones you use often, which was a goal of mine.” (Savage and Huges, 2014, p.112); “Being surrounded by Chinese characters really made a difference. I learned more characters and improved my Mandarin ‘pinyin’ this year.” (p.113); “My characters increased because I saw them everywhere I looked, and I also learned some new vocabulary. Also, I learned some Confucius sayings which are very interesting, and my reading definitely improved” (p.113); “In reading and speaking. Every day we read from textbooks written only in Chinese, and we saw characters everywhere we went. We were able to interact with natives all the time and receive immediate feedback.” (p.113)

Prior testimony provides an illustration on how the foreign immersion contributes to learners; Savage and Huges (2014) mentioned that “We were able to interact with natives all the time and receive immediate feedback.” (p.113).” This is the best advantage of being in the country where the foreign language is spoken. Students not only have regular language classes but also can take their recent acquired knowledge in the classroom outside the classroom. Their learning process do not finish when the students leave the classroom instead it remains and forces students to implement the already acquired skills, develop them, transform them or obtain new ones according to their needs in society: “Everywhere I go I use Chinese, hear Chinese, and see Chinese. In the States, I have to open my textbook or go to it. In China, it comes to me.” (p.113); “I had no clue the extent of my speaking abilities until I came to China. I noticed how the more I talked, the more complex my sentences would become, and vocabulary became easier to remember.” (p.111); “I can already speak on a higher level than when I got here, and the extra practice has made me less timid about using the language as well.” (p.111); “My listening skills dramatically increased by constantly and actively listening to native speakers.” (p.112); “The program provided intense Chinese language training, which reinforced the foundation I’ve been building the last three years.” (p.113); “Nothing makes you learn faster than being surrounded by the language. Total immersion is the only way to really get good.” (p.113).

In recent years this strategy has been progressively recognized and implemented in several countries of the world due to the benefits previously exposed, both governmental and non-governmental entities acknowledge the immersion abroad advantages not only in the language learning area but also in the cultural background that it offers for the country recognition from different perspectives and scenarios. Thus, it is noticeable the increasing exchange and interexchange programs offered in different countries that aim to the acquisition of

their language from different contexts, including scholarships that are accessible for most of the population, for instance, the Korea Foundation provides foreign scholars and graduate students abroad with an opportunity to learn Korean systematically in a Korean language immersion program at Korean universities; au pair program which is a form of cultural exchange that gives the family and the au pairs a chance to experience and learn new cultures; DAAD scholarships in Germany for students wishing to improve their German proficiency and cultural knowledge of the country; Erasmus in Europe organize exchange for students to improve communication, language and inter-cultural skills.

Specifically on the current growing interest of Au Pair program there are several particularities that can be highlighted due to the context that the whole situation arouses. Au pair inter-exchange program can be considered a complete immersion experience since it covers the daily basis of people as well as educational and more formal contexts, simultaneously. People between 18 and 30 years old may travel to a foreign country, live in a family house, take care of children and continue with their foreign language studies. Here the need of the learners is extended beyond, they are not only in the school learning English or speaking with the natives in the streets, but they are also sharing they daily and personal life with people who speaks the foreign language. The need to adapt to different slangs according to their context expands their lexis, expressions and understanding of the language in a natural way, Pinar A. (2016) mentions studies by Knight and Schimdt-Rienhart (2002), Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004), and McMeekin (2006) that manifest “when host families play a cooperative role, this facilitates high quality interaction that allows students to practice the language, be corrected and receive new input at the same time, which very positively affects the development of linguistic and cultural knowledge” (p.89)

Focusing on the main objectives for the au pairs in this exchange program, which are to improve their language skills while experiencing a new culture, it could be said that they are always fulfilled. For au pairs, culture immersion is constant, during their work hours, in the school, even on their free time with their host families, they have the opportunity to learn from different cultural contexts addressing their language skills to different situations and audiences, it can be obvious but sometimes when learning a new language people do not realize about the different ways to communicate in different contexts, for instance it is not the same for an au pair to have a conversation with the children they are taking care of, than to have a conversation with the host parents either in a professional way (boss-employee relation) or in a casual way. The expansion of foreign language knowledge is massive since au pairs have different perspectives of the language. Students of English normally refer to the bathroom using that word "bathroom" , however when going out with friends to a restaurant this same place will be a "restroom", for the grownups this is the "toilet" but for some children could be "potty", for a language foreign student only this lexis expansion can make a big difference in their learning process. A study conducted by Allen, Dristas, and Mills (2006), states that "among students of different languages who lived with host families, shared bedrooms, or residences of students, found that those who lived with host families showed much greater progress in acquiring the linguistic knowledge and the level of identification with the target culture than students who stayed in dormitories or student residences"

On the other hand, Erasmus program in the European Union has demonstrated to be a successful initiative not only in terms of acquiring a new language but also contributing to the work field and experience of students. Erasmus program allows students to have an educative and work experience exchange in one of the European union countries learning the language,

acquiring work experience and involving in a new culture. Once more, the constant envelopment in the foreign country culture specifically in this case, in professional environments have shown positive outcomes not only in the expansion of their vocabulary and language learning in general but also in the perspective of students by the language and culture of the foreign country, as Gürlek (2016) stated in his study “The comparison of the results indicates that Erasmus Exchange Program supported the participants either to strengthen their already positive attitudes or to develop positive ones other than neutral ones” (p.28). Here is where the cultural immersion through a direct experience in a foreign country can be very beneficial, that place that once was new and unknown starts to become a home for the student, starts to be part of their own daily life, routines and important events. Once a foreign country becomes home and culture immersion allows students to build bonds and develop a mayor interest in academic, cognitive and professional processes such as language learning and the growth of their work and professional experience.

As mentioned above there are several exchange programs worldwide and the development of such methodology in different places and with different languages, being supported even by governmental institutions as well as prestigious academic institutions, only support and highlight the positive outcomes that cultural immersion provides to the language learning along with the understanding of language’s connection with cultural elements of a foreign country. Hossain (2023) stated “It is not just about learning words; it is about understanding the cultural context that gives those words life” (p.2)

## **Direct Exposure to the Foreign Language Culture in the Classroom through Suitable Strategies and Resources**

It is necessary that educators continually innovate with diverse methods and materials to make the teaching-learning process a significant experience for students, in this way we will be contributing not only to the cognitive process but also encouraging and fostering the interest of learners of the foreign language. As previously evidenced, cultural immersion is the best way to carry on this kind of process, but what to do when a direct exchange experience is not a reachable resource in the classroom?

Educators often have these challenges during the teaching process; it is not a simple task to bring the culture of a country to a classroom due to different factors and as Kramersch (2014) mentioned “The dearth of cultural content in course materials hinders learners’ exposure to real-world language use and cultural diversity”. However, it is necessary to note that to contribute to language learning in a proper way through cultural immersion it is necessary as a first step to consider the students’ context. Contrary to what Kramersch (1993) stated “Cultural elements incorporated into language learning resources facilitate the adaptation of language usage by students in a variety of cultural contexts”, Factors such as the student’s language level, interests and environment can become advantages as well as challenges by the time of the teaching-learning process. As educators our duty is to adapt the different cultural immersion strategies and resources to ensure these will be suitable for the learners’ skills, context and development.

McKay (2002) pointed out that “Predominantly focusing on grammar and vocabulary, many language learning resources neglect the rich cultural aspects essential for comprehensive language acquisition”, this prevents students from gaining real context knowledge and important nuances, slangs and expressions necessary for genuine conversations and proper development of

a foreign language. Consider the students' context as well as the foreign language to learn, provide the educator with a guide to implement suitable materials for an organic immersion to the language. "For example, if you want to learn how to speak Spanish, then telenovelas would be a great way to get acquainted with the language. Telenovelas play a major role in Latin America's pop culture. There are teachers who would testify that students would get involved in the dramas that they do not even realize that they are slowly improving their Spanish skills." (Hugo and Ambrose, 2019, p.59).

In another and deeper instance, Northeast Asian countries are well known for their gestures of respect and the importance of the hierarchies; children and young people are often showing good manners to senior adults, likewise in professional environments such as workplaces, offices, governmental entities the occupational role arouses different ways to approach the people, this has a strong connection with their culture and traditions since people from Asia value in an extended way the knowledge an old or professional person can contribute to their societies. South Korea, Japan and Vietnam are some of the languages that show this hierarchy system in their language. Korean language has one of the most complex formality systems in Asia holding language forms such as informal speech, formal speech, polite and honorific forms, each of these with different verbs termination and several usages of nouns and particles, considering always the relation of the speakers as well as their role in society. Here is where the mentioned by Kramersch (2014) make sense "Cultural nuances in greetings and politeness expressions can lead to misunderstandings". In this specific case the cultural awareness is essential since for Asian countries to show respect is very important. Speaking the language of these countries without considering the formality rules can be seen as a rude behavior and many times this could be intolerable for the locals, as Pennycook (2007) stated

“Educators can teach learners appropriate cultural norms for greetings and politeness to foster respectful interactions”.

The best way to approach these complexities of the languages in the classroom is through experimentation. Strategies such as role plays and discussions would be proper strategies that will make understanding simple while providing an extra factor of interest to the students. Educators could encourage students to use the formalities in the school, classroom and even in their own homes when referring to their parents and older siblings, considering in this way the differences when talking to a friend, an authority figure or an honored person. Risager (2018) suggested that: “Educators can use culturally relevant materials, such as films, literature, and real-life scenarios, to provide context and stimulate interest”

The previous are only several examples that show the options that the cultural immersion approach offers for a language teaching-learning process in the classroom. Nevertheless, due to the technological growth evidenced in the last years as well as the accessibility people have to it, ICT tools are also essential resources with major contributions to this approach. Besides audiovisual tools, resources such as apps, AI or virtual communication platforms offer considerable opportunities to access native information of the language. These help us to have a meaningful approach to culture of the country and with that profound access into the nuances and necessary contexts for understanding the language as a whole. An example of this is the communication that virtual tools ease with native speakers. Nowadays these kinds of interactions are becoming increasingly common; learners take advantage of oral communication; these resources offer enhancing skills such as listening, speaking or even writing or reading, adapting themselves progressively to the expressions, slang, accents, etc. of the natives. Virtual language exchanges, as noted by Belz and Thorne (2006), broaden learners’ cultural perspectives,

allowing them to access language resources conveniently and at their own pace. This asynchronous nature of virtual exchanges provides learners with the flexibility to explore different cultural contexts, promoting a self-directed and personalized learning journey (Hossain, K. 2023, p.8).

Cultural absorption offers a wide variety of materials and strategies to implement inside the classrooms. Through the customs, food, places, history, art, idioms, etc. of a country, a foreign language can be completely learned even with the nuances that most of the time are not taught in a common foreign language teaching process. Just as Risager (2018) stated “Educational Approaches to Integrating Culture Incorporating cultural content into language education can significantly enhance learning outcomes. Educators can use culturally relevant materials, such as films, literature, and real-life scenarios, to provide context and stimulate interest”. Furthermore, the implementation of innovative resources and strategies within the cultural immersion approach contributes to the stimulation and interest of students in the language, factor that most of the times is necessary in the educative processes, Dang, T. K. C., Nguyen, T.L. (2024) mentioned “Evaluation of Teaching Methods and Materials Participants praised teaching methods that actively integrated cultural content but suggested the need for more diverse and interactive materials. They appreciated their teachers' efforts to bring culture into lessons but expressed a desire for more interactive activities and real-life simulations. This feedback points to the effectiveness of current approaches while also highlighting areas for improvement” (p.5351)

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The presented monograph's objective was to highlight Cultural immersion as a differential methodology in foreign language learning, considering the benefits, strategies and resources to implement when applying it. This addressed the examination of current applied methodologies focusing on variables such as the student's proficiency and motivation in the foreign language, the influence of cultural interexchange programs as strategies as well as the materials employed.

According to the research, cultural immersion was evidenced as one of the best methods of foreign language learning since not only contributes to enhance the basic communication skills such as speaking, listening, writing and reading but optimize motivation and interest of students for the foreign language and its culture evidencing outcomes in wider contexts and in a minor amount of time.

The investigation also approached different strategies to implement within the cultural immersion methodology; cultural exchange programs such as Erasmus and Au pair are two of the most common. The outcomes are evidenced in the foreign language development from different disciplines as well as in the knowledge of the culture where the interexchange is happening. The constant need and contact learners have with the language and culture offer the proper complement to their academic process through real contexts while encouraging a sense of belonging for the country where the language is spoken. The cultural interexchange expression becomes meaningful during these programs since cultures and countries that are most of the time separate for thousands of kilometers have a significant encounter sharing traditions, customs and principles.

The foreign language experience is also analyzed from the classrooms. Strategies and

resources such as traditions, national holidays, music, ICT, etc. were documented as functional materials to implement within the cultural immersion methodology, standing out the importance of considering the students' context as well as the culture of the approached country. Direct exposure to the culture of the language that is being learned through the proper resources is an approach that should be implemented in each educational environment that is related to the foreign language teaching-learning process.

The focus in future research is recommended to be the necessity, process and possible outcomes of the incorporation of cultural immersion in the syllabus for the English subject as a leading methodology in Colombia. This will allow us to develop and analyze topics such as the teachers' role, challenges implementing the methodology in the country as well as consider Colombian context from different perspectives. The presented monograph as well as the references approached on it will be convenient resources to support the objective of the previously recommended investigation.

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