

**Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs**

by

Ekaterina McKnight

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**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the concept of language learning as part of educational tourism with a particular emphasis on the participants enrolled in short-term English programs in Toronto. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore participants' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program. Additionally, the researcher determines how their expectations were formulated, and what factors influenced their decision to participate in language programs. Despite the steady growth of the language school industry, it is surprising that so little research has been carried out into participants' expectations and experiences. Furthermore, it is notable that only a few studies have explored non-native English students learning English as a second or foreign language abroad (albeit Eder et.al., 2010; Gertner, 2010; Miao & Harris, 2012; Foster, 2014). Regarding students' expectations, some scholars have examined expectations but in regard to their academic achievements (Wilkinson, 1998; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ketsman, 2012) not in relation to their experiences. Such studies were intended to explore the influence of students' expectations on their academic performance before participating in language programs. This phenomenological study is grounded in a constructivist epistemology, within the interpretivist framework. 15 semi-structured interviews were carried out at three language schools in Toronto offering short-term English language programs in October and November 2016. Overall, this study fulfills a theoretical gap as limited studies have explored students' expectations and their experiences while participating in short-term language programs. Furthermore, this study has the potential to benefit both language schools and students. Lastly, the research outcomes, emerged from this study, contribute to a better understanding of the language schools' market.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Contextualization of Content and Rationale**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This phenomenological study examines the concept of language learning as part of educational tourism. According to Ritchie (2003), educational tourism is referred to as “tourist activity undertaken by those who are undertaking an overnight vacation and those who are undertaking an excursion for whom education and learning is a primary or secondary part of their trip” (p. 18). This definition includes two essential components of educational tourism: *learning*, whether conducted in formal or informal contexts, and the process of *leaving the home environment*. This study specifically focuses on participants of short-term English programs in Toronto, Canada. According to the Canadian standards, short-term programs entail a stay for no more than 6 months (Government of Canada, 2016). This type of language program involves travelling to a foreign destination (preferably, but not limited to, a place where the language is spoken natively), attending interactive classes and taking part in extra-curricular activities, such as excursions, either straight after classes or in the evenings and/or weekends. Despite an increased interest in examining the concept of language learning and language acquisition, it is surprising that there is a lack of academic literature which looks at participants' expectations and experiences. Besides, the cost of the trips and value generated by businesses (private language schools) suggests that expectations research would be of value to ensure satisfaction is met. Additionally, it is notable that only a few studies have explored non-native English participants learning English as a second or foreign language in the United States (e.g. Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Eder et al., 2010; Weger, 2013), United Kingdom (e.g. Miao & Harris, 2012; Foster, 2014), Australia (e.g. Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Lobo & Gurney, 2014), and Canada (Gertner,

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2010). Many studies, conversely, have been conducted on native English speakers learning either French (e.g. Wilkinson, 1998; Allen & Herron, 2003; Freed et.al., 2004; Allen, 2010a) or Spanish (e.g. Collentine, 2004; Segalowitz et.al., 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Isabelli-García, 2006; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Serrano et.al., 2014), while undertaking a study program abroad.

Regarding participants' expectations, some scholars have examined expectations but specifically in regard to their academic achievements and learning progress (Wilkinson, 1998; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ketsman, 2012). Such studies were intended to explore the influence of participants' expectations on their academic performance before taking part in language programs. Furthermore, there have been a number of studies comparing participants' linguistic proficiency acquired in two opposite settings, home environment versus abroad (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Freed et.al, 2004; Lafford, 2004; Segalowitz et.al, 2004; Serrano et.al, 2011). Lastly, the concept of participant motivation is an active topic, since it is essential to determine which factors drive participants to take part in language programs (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2003; Isabelli-García, 2006; Allen, 2010b; Hernández, 2010; Weger, 2013). Despite an increasing interest from participants to take part in language programs and the steady growth of the language school industry, it is surprising that so little research has been carried out into participants' expectations before taking part in language programs and their experiences throughout the programs.

As mentioned previously, this study was conducted in the biggest city of Canada, Toronto, which is heavily dominated by Anglophones. The choice of the destination was justified by the size of the city and the number of language schools it offered. According to

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Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS) Participant Profile Survey (2004), many participants choose Canada, specifically Toronto and Vancouver, because “they perceive it as a safe place to study, and [it] also represents value for money and a great place to live” (p. 33).

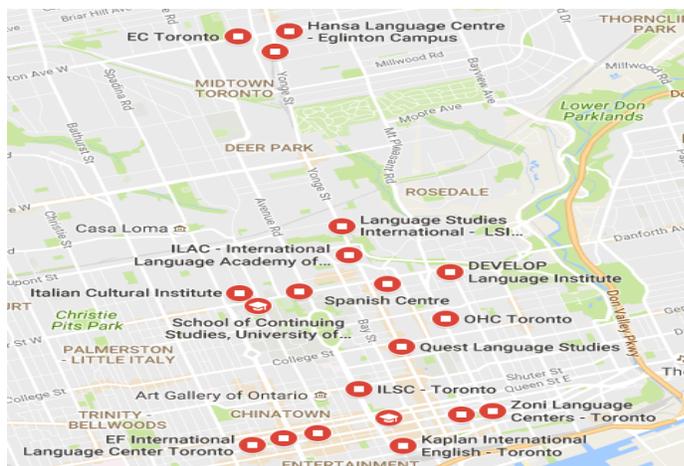
Phenomenology was adopted as the theoretical lens for this study, since the objective was to gain a deep understanding of the participants' expectations and experiences while studying in Toronto. Implementing this theoretical framework allowed me as a researcher to fully immerse myself in the studied setting and build rapport with the participants. The project was guided by three research questions:

- 1) Firstly, the study aimed to explore thoughts and feelings participants had experienced prior to enrolling in language programs.
- 2) Secondly, it intended to determine how their expectations were formed, and what factors influenced their decision to take part in language programs, such as social media, and pivotal influencers such as parents, teachers, or peers, and others.
- 3) Lastly, it meant to examine participants' experiences in three different settings: in the school environment, while taking part in extra-curricular activities and while living with the home-stay families.

The findings of this study, if applied, should benefit both language schools and participants. The analyzed data should provide schools with valuable information on how to improve their programs and make adjustments to their current system to meet participants' expectations. Additionally, the study intended to provide a deeper understanding of who/what influences students' expectations and how that may translate into improved marketing strategies for attracting wider demographics. Satisfying participants' needs can contribute to the school's

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs reputation, ultimately attracting more clients. From the participants' perspective, if their expectations are met, they are likely to have memorable experiences and come back, and/or recommend the school to their friends. Figure One below shows the English schools in the downtown core of Toronto which receive participants from around the world. The reason the map is attached is to represent the size and significance of the language school industry. Currently, many schools welcome students and create a comfortable learning environment to assist them with learning languages not native to them. A growing number of schools creates competitiveness between them; therefore, each school needs to ensure that they provide a high quality education so they could have a good reputation and attract both returning and new students.

*FIGURE ONE: English Language Schools in Toronto, Canada*



To summarize, this phenomenological study aims to explore participants' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program abroad and their experiences throughout the program. Additionally, I intend to examine the ways participants' expectations were formulated once their decision to take part in the program has been made, including the influence of social media, and the role of their parents, teachers, and peers. This study fulfills a theoretical gap as limited

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studies have explored participants' expectations and experiences while taking part in short-term language programs. Furthermore, this study has the potential to contribute practically as identifying participants' experiences may allow language schools to become more aware of their customer's needs and expectations. Overall, this chapter has introduced the topic and discussed the main objectives and the rationale for conducting this study. The following chapter will initially focus on the theory used for this study followed by a thorough review of the related academic literature in both educational and tourism fields.

## **Chapter 2: Theory and Literature**

### **2.0 Phenomenology**

This study utilized phenomenology as a theoretical perspective, and it was grounded in a constructivist epistemology, within the interpretivist framework. The purpose of phenomenology is to gain a deep understanding of people's experiences. Since this study is focused on participants' expectations and experiences while taking part in short-term language programs, phenomenology is appropriate. Scholars working in this field fully immerse themselves in the process of data collection, as they believe this is the only way to gather accurate information.

Regarding epistemology, phenomenological studies are grounded in constructivism, as noted above. Constructivism highlights the unique experiences one has and asserts that everyone has his or her own opinion and understanding of the world. As phenomenology tries to understand people's experiences, it fits into the constructivism perspective. Studying people and their perceptions of the world allows researchers to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). Since this study explores participants' expectations and experiences, it recognizes that people may have different views. Constructivists believe that the only way to find truth is through interaction and engagement with people (Crotty, 1998); therefore semi-structured interviews were implemented to collect data. Phenomenology is also often connected with interpretivism, the main purpose of which is to "understand and explain human and social reality" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). According to Crotty (1998), the interpretivist approach deals with "the interpretations of the social life-world" (p. 67). Interpretivists are interested in how people comprehend various concepts based on their own experiences.

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Phenomenology is divided into two main schools: European and North American, which will be fully described in the methodology section. In continental Europe, phenomenology was described as the study of “self” with dominance of the “first-person experience”, rather than considering other people’s experiences (Barkway, 2001). The European approach was the original critical form of phenomenology, encapsulating the concept of “bracketing”, which means “a process of suspending one’s judgment or beliefs, about the phenomenon under investigation in order to see it clearly” (Burton et.al., 2006). In other words, there was a clear separation between the researcher and the participants throughout the data collection process to allow the participants to share their stories without feeling under pressure. However, with a shift from the European perception of phenomenology to North American, researchers realized that the best way to perceive the world is by studying people living in the world, and interpreting their ideas and opinions (Crotty, 1998). These days, the main idea of phenomenology is connected with a deep understanding of people’s perceptions and experiences, thereby becoming a subjective and non-critical concept.

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger are the two most influential phenomenological scholars. Husserl founded the original phenomenology, called descriptive, in Europe in the twentieth century as a philosophical method of inquiry (Mapp, 2008). Heidegger, however, invented a different type of phenomenology, known as Hermeneutics (Mapp, 2008). Husserl’s approach is connected with searching for meanings and essences of experience, implying that a researcher should keep his or her own personal beliefs and thoughts to themselves, “preventing their biases and preconceptions influencing the study” (Flood, 2010). Unlike Husserl, in Heidegger’s approach, the researcher brings his or her own understanding and experiences to the

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research process instead of bracketing one's experiences out of the research. This implies that researchers interpret the data collected in terms of their own experiences. Other scholars involved in using phenomenology, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Max van Manen, will be discussed in the methodology chapter. This particular study is guided by Heidegger's approach, acknowledging that pure knowledge and experiences can never be observed. Since everyone lives in the world influenced by social and cultural norms, finding pure knowledge can be a challenge. Additionally, due to my personal experience of studying and working in a language learning environment, I embrace what I bring to this study. Overall, this part of the chapter introduces phenomenology as a theory being used for this study and provides a rationale for selecting it. The second part of the chapter will explore the areas that have previously been explored in both educational and tourism fields.

## **2.1 Literature Review**

This literature review is comprised of three sections closely related to language programs abroad. The first section introduces the phenomenon of educational tourism, often referred to as "edu-tourism" in academic literature (Ritchie, 2003, p.25). This section provides the historical background of educational tourism and a variety of definitions that will help clarify it. It also looks at the geographical and demographical contexts in order to gain a deeper understanding of the main participants and the destinations they choose. Furthermore, it examines the business side of educational tourism, as it is a lucrative industry. The second section is based on a comparison between participants' proficiency gains in two settings: their home countries and abroad. While the home environment entails formal classroom learning in participants' home countries, studying overseas implies travelling to a destination, preferably, but not limited to,

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs where the language learning is spoken natively and taking part in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. Following that, I will take a closer look at the motivations that influence participants' decisions to study overseas instead of staying at home. This study will also determine the "push" and "pull" factors that lead participants to study at language schools. (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Lam, Ariffin, & Ahmad, 2011). Lastly, participants' expectations and the correlation between this and their academic achievements will be examined. The overview of the most influential studies utilized for the literature review is shown in Figure Four.

## **2.2 Concept of Educational Tourism**

### **2.2.1 Historical Context**

The phenomenon of language learning abroad as part of educational tourism is not new. According to Ritchie (2003), educational tourism has its origins in the 17-19<sup>th</sup> centuries when British scholars and young aristocrats began taking part in "Grand Tours" (p. 9). Grand Tours were opportunities for wealthy families to send their children to European countries, such as Germany, France, and Italy, for a limited period of time, to take part in a different system of education (Ritchie, 2003). However, it was not a purely educational program; it also involved extra-curricular activities after classes, including horseback riding and dancing. The participants were culturally immersed in their new environments, and therefore could see how people lived in continental Europe (Ritchie, 2003). As Long et al. (2010) note, involvement in educational programs served as an initial step preparing them for their professional lives and broadened their horizons. It was believed that after living abroad for an extended period of time, participants would have enhanced their leadership skills and become more open to the world (Long et.al, 2010).

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Grand tours have exerted a significant influence on the development of modern educational tourism. According to Ritchie (2003), travellers seek some form of education, whether it is presented in a formal or informal setting. The formal environment entails attending classes, workshops, conferences, and other official meetings in order to gain new skills. Formal learning can be part of one's travel experience, e.g., language learning programs. The participants of these programs typically attend classes for half the day and guided excursions for the other half. The informal learning experience can include such activities as trips to museums or galleries, where one can explore new places and learn some facts about the country he or she is visiting. Consequently, there are clear connections between educational tours today and Grand Tours which took place in the 17-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The idea of travelling to other destinations, being immersed in new cultures and gaining skills is the same now as it was four centuries ago.

It is worth noting the demographical side of the participants in Grand Tours. Stone and Petrick (2013) state that this luxury was only offered to "upper-class British men" (p. 735). Grand Tours were not offered to women; however, nowadays, a large diversity of participants with different backgrounds and social statuses take part in educational tourism. The proposed research does not examine the gender and/or identity issues; therefore, this aspect is beyond the scope of this paper. Towner (1985) points out that there is a gap in the literature in examining the Grand Tour from a tourism perspective. Previous studies had looked at the Grand Tour from a purely educational perspective despite its main purpose being to travel to a new destination. Towner (1985) states that the tours significantly contributed to the economies of the European countries since the numbers of tourists significantly increased. This also increased the rate of development of communities and cities such as Rome and Paris. According to Towner (1985),

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Paris was portrayed as “the political and artistic center” and the significance of Rome as a destination was summarized as “the cultural and artistic center of western civilization” (p. 321). Richie (2003) reinforces the significance of the Grand Tour to the development of the Alps as a destination. Overall, educational tours positively affected Western Europe, contributing to its prosperity and influencing its centre of education.

It is important to mention that the connections between education and tourism emerged much earlier than the notion of the Grand Tour. Brodsky-Porges (1981) suggests that educational tourism goes back to the ancient Chinese and Western philosophers who showed the significance of the correlation. He quotes Mencius's statement that was made in 385-289 B.C. as an illustration “To see once is better than to read a hundred times” (Brodsky-Porges, 1981, p.174). By education, the philosophers meant seeing the world, expanding horizons, and gaining new experiences while traveling. They believed that after being away from home and exploring new places, one could bring new ideas back home.

To summarize, the significance of educational tours has been acknowledged for many years. They allow participants to immerse themselves in a new environment, gain new skills, and become more fluent in foreign languages. The experience of travelling and learning languages abroad provides opportunities for future success, as noted by Smith in Hanreddy and Whalley's book (2012): “One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way” (Hanreddy & Whalley, 2012, p.2). This succinctly captures the essential benefit of learning foreign languages. Modern life is fast and can be very competitive; therefore the ability to speak foreign languages is a tangible advantage. Also, since language programs are more affordable nowadays, they have become more accessible to a wider audience, including the

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middle class. Compared to Grand Tours in the seventeenth – nineteenth centuries, one does not need to be an aristocrat to participate in this form of tourism. Some people may want to invest in their self-development and education despite being rich. The values and goals an individual has will dictate whether he or she will be involved in educational tourism, whereas before the social status was the primary determinant of either allowing or disallowing one to participate in this type of tourism.

### **2.2.2 Defining Educational Tourism**

Educational tourism consists of two equally important components: education and tourism. Both terms can be used independently, but together they represent a significant industry. To gain a deeper understanding of this industry, it would be reasonable to start by defining the two components individually. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (1994), tourism is defined as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (p. 10). This definition is comprised of three main variables that travelers determine themselves: destination, duration and aim. Tourism implies travelling for at least 40km from home, and therefore does not have to involve flying to a new country or a city (Buckley & Shakeela, 2013). Regarding the duration of the trip, it must not go over one year, otherwise it would be considered residency. The definition also illustrates that there are a variety of reasons why people choose to travel; one of which is the desire to study.

Education is the second component of educational tourism and is described as “the organized, systematic effort to foster learning [...] and to provide activities in which learning can occur” (Smith, 1982, p. 37). This definition highlights how education and learning intertwine.

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

Ritchie (2003) characterizes educational tourism as a combination of activities undertaken by participants aiming to merge learning and traveling, with one or the other being the primary motivator. Based on this definition, the participants of study tours can either be driven by their desire to learn a language and broaden their mind or by their desire to travel, with language learning being secondary. The main emphasis here is on travelling away from the home environment in order to learn and seek new experiences as well as taking part in leisure activities. The Canadian Tourism Commission (2001), now referred to as Destination Canada, proposes a spectrum of educational tourism categories, starting with 'general interest learning while travelling', through to 'purposeful learning and travel'. The first group is labeled 'tourism first' where travel is the main motivation rather than education. The people in this category want to go sightseeing, visit attractions and behave like tourists, whereas learning is less important for them. However in 'education first', as the second group is known, the main focus is on learning and travel serves a secondary purpose.

Some researchers attempt to establish connections between language programs today and the notion of Grand Tours. Stone and Petrick (2013) discovered that educational tourism in the twenty-first century shares common features with the idea of the Grand Tour. They conclude that the main aim of educational tourism is traveling elsewhere (away from the home environment) to study and obtain new skills. Towner's (1985) definition of educational tourism is similar and is described as "a tour of certain cities and places [...] undertaken primarily, but not exclusively, for education and pleasure" (p. 301). Overall, I can conclude that the discussed meanings of educational tourism have many similarities with each other and are related to Grand Tours.

### **2.2.3 Demographics**

Participant demographics is an important element to consider in educational tourism. Demographics can provide an insight into the makeup of language school participants, and it plays a crucial role when it comes to marketing. When schools know who or where their main market is, they will be more likely to invest money in targeting to that market. Demographics is a complex notion, and can include the following parameters: earnings, job position, qualification, and their age (Ritchie, 2003).

Aspects such as earnings, job title, and qualifications are closely related when talking about the demographics of participants taking part in study tours. Since learning a language abroad still remains a luxury for many families, only those with high salaries and qualifications can afford to indulge in this type of tourism. Figure Two below shows some examples of pricing packages for short-term English programs offered in language schools in Toronto. The table is comprised with a variety of courses such as general and intensive English, IELTS and TOEFL Exam preparation, as well as a registration fee, which is mandatory for all students and is commonly non-refundable. Furthermore, the table depicts the duration of each program and the number of hours taught per week. Lastly, I purposefully selected three language schools in downtown Toronto and their price packages for the programs in order to provide a clearer image of the average tuition fees. The reason language schools still remain a luxury for some families can be caused by their weak financial situation and inability to afford the programs. As seen from Figure Two, all classes cost more than \$1000 CAD, which can put constraint on some individuals. It is also important to remember that accommodation, flights, additional expenses related to the costs of food, sightseeing, and souvenirs are paid on top of tuition. However,

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs according to International Education – Global Growth and Prosperity (2013), “rising incomes in developing countries” can significantly increase the number of participants coming from those countries (p. 27). The British Council predicts that “by 2020 about 450,000 participants are expected to be internationally mobile, with 130,000 going to the major destination countries, including US, UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, France and Japan” (p.27).

*FIGURE TWO: Pricing Packages for Short-Term English Programs in Toronto*

| Names of Courses:  | Hours per Week                   | Language Schools and Prices              |  |  |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
|  |                                  | Study English in Canada (SEC) School     | English School of Canada                 | Language Studies International           |
| General English  | 20 hrs for 4 weeks               | \$1166 CAD                               | \$1385 CAD                               | \$1200 CAD                               |
| Intensive English  | 30 hrs for 4 weeks               | \$1557 CAD                               | \$1680 CAD                               | \$1480 CAD                               |
| International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Exam Preparation | 25 hrs per week (4, 8, 12 weeks) | \$1411 CAD/<br>\$2822 CAD/<br>\$4223 CAD | \$1450 CAD/<br>\$2890 CAD/<br>\$4275 CAD | \$1480 CAD/<br>\$2960 CAD/<br>\$4260 CAD |
| Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Exam                     | 20 hrs per week (8 weeks)        | \$2266 CAD                               | \$2890 CAD                               | \$2960 CAD                               |
| Registration Fee   |                                  | \$200 CAD                                | \$175 CAD                                | \$130 CAD                                |

Social and economic status may not allow one to take part in language programs. Lörz et al. (2015) explore the notion of social inequality between participants of educational tours in Germany. They address the limitations experienced by the underprivileged, claiming that “international participant mobility is socially selective” (Lörz et.al, 2015, p. 2). Despite an overall increase in the number of participants going overseas compared with previous years, they state that only a small portion of German and other European families take part in it. After implementing a quantitative data analysis, they determine that several factors influence social

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selectivity. Firstly, the lack of early experience in participating in language programs results in the underprivileged being unaware of the benefits and potential outcomes of the programs, and therefore not being motivated by them. Since they do not have any previous experience, they cannot forecast what achievements they could gain after being immersed in a new environment. The second factor is linked to low academic performance; according to Lörz (2015), participants from underprivileged families rarely “fulfill the performance-related preconditions for studying abroad” (p. 5). Since some universities have ties with private educational institutions abroad, they prefer participants that studied at these partner institutes, therefore limiting other participants' chances of being selected. Lastly, participation in study tours is greatly affected by the high cost of programs. Participants are not only responsible for paying their tuition, but also their own flights, accommodation, transportation, and extra-curricular excursions, which can pose difficulties when on a limited budget.

Some researchers attempt to generalize characteristics pertaining to participants of language programs based on what has been studied before. Twombly et al. (2012) sought to establish the overall demographics of educational tour participants. They profiled participants studying in the US and state that the majority of them are female from wealthy families, who have travelled extensively in the past, and whose parents received a good education. Their parents tend to be highly qualified, holding a respected status in society. Based on this, it is clearly indicated that studying abroad remains a luxury few can afford. Their parents' financial support and social background are important factors when it comes to educational tourism. Regarding participants' ages, one should not assume that study tours are only offered to a young audience. Bodger (1998) states that age is not a limiting factor, quite the opposite in fact, as it is

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs becoming increasingly popular for retired people to go abroad to learn a new language. Since they have more discretionary time, some may want to spend it taking part in self-development and leisure activities. He also claims that there is a tendency to take an "early retirement" and to use that time for learning new things (Bodger, 1998, p.28). Bodger concludes that study tour participants of all ages have one feature in common – they all have the same goal to improve their language skills and fluency. Smith and Jenner (1997a) also claim that early retirees are becoming increasingly interested in taking part in educational tourism, particularly in Western Europe. However, due to financial constraints some of them cannot afford to study abroad. The following section will discuss the geographical context of language programs and the rationale for choosing a specific destination.

#### **2.2.4 Geographical Context**

The geographical context of study tours indicates which countries have large numbers of foreign participants. Since the purpose of this study is to look at short-term English language programs, the literature review will analyze English-speaking countries. Before delving into it, it is necessary to define the term "*internationally mobile participants*". According to UNESCO (2009), they are described as "participants [who] leave their country or territory of origin and move to another country or territory with the objective of studying". This definition comprises two important components: movement to a new country and desire to study, which goes back to the main purpose of educational tourism.

Looking at the statistics of the most popular destinations can provide a bigger picture of the overall demand for study tours. Lillyman and Bennett's study (2014) on overcoming cultural

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shock and adjusting to a new environment begins with the statistics of the number of international participants studying in the UK. They state that the UK is the second most-popular destination for foreigners to gain a higher education after the United States. They indicate that about a quarter of the overall number of participants in the UK come from overseas. Since the international participants pay significantly higher tuition fees than residents, it positively affects the economy of the country. According to the UK Council for International Students Affairs (2014), they forecast that “by 2025 they will boost the UK economy by £26 billion”. This figure shows the significance to the UK economy of accommodating international participants.

As mentioned previously, the United States (US) is the most popular destination for international participants. Weger (2013) examines the factors that motivate adult learners to study there. He claims that despite the high price of language programs they may have “a strong motivation for the US-learning context”, including their personal interest and desire to immerse in the American culture (p. 91). The researcher also uses the term “international identity,” meaning that those participants aim to travel, meet people from different countries, and become more open-minded and tolerant of others (p. 99). Overall, the reasons they choose to study in the US are connected with their personal interests.

A country's image may influence the decision of participants to study there. Gertner's (2010) study aims to measure this influence by quantitatively analyzing the responses of 360 participants divided into two groups based on their purpose of travel – education or tourism. The researcher concludes that destination images, the impressions and beliefs one has about a certain place, have a direct impact on participants' decision-making process. The images can either draw them, which will positively influence the economies of the host countries, or make a negative

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impression, which will decrease the number of participants choosing the destination. For example, as noted previously, Canada is “[perceived] as a safe place to study, and [it] also represents value for money and a great place to live (Canadian Association of Private Language Schools, CAPLS, Participant Profile, 2004, p. 33). Therefore, by having positive impressions of Canada, students are more likely to choose it as a place to study. Word of mouth can also form either a positive or a negative image of a specific place. Overall, since study tours are becoming more popular, it is important for not only educational providers but also for the government to ensure that they have a positive image.

### **2.2.5 Business Component of Educational Tourism**

Educational tourism, which includes short-term language programs, plays an important role in the process of internationalization and globalization. Ryan’s (2011) study focuses on the importance of attracting international students to academic institutions and listening to their needs, therefore making those institutions more diverse and global. The author proposes to use a “transcultural approach”, which helps to create “culturally inclusive teaching and learning environments” (Ryan, 2011, p. 635). The main intention of this approach is to maintain warm relationships and respect among people of different nationalities in order to make everyone feel accepted in the community. International students should be treated in exactly the same way as domestic, since the former ones bring their knowledge and experiences to the countries where they choose to study. Overall, listening to everyone’s needs and creating a friendly environment based on respect and cooperation is a good way for maintaining of internationalization and globalization among a variety of cultures.

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The business component is an essential part of educational tourism, since language schools compete with each other to attract more participants. Farrell's article (2007) highlights the role educational programs play in the current business world. She states that as governments realize the overall importance of studying abroad, they aim to ease the requirements and the cost of tuition. The authorities are interested in investing money to produce globally literate citizens, as when they come back home, they can make a big contribution to their own countries. This strategy seeks to identify the ways more people can take part in educational tours. However, increasing demand to study abroad leads to the emergence of more private language schools, which do not necessarily provide a high-quality service. Since the language industry is currently growing, companies need to compete with each other to attract more customers. This competition can have both positive and negative consequences. On one hand, participants have more choice and can compare schools to select the one that meets their criteria, but on the other hand, the increasing number of schools does not guarantee each will have a fully qualified teaching staff and an outstanding reputation. Due to the large number of educational programs abroad, it can be difficult to evaluate which programs are worth applying for and which are not.

Looking at the governance of language schools in Canada, all of them are viewed as private organizations run independently from the government. According to the Ministry of Education in Canada (2013), a private school is defined as:

An institution at which instruction is provided at any time between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on any school day for five or more pupils who are of or over compulsory school age in any of the subjects of the elementary or secondary school courses of study. (p. 6).

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Based on the definition, students attend a school during morning and afternoon hours from Monday until Friday. The class size may vary in private schools, but there is a tendency of having small classrooms with no fewer than 5 students. Regarding students' age, they need to be no younger than 5/6 years old, and the subjects taught vary based on a school. However, as this study explores students' experiences studying at language schools, the primary motivator for those is either to learn English as a foreign language or improve their current level of English.

According to the Canadian Ministry of Education, private schools in Ontario “operate as businesses or non-profit organizations, independently of the Ministry of Education” (p. 7). This means that they do not receive any financial assistance from the Canadian government and are run autonomously. Private schools are responsible for setting their own rules and policies that they are obliged to follow. For example, International Language Academy of Canada, one of the language schools in downtown Toronto, is “a private corporation and its Executive Directors are actively involved with the organization” and planning to ensure a smooth working process (ILAC Student Handbook, 2015, p. 3). However, all schools need to be “accredited by Languages Canada – the ESL accreditation body in Canada” (ILAC Student Handbook, 2015, p. 3). Without obtaining this type of accreditation they are not allowed to run a business and advertize their school. Overall, students are advised to carefully select a language school they want to study at based on the existing school's accreditation and reputation. However, there are additional factors students may want to consider before enrolling in a language school, which are discussed below.

The school environment plays an important role in the educational process and can affect participants' performance, either positively or negatively. Kazal-Thresher (1993) explores the

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connections between schools' inputs and participants' achievements. He claims that if schools can provide a good learning environment, highly qualified teachers, and small class sizes, participants are more likely to perform better. To offer all these services schools need to have solid funding and continuous financial support from either the government or private companies. He concludes that in order to ensure participants' satisfaction and desire to come back, schools need to be financially strong and provide a comfortable environment for participants' success.

Regarding the countries' images discussed previously, other factors can potentially affect the participants' choice of institution in which to study. Cristobal and Llurda (2006) identify three aspects that can either encourage or discourage participants in this selection. The first one is accessibility; it entails not only the location of the school, but also the appearance of the building from both inside and outside, how hospitable and friendly the staff are, and what services they provide, including the cancellation and sickness policy, for example. The second factor is that participants want to ensure a high quality of teaching so that their financial input will not be wasted, by which the authors mean "the methodology of teaching and the flexibility of schedules" (Cristobal & Llurda, 2006, p. 141). Teachers' qualifications and their levels of experience also play a crucial role while selecting an institution. Lastly, participants may have practical reasons, referred to as "pragmatism" (Cristobal & Llurda, 2006, p. 142). They aim to not only improve their language skills and go to various attractions, but also to receive a certified diploma upon completion of the course. A school's reputation is also an essential criterion for choosing a place to study. Overall, the authors conclude that these three major factors dictate which academic institution participants want to attend.

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Being aware of the benefits of short-term language programs can motivate one to take part in these programs. According to Donnelly-Smith (2009), short-term language programs are generally not as expensive as longer exchange or degree programs abroad. Due to their length, they also do not require a long-term commitment. If participants realize that they made a mistake or would like to enroll in a different institution, they can freely do so. Moreover, as the programs are not discipline specific, participants from a variety of fields can take part in language learning tours. Overall, there are a number of benefits to taking short-term language programs rather than committing oneself to a long-term stay.

### **Summary**

To summarize, this section examined the notion of educational tourism from different perspectives to provide a deeper understanding of its essentials. By looking at the historical context, the emergence and development of study tours was established. Grand Tours gave British aristocrats an opportunity to not only explore Western Europe, but also broaden their horizons, learn new skills and experiences, and bring the knowledge they gained back home. A discussion on the two essential components of educational tourism highlighted the complexity of this industry. The demographics of participants involved in study tours was important in order to explore who is able to take part in such experiences. Lastly, it was concluded that age is not a limiting factor, quite the opposite in fact, as it is becoming more popular for adults and retired people to enroll in language programs abroad. Examining the geographical context was the next step, where the most common countries for taking English language programs were established. Lastly, since demand on language programs is growing, and schools are competing with each other to attract more customers, it was determined to be important to analyze the business

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs component of educational tourism. The following section will discuss and compare participants' proficiency gains acquired in two opposite settings, their home countries and abroad.

### **2.3 Participants' Proficiency Gains at Home vs. Abroad**

Many researchers have compared the academic achievements of participants in two contrasting settings: at home and abroad (for example, Collentine & Freed, 2004; Freed et.al, 2004; Lafford, 2004; Segalowitz et.al, 2004; Serrano et.al, 2011). The home environment implies classroom learning in the participant's home country without "access to a native speech community"; in other words, English native speakers in the context of this proposed research (Serrano et.al., 2016, p. 45). The home setting is depicted as one that holds formality, follows set guidelines, and tends to have a fixed schedule (Freed, 1995). The second setting, studying abroad, entails participants leaving their home countries and travelling to other destinations where English is spoken natively. This means that participants not only experience cultural immersion, but they are also encouraged, possibly even compelled, to speak English in everyday life. Apart from having formal classes for half the day, they also take part in a range of extra-curricular activities, where all their instructors and guides are native English speakers.

This section of the literature review examines which skills may be obtained in each setting: home versus overseas. The participant's improvement in speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary are compared based on the location of studying. Furthermore, this section aims to determine the predictors of participants' academic successes based on their previous experience in learning languages, the duration of the program, and other factors. Lastly, the role of age as a factor is discussed.

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### **2.3.1 Assessing Improvements Based on Acquired Skills**

Speaking skills can pose difficulties for evaluation, as those who assess participants may have different criteria or opinions, therefore it is somewhat subjective. Many studies aim to determine whether any significant differences in speech occur between participants studying abroad and at home (Freed et.al, 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Hernández, 2016). Linguistic improvements may be measured through various components, such as the speaking speed, clarity, comprehension, and use of complex phrases and sentences. Some scholars believe that learning a foreign language abroad, particularly in a destination where it is spoken natively, provides more opportunities for participants to enhance their linguistic skills over time (Freed, 1995; Coleman, 1998; Allen & Herron, 2003). Freed (1995) was one of the first researchers to look at the differences in linguistic achievements between two settings. Her research compared participants' gains in terms of fluency, communicative strategies and proficiency. Her study concluded that participants who have took part in study tours overseas speak more confidently and are able to express their thoughts effortlessly. Over time, they start speaking naturally instead of translating words one-by-one from their native language into English. As well as being more natural, they also appear to speak faster and have better listening and comprehension skills. Their speech becomes more diverse and instead of using simple structures, they start using more complex sentences and vocabulary (Freed, 1995).

Communication skills in a second language allow participants to express their thoughts and opinions on different topics. The length of time required to master a language varies from individual to individual. Coleman (1998) analyzed the outcomes of social interactions in study overseas compared with formal classroom learning at home. He concludes that participants who

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study abroad dramatically expand their vocabulary on a day-to-day basis, become familiar with different styles of writing and speaking, such as formal and informal, and become more comfortable in leading conversations and expressing their own points of view (Coleman, 1998, p. 172). Their research results indicated that through social interaction, a higher level of fluency may be achieved. Most participants are unaware of these changes as they do not manifest themselves rapidly, but develop over time. By being forced to leave their comfort zone, participants are able to overcome the language barrier and lose their fear and embarrassment of making mistakes. Participants should also remember that mistakes are, in fact, essential to learning.

While discussing participants enrolled in language programs overseas, it is worth examining their feelings and experiences in addition to their academic performance. Allen and Herron (2003) explore a combination of both the language changes and levels of anxiety among 25 American participants had while studying French during a summer program in Paris. Regarding linguistic improvements, the researchers evaluate participants' speaking and listening skills. The study implements a mixed methods approach, and the data collection process entailed three stages: pre-study, study, and post-study abroad. The results demonstrated that the participants significantly improved both their linguistic and listening skills. Also, after finishing the program they felt more comfortable speaking French in everyday life and were able to overcome the language barrier. However, the authors determined that the participants experienced anxiety, particularly at the start of the program. They believe that the feeling of anxiety was caused partially by linguistic incompetence and partly by cultural shock. They needed some time to adjust to the new environment, accept cultural differences, and ultimately

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become more confident. Overall, the discussed studies (Freed, 1995; Coleman, 1998; Allen & Herron, 2003) indicate that by being immersed in a native language environment, participants become more fluent and confident in speaking the language. Additionally, their speech becomes more natural, since they hear other people speaking the same language in everyday life, which stimulates them to study harder. Furthermore, their vocabulary considerably expands, and they intend to produce more diverse sentences. Lastly, participants begin feeling more comfortable in expressing their thoughts without being under pressure.

Other scholars, however, indicate that there are some limitations to linguistic gain acquired abroad (Rivers, 1998; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Hernandez, 2016). By examining participants' academic performance and achievements made by the end of the program, they state that one should not assume that studying abroad ultimately leads to rapid improvements. While comparing the language gains of participants between two settings, one may question what role extra-curricular activities play in language acquisition. As previously noted, studying overseas entails not only formal learning, but also a variety of excursions organized by native speakers. Segalowitz and Freed (2004) examine how these extra-curricular activities affect participants' linguistic improvements. The study follows 40 native English speakers learning Spanish, with some of the participants attending Spanish lessons at a university in their home country and the others taking part in a semester-long program in Spain. The study concludes that participants who stayed at home had "few L2 extracurricular exposure opportunities and [...] were heavily immersed in an L1 environment" (p. 193). L2 in this example indicates second language, whereas L1 first language, English in this case. This indicates that staying in their home country limits participants' opportunities to practice the second language to the classroom,

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not encouraging them to use the language outside of the school environment. Surprisingly, individuals who took part in the study tour did not significantly improve their speaking skills. The authors hold two reasons for this: firstly, the relatively short length of stay, and secondly, limited interactions with home-stay families and peers. The researchers posit that 6 weeks may not support a long enough period for full immersion and attainment of fluency, therefore more time is required to master a language. Additionally, those who stayed with host families interacted only superficially and had limited conversations. To support this claim, Rivers (1998) conducted a quantitative study to explore participants' linguistic gain, while staying with host families. The study indicates that the quality of interaction between participants and home-stay families was "often restricted to quotidian dialogue and television-watching", therefore participants did not benefit from living with native Russian speakers (p. 496). They also had a lot of tension while communicating with each other, since they were strangers, and the families did not think that the participants' level of Russian was good enough to carry out a proper conversation with them. Also, participants felt uncomfortable staying in a stranger's place and preferred sitting in their own rooms. The study suggests looking for ways to improve the home-stay environment and matching participants with the families depending on their needs and preferences.

As many researchers indicate, studying abroad provides more opportunities for implementing knowledge gained in the classroom into real life. Hernandez (2016) aims to establish whether a relationship exists between linguistic improvements on short-term study programs and language development after completing the course. He created a questionnaire for 20 participants studying in Spain to assess this connection. He concludes that even though their

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speaking skills improved, they did not actively engage in extra-curricular activities with native speakers, quite the opposite in fact, they tended to stay within their own communities. The participants stated that they had “infrequent contact with native speakers during their study abroad experience” (p. 51). This could be related to the limited amount of time spent abroad, which was too brief to make strong connections with other people. Overall, the examined studies (Rivers, 1998; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Hernandez, 2016) point out that studying abroad does not always lead to linguistic improvements. They conclude that if participants extensively interact with their friends in their first language, they limit their ability to enhance their speaking skills on a day-to-day basis. Instead of communicating with native speakers, they feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and sharing ideas among their peers, who speak the same language. Additionally, staying with a host family does not guarantee one to become more fluent, since participants frequently have brief interactions with their hosts.

Some studies have been conducted to compare participants' linguistic gains acquired in two opposite settings, home environment and abroad (Collentine, 2004; Segalowitz et.al., 2004). Apart from comparing improvements in communication skills, one may want to examine the differences in grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation skills gained abroad versus at home. Segalowitz et.al (2004) explore a number of linguistic gains in Spanish achieved by American participants either in Spain or Colorado. The authors assessed and compared these skills based on the setting. They found that those who went abroad for a semester study program did not perform better than the others at home in all aspects, which may seem controversial. Regarding their linguistic proficiency, they did have a better performance and used more diverse vocabulary, which the authors attribute to the participants being both culturally and linguistically

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs immersed in Spanish and surrounded by native speakers. However, their grammar was not as good as the participants involved in the classroom learning in Colorado. This result can be explained by the formal approach classroom learning tends to take, with a predetermined curriculum covering a range of grammar rules. Grammar can be neglected in a native language environment, since the main goal is to be able to communicate with others. Lastly, the pronunciation of both groups of participants were approximately the same, indicating that spending a semester abroad does not guarantee improvement in this area.

While studying abroad seems to be a stimulating environment for improving linguistic skills, it is worth analyzing and comparing other academic achievements. Collentine (2004) aims to determine the development of participants' grammatical and lexical proficiency in both settings. The participants of this study were American participants studying Spanish: some of them went to Spain for a semester-long program, whereas the others stayed at home. The data were collected in two stages, pre- and post-study experience. This research concludes that staying at home is "more advantageous to the acquisition of grammatical phenomena" (p. 245). This is justified by the fact that the school's curriculum was well-structured, and the teachers were able to cover and clearly explain all grammar material. However, others who went overseas expanded their vocabulary significantly more, which can be explained by having everyday contact with native speakers. Overall, one should not assume that studying overseas necessarily leads to improvements in all language skills. Both studies (Collentine, 2004; Segalowitz et.al., 2004) determined that linguistic gains vary depending on a setting, where the language is being learnt and practiced. For example, taking part in language programs abroad allows participants to improve their speaking skills and expand vocabulary, making their speech more diverse.

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However, studying in the home environment helps to better comprehend the grammar rules due to a systematic and well-structured curriculum.

To summarize, studying abroad remains the best overall environment in which to improve language skills and expand vocabulary. The learning process therefore becomes much more natural as they experience full language immersion. As previously noted, language learning abroad has become much more accessible to a wider range of people than ever before. The cost of the programs tend to vary depending on many factors: its length, the number of hours taught each week, the school's location and reputation, a type of program one is taking, such as Business English, General English, Exam Preparation, and others. Being completely immersed in an English language environment, for example, stimulates participants to think and speak in English, leading to rapid improvements in proficiency, particularly speaking, and a continued interest in learning the language.

### **2.3.2 Factors Influencing Participants' Success**

While examining participants' gains abroad, one may wonder whether the length of the program affects one's academic performance and motivation to continue studying. Academic literature reveals a lot of contradictions on the most effective length of studying overseas (Dwyer, 2004; Magnan & Back, 2007; Martinsen, 2010). While some scholars indicate that the longer one is immersed in a language environment, the better results he or she will achieve; the others argue that short-term language programs can be also beneficial to a certain extent. Dwyer (2004) investigates the correlation between the duration of language programs and the participants' achievements. This study implements a quantitative approach and surveys participants that took part in study tours during periods "between the academic years of 1950-51

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs and 1999-00" (p.154). The results of the study show that the longer participants spend in the environment where the language they are learning is spoken natively, the better results they produce and the more motivated they become to continue their studies. The study estimates that the perfect length of the program is one year, as it gives enough time to become immersed in a new environment and implement all knowledge learnt in the classroom into practice. However, Magnan & Back's study (2007) states that a semester-long program can give one enough time to improve language skills. This statement concerns those participants who already have solid ability to speak that language. Prior knowledge helps to implement the theoretical rules learnt at home in practice. Also, the study indicates that if the learning environment encourages participants to speak that language outside of the classroom, they will be more likely to master it quicker. Lastly, the results of the study stress the significance of the teacher's role as the one who should create a friendly learning environment and motivate participants to engage in a variety of activities. Martinsen (2010) argues with the two previously described studies and states that participants can also benefit from short-term study abroad programs lasting up to two months. His quantitative study surveyed American participants learning Spanish in Argentina to examine whether their linguistic skills would improve after being abroad. The results of the study show that participants had "significant gains in their oral language skills and in their cross-cultural sensitivity" by the end of the program (p. 520). Martinsen states that enrolling in a short-term program is a good alternative for those who cannot afford studying for an extended period of time. Therefore, enrolling in short-term language programs can also lead to outstanding results, although the programs need to be carefully planned to meet participants' expectations and help them learn and develop at a faster pace. If the language providers assess participants'

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knowledge at the start of the program, they should be able to determine their weaknesses and place them in the right class, based on their language level. The authors recommend that participants take at least a 6-week intensive program to clearly see improvements. Overall, the article emphasizes the benefits of long-term study programs, although short-term language courses can also increase participants' proficiency if they are carefully planned. To conclude, the reviewed studies indicate that the length of studying overseas can vary based on one's personal needs and goals. While some may benefit from a short-term program lasting for one or two months, others may wish to study for up to a year.

Another factor that can potentially affect participants' academic gains and their desire to continue studying is their personality and the level of motivation. Several studies compared the factors influencing participants' academic success in two opposite settings, home environment and abroad (Dwyer, 2004; Serrano et.al., 2014). Dwyer's study, discussed in the previous subsection, stated that participants taking part in language programs abroad tend to be more motivated to continue their studies by the end of the program. After experiencing a linguistic and cultural immersion, they intend to study harder, once they come back to their home countries. Serrano et.al (2014) analyze the personal traits of Spanish participants who are learning English in two settings: England and Spain. He states that those who went to England had a "better predisposition", in other words, they were more enthusiastic and eager to learn (p.403). They were self-motivated, whereas the others, who stayed in their home country, were not necessarily as eager to learn English, but realized the significance of being able to speak the language nonetheless. Moreover, the first group of participants indicated that they would like to take part in the program again, signifying their level of satisfaction. Their overall experience was

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs described as "enriching", because they were able to explore a new country, learn about a different culture, be fully immersed in an English environment, and meet other international participants (p. 404). Even though participants who stayed at home also made academic progress, they lacked the enthusiasm and desire to continue learning English. Overall, both studies determined that studying abroad influences participants' willingness to continue their education, once they return home (Dwyer, 2004; Serrano et.al., 2014). Miao and Harris (2012) explore Taiwanese participants' personalities while taking part in study tours in the UK, Australia, and the US in order to determine the effects of their personalities on their academic achievements. They employed 66 participants to find out how their personalities affected their academic performance. The data from all three locations were gathered simultaneously by using questionnaires, journals, and participant observations. The authors state that the participants were more accepted and felt more comfortable in the UK and Australia. Prior to the start of the program their language skills were tested, and they were divided into classes based on their language abilities. They were also encouraged to speak English the whole time they were there. However, the other participants in the US felt disconnected and did not have much chance to socialize with the others. The participants from the UK and Australia claim that "immersion in the English-speaking community and mixing in classes with learners from different countries" were two essential components that positively affected their academic performance and the overall experience (p. 444). The authors conclude that studying abroad stimulates participants' interest in learning English and encourages them to be more mobile and tolerant of other cultures.

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Other than the length of the program and participants' personalities, there are some additional factors in predicting successful academic performance. Brecht et.al (1993) looked at American participants who spent four months in the former Soviet Union studying Russian. The study implemented a quantitative approach in the form of listening and reading tests to assess the participants' level of Russian before the start of the program and by the end to determine if any changes occurred. The researchers identified two main factors that played a crucial role in participants' academic success: previous experience in learning other languages, and a pre-existing solid knowledge of grammar. The first factor deals with the participants' previous linguistic experience. The study indicated that if the participants spoke any other foreign languages, apart from Russian, they gained better results. Following that, solid knowledge of grammar rules learnt in the classroom setting in the US was a predictor of subsequent language improvements. Overall, the results of Brecht's (1997) and Magnan's (2007) studies determined that factors such as an existing ability to speak any other languages and a good understanding of grammar can lead to significant improvements in later stages. By having prior experience in learning a language and solid grammar comprehension, participants are more likely to reach higher academic achievements.

### **2.3.3 Age Effects in Language Acquisition at Home and Abroad**

Age can play a crucial role in second language acquisition, whether one is a child, a teenager, or an adult. While some scholars believe that an early start of learning a foreign language brings better results, others argue that adults can make progress quicker compared to children and teenagers. For example, Llanes and Muñoz (2013) explore the age effects on academic gains in two settings. The participants of this study were Spanish participants of

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different ages with some of them travelling to the UK and Ireland for up to three months on a language program, and the rest staying in their home country, Spain. Their knowledge was tested on a range of parameters, such as speaking and writing skills, vocabulary, and accuracy. The purpose of the study was to determine which setting led to better productivity, and who made more academic progress. Regarding the setting, the study concludes that the study abroad environment is more beneficial for participants, particularly in regard to their speaking proficiency. The age effects tend to depend on the setting; nevertheless, children who studied overseas achieved higher scores than adults by the end of the experiment. This fact was justified by the children's "superior ability to learn implicitly", since they were able to absorb new information very quickly (p. 83). However, the adults achieved more in the home environment. They admitted that a formal classroom setting with a carefully planned curriculum appealed to them. On the whole, the study shows that age and learning environment have a significant impact on academic gain. Selecting the most effective setting for learners of a particular age is important and needs to be done based on an individual's preference.

The correlation between language settings and participants' age, and their effects on academic gains appear to be well documented. Llanes and Serrano's (2014) article shares many ideas with Llanes and Muñoz's study in 2013. However, this study compares three demographics: children, adolescents, and adults, and it examines their improvements in speaking and writing skills. The participants were native Spanish speakers learning English. The first group of children remained in Spain and enrolled in an intensive English program with 6 hours of lessons per week. The adolescents studied in Vancouver for two months with the same number of hours of English instruction. Lastly, the adults were majoring in English at university

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs and studied it for 15 hours per week. The study concludes that adolescents are able to gain more in linguistic fluency for two reasons: their exposure to a native English environment for an extended period of time and their ability to memorize new vocabulary promptly. However, the study indicates that adults outperformed the rest of the participants in writing skills. This is justified by the adults' overall life experience and their "more developed cognitive skills" (p. 8). Overall, the participants' ages combined with the language setting can partially determine their academic success. To conclude, these two studies determined that children are able to learn a foreign language faster than any other age group due to their natural ability to memorize and learn new things quickly (Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Llanes & Serrano, 2014). Additionally, by being exposed to the language environment from an early age, participants are more likely to achieve significant results and acquire language proficiency.

It is worth examining the influence on language development of the age when one starts learning a second language. Mayo (2003) aimed to explore the correlations between those factors and followed 60 native Spanish-speaking participants studying English. The participants were divided into 2 equally-sized groups based on their age: "11-12 year-olds who were first exposed to English when they were 8-9" and "14-15 year-olds" who started learning English at the age of 11-12 (p. 100). The quantitative study was conducted in a formal language setting in the participants' schools in Spain. Based on the results of the grammar test, the study concludes that, overall, the length of studying the second language is an important indicator of participants' academic success. Surprisingly, regarding the starting age, the authors determine that the older group of participants was able to produce better results, even though they started learning English later. Consequently, a formal learning setting does not guarantee improved language

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gains in the case of earlier exposure. There are several potential explanations for this: Firstly, the older participants tend to have “greater cognitive ability” (p. 107). Secondly, the academic curriculum needs to be carefully planned based on the participants' level of proficiency, and increasing numbers of hours need to be offered as participants attain a higher level. Overall, even though there is a tendency to think that the earlier one starts learning a second language, the greater the proficiency he or she will achieve, this is not always true. Teaching quality, the number of hours spent studying the language, and the participants' individual characteristics all affect their academic success. To conclude, this study shares an idea with Llanes and Serrano's study (2014) that adults are also capable of acquiring linguistic gains due to their cognitive skills and prior life experience. However, compared to a children's natural ability to memorize words and rules quickly, it may take longer for adults to advance their level of fluency. Adults also prefer studying in a formal classroom setting with a carefully-planned curriculum opposite to younger participants, who are more likely to benefit from studying abroad (Mayo, 2003; Llanez & Muñoz, 2013).

### **Summary**

To summarize, this section of the literature review compared the academic achievements of participants in two contrasting settings – the home environment and overseas. Both locations were discussed in terms of participants' gains in speaking and writing skills, grammar, and vocabulary. While an overseas language environment is mostly beneficial for improving linguistic proficiency, the other sets of skills can be gained in a formal classroom setting with a well-planned curriculum. Following that, the study explored the predictors affecting academic performance, such as the length of time spent studying the second language, the participants'

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previous experience with second languages, and their personalities. Assessing these factors can help identify their potential achievements in language acquisition. Lastly, this section of the literature review examined age as a factor in language gain and concluded that starting to learn a second language at an earlier age does not always lead to improved academic performance.

### **2.4 Participants' Motivations and Perceptions of Short-term Language Programs**

This section of the literature review initially focuses on the motivations that influence participants' decisions to study overseas instead of staying in their home countries. Furthermore, push and pull factors affecting participants' desires to enroll in academic institutions abroad are identified and analyzed. According to Lam et al (2011), push factors are internal features that compel participants to leave their home environment and go elsewhere. However, pull factors are described as external features where either language schools or countries try to attract participants to their specific destinations once the decision to travel has been made. Lastly, this section of the literature review examines the expectations participants hold before arriving at the chosen destinations and the correlations between their expectations and experiences.

#### **2.4.1 Exploring Participants' Motivations**

Many researchers have conducted studies into participant motivations for studying languages abroad (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2003; Isabelli-García, 2006; Allen, 2010a; Hernández, 2010; Weger, 2013). Gardner is one of the most influential psychologists in this field and initiated foreign language motivation studies. He defined second language motivation as “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). This indicates one's determination and enthusiasm to succeed in learning. Allen (2010a) expanded Gardner's

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definition of participants' second language motivation and stated that motivation is not necessarily determined by one's inner stimuli and interests, but can also be formed based on the surrounding environment, "the learning context" (p. 30). Therefore, studying a language in the home country or overseas, where this language is spoken natively, can affect the learner's motivation and intention to continue his or her studies. Generally, motivation to learn the second language is depicted as a mechanism, led by both inner desire and outer environment, which provokes one to accomplish his or her goals.

Interestingly, studies of second language motivations originated in the psychological field in Canada (Dörnyei, 2003). This can be explained by the fact that Canada has two official languages: English and French. While some provinces, such as British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and others are primarily Anglophonic, Quebec and, to a lesser extent, the northern part of New Brunswick are dominated by Francophones (Dörnyei, 2003, p.4). As a result of this duality, in Canada there has always been an interest in exploring the motivations influencing second language acquisition in either English or French. This also generates a sizeable industry in the form of language schools, private teachers, translating, and interpreting services.

Exploring the motivations of participants provides a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their desire to study abroad. Scholars, such as Allen (2010) and Anderson (2015) explore the inner stimuli inspiring participants to take part in language programs. Allen's study (2010) focuses on this aspect and follows six American participants learning French on a six-week program in France. The data collection process was divided into three stages: before, during, and after the program, and applied the method of triangulation, using semi-structured

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs interviews, questionnaires, and the participants' blogs. The results of the study show that "linguistic [...] and career-oriented motives" dominate for the participants (p. 44). While the former motive is depicted as their intention to master their language skills and practice French in a native language environment, the latter is based on their pragmatic desire to build a successful career with higher earnings. Anderson's study (2015) also identifies a variety of motives stimulating one to study overseas. The first concerns personal development, becoming more independent, responsible and confident, and gaining experience of living on your own. The second is related to Allen's study and refers to career opportunities and becoming more knowledgeable in a certain field. Lastly, exploring the world and meeting people from other countries is also one of the motivations for studying overseas. Overall, the reviewed studies show that participants can be driven by a variety of stimuli, such as personal development, professional development, and opportunities for global travel. They are adamant about gaining new knowledge, enhancing linguistic skills, and expanding their horizons.

There is a range of stimuli that influence participants' decision to study abroad. Apart from the ones that have already been discussed, Weger's study (2013) expands the academic literature on this topic by discovering some additional motives. This study explores the motivations of international adult learners studying English in Washington D.C., USA. It utilized a quantitative approach in the form of questionnaires and identifies five factors influencing the participants' motivations, given below in ascending order of influence:

- Learning Self-Confidence
- Attitudes toward English Language Learning/Community
- International Posture

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- Personal English Use
- Value of English Learning (Weger, 2013, p.96).

Therefore, becoming self-confident is the least influential motive, whereas the value of language acquisition is the most desirable. Overall, the adults in this study are motivated by a variety of stimuli with differing impacts.

The correlations between motivation and linguistic acquisition are discussed in several studies (for example, Isabelli-García, 2006; Hernández, 2010). Both studies claim that one's motivation has a direct impact on his or her speaking gains, as it either stimulates or limits one's interest to learn. Isabelli-García (2006) states that an "unwillingness to interact and create social networks with the speakers of the host culture stemmed from motivational and attitudinal deficits maintained by the learner" (p. 257). This indicates a clear connection between the development of participants' attitudes and their desire to freely use the second language. This mixed methods study included pre- and post-program speaking proficiency interviews, informal interviews, diary entries, and social network contact logs of American participants learning Spanish as a second language. Hernández's study (2010) also implemented a mixed methods approach to investigate the relationship between participants' motivations and the development of second language proficiency. The study concludes that motivation is a predictor of language gain, and if participants are encouraged and enthusiastic, they are more likely to take part in both classroom and extra-curricular activities that consequently lead to mastering a language. Overall, Hernández's study (2010) supports the findings of Isabelli-García's work (2006) and determines that participants' incentives directly influence their overall academic performance and linguistic gain acquired by the end of the program.

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To conclude, motivation is one of the most powerful influences on participants choosing to take part in language study programs. Motivation can be shaped by a combination of inner interest and external environment i.e., the learning context. A participant's level of interest is the foundation of their learning process, and can affect their experiences and achievements.

Knowing participants' motivations is very beneficial for language schools as they can make adjustments to their programs to more fully satisfy their clients' wishes. By having a clear idea of what participants' motivations are, schools can work on their marketing schemes as well.

### **2.4.2 Effects of Push and Pull Factors**

Having an understanding of push and pull factors allows one to identify the motives of participants in their choice of academic institutions. Lam et al (2011) define push factors as "the internal motivating factors that drive the respondents to take action" (p. 67). This is what inspires one to leave their home environment and study overseas. Push factors in language learning abroad can be represented by a willingness to practice and improve language skills, knowledge expansion, confidence, desire to meet new people, experience different attractions, and others. While these factors are internal, pull factors, conversely, are depicted as external, in other words they are referred to as "the appeals of the destination attributes" (Lam et al., 2011, p. 67). Lam et al.'s quantitative study utilized a questionnaire to identify push and pull factors affecting participants' choice of academic institution in Malaysia. The results of the study show that the most influential push factor for studying overseas is increasing job opportunities. The participants' are thus interested in achieving a higher social status, employment with a better company, and higher earnings. Regarding pull factors, one of the priorities for the participants was the image and prestige of the academic institution. Moreover, the quality of education and

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access to various facilities, such as computer labs and libraries, were also important. Lastly, institutions favouring social opportunities, as well as positive feedback from former participants appealed to the participants. Mazzarol and Soutar's study (2002) supports the findings of Lam et al.'s work in 2011. These scholars also believe that both push and pull factors influence the participants' choice of an academic institution they want to enroll in. Their mixed methods study determines that participants are attracted by the reputation of academic institutions, the quality of education they provide, as well as employment opportunities after graduating. Both studies show the significance of potential job opportunities as a push factor and the institution's image and the quality of education as the two crucial pull factors. Overall, these two studies indicate that participants are becoming more serious in selecting and comparing academic institutions. Also, since there is increasing competition between institutions, they should "maintain and develop a distinctive image in order to reach a competitive advantage" (Lam et al., 2011, p. 74). Lastly, carefully planned programs combined with the provision of high quality education will increase the chances of being selected.

Along with push and pull factors that inspire participants to study abroad, there are some challenges they may encounter either before enrolling in a program or while being in a foreign country. Eder et.al (2010) explore what motivates participants to take part in study tours in the United States. This qualitative study utilized Skype interviews with open-ended questions. Regarding push factors, the two most important were identified as personal development and language acquisition. The study program allowed the participants to become more independent, immerse themselves in a new country, and gain new experiences. Moreover, they aimed to improve their language skills, since they realized the current importance of being able to speak

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs English. Pull factors included the institution's image, its geographic location, and the participants' interest in the American culture. The study also determined "structural factors", which were defined as those that can "outweigh the desire to visit or the attractiveness of a country" (p. 243). The participants faced at least two challenges – a need to obtain an American visa, and cost issues. While the former coerced participants to go through the visa application process to enter the country and caused additional stress, the latter was based on the high cost of the program, which was prohibitive for some. Foster's study (2014) builds on the idea of Eder's research and examines push factors and barriers among Brazilian participants studying in the United Kingdom. This mixed-methods study recognizes a variety of push factors, such as the opportunity to enhance English, gaining experience of study overseas and facing a different system of education. However, the study also determined that the high cost of tuition, being away from home and difficulties in obtaining financial assistance are some of the barriers that may prevent one from studying overseas. Overall, the reviewed studies show that while there are some benefits in studying abroad, such as language acquisition, participants also face a range of challenges, including high cost of tuition. After examining literature about participants' motivations, as well as push and pull factors leading them to study abroad, it is interesting to explore how participants' expectations formed prior to enrolling in a language program affect their experiences throughout the program.

### **2.4.3 Participants' Expectations and Experiences**

Some studies on language programs focus on exploring participants' expectations of study programs overseas and how they are formed (McCargar, 1993; Ketsman, 2012; Lobo & Gurney, 2014). Others, however, examine the correlations between their expectations and

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academic performance or achievements. Several scholars, such as Wilkinson (1998), Badstübner and Ecke (2009) strongly believe that participants' expectations formed prior to enrolling in a language program influence their academic progress and linguistic gains. Badstübner and Ecke's (2009) study investigates American participants' expectations of taking part in a one-month program in Germany and its impact on their learning progress. This quantitative study utilized questionnaires in two stages: at the beginning and the end of the program. The researchers concluded that the participants had considerably higher expectations of the language gain compared to what they actually achieved by the end of the program. Their expectations were focused on improving their listening and speaking skills, expanding their vocabulary, and experiencing full cultural immersion. However, by the end of the program only cultural immersion was reported as a significant benefit. This can be explained by the assumption many have that studying abroad inevitably leads to outstanding results. Wilkinson (1998) also argues against the common belief of gaining language fluency while abroad. His ethnographic study followed American participants studying French in Valcourt, France. He concludes that the participants did not improve their speaking skills, since they were accompanied by other Americans and did not have an opportunity to speak French with the locals. They also did not fully experience cultural immersion for the same reason. This demonstrates that if participants do not practice their language skills outside of the course instructions, their fluency is likely not going to improve. Overall, these studies indicate that the expectations need to be carefully constructed based on one's current level of proficiency, involvement in the program, and length of stay and need to be adjusted based on the circumstances.

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The notion of the participants' unmet expectations can emerge if little attention is paid to monitor the language programs. School administrators should be able to adjust their programs to meet, if not exceed, their clients' expectations. Lobo and Gurney's study (2014) investigates whether there is "a link between participants' expectations, attendance and attrition on English language enhancement courses" (p. 1). This mixed-methods study was conducted in Australia using a survey initially followed by semi-structured interviews throughout. The study concludes that unmet expectations and neglectful teaching staff can negatively affect participants' attendance, performance, level of engagement, participant satisfaction and course feedback (Lobo, 2014). It is essential to engage with the participants before the start of the program, otherwise a lack of understanding of their expectations may lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment from their perspective. Pitts's (2009) ethnographic study supports the findings of Lobo and Gurney's (2014) study regarding the fact that communicating with the participants prior to the start of their program is beneficial for exploring their expectations and needs. Pitt's (2009) study describes the notion of "expectation gap", referred to as "participant goals [...] not necessarily met through the academic program" (p. 453). This study suggests providing pre-departure recommendations to participants on how to manage their expectations accordingly. Participants need to be aware of the potential changes and difficulties that may occur throughout their program and should be able to reconsider their expectations and adjust them based on the situation. Overall, the discussed studies show that meeting participants' expectations can be achieved by knowing the market and their needs prior to the start of the language programs.

Implementing a quantitative approach may not always produce accurate results in terms of the relations between participants' expectations, their academic performance, and learning

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environment; therefore a qualitative study could be a better strategy. Ketsman's (2012) case study utilized semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document checking to explore these correlations. The article concludes that all aspects are interconnected, and it is the instructors' responsibility to create a friendly environment in the classroom to exceed participants' expectations, which will eventually lead to better results. The term "acting on high expectations" in the paper refers to building a rapport between the participants and teachers, so the former are not afraid of making mistakes and feel comfortable in the learning setting (p. 17). Goldoni's (2013) ethnographic case study supports the idea of Ketsman (2012) in regard to the significance of a teacher's role in creating a friendly learning environment and states that full cultural and linguistic immersion can be difficult to obtain unless facilitated appropriately. Teachers and school coordinators need to carefully observe the learning environment and each participant's progress, making necessary changes where appropriate to enhance participant experiences throughout the program. Ruddock and Turner (2007) also stress the importance of the program facilitators' and teachers' roles in providing a smooth transition for participants from studying at home to study tours overseas. They should ease the adjustment process and provide necessary support to the participants. However, Amuzie & Winke (2009) found, after investigating the changes in participants' beliefs while studying abroad, that the teacher's role becomes less important throughout the program, and "the importance of learning autonomy" is far more significant (p. 374), where "learning autonomy" refers to participants' own efforts and desires to interact with native speakers and make progress. Those who are active and enthusiastic about making improvements tend to attain greater results. Overall, having an encouraging learning environment combined with participant enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn can ensure

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participants' expectations are met and make them feel accepted in the classroom, therefore having a positive impact on their academic performance.

Despite an increased interest in examining the concept of language learning and language acquisition, it is surprising that limited research has been conducted on participants' expectations and experiences. According to Smith and Jenner (1997b), only a few studies have been carried out on this topic, mainly due to the size of the field, and as not much information is currently available, the industry is unaware of the real size of the language learning segment. Short-term language programs significantly contribute the economies of the host countries, since the participants pay not only for their tuition, but also for their stay, which includes use of public transport, accommodation, groceries, excursions, entertainment, souvenirs, and others. The duration of the stay may vary; however, it cannot exceed more than a year. Looking at the Canadian rules, however, they indicate that short-term language programs can last for no more than 6 months (Government of Canada, 2016).

Based on this literature review, the majority of studies have explored participant motivations, linguistic skills acquired in the home environment versus abroad and how expectations or goals affect achievements. Little research has been conducted on participants' expectations prior to enrollment and their overall experience. Several researchers, nonetheless, examined the correlations between participant expectation and their academic achievements (for example, Badstübner & Ecke's, 2009; Ketsman, 2012; Lobo & Gurney, 2014). Also, most of the previous studies looked at English native speakers learning either Spanish or French as the second language. This study, conversely, will focus on non-native English participants learning English as a foreign language in Toronto. Initially, I will explore how participant expectations

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### **Summary**

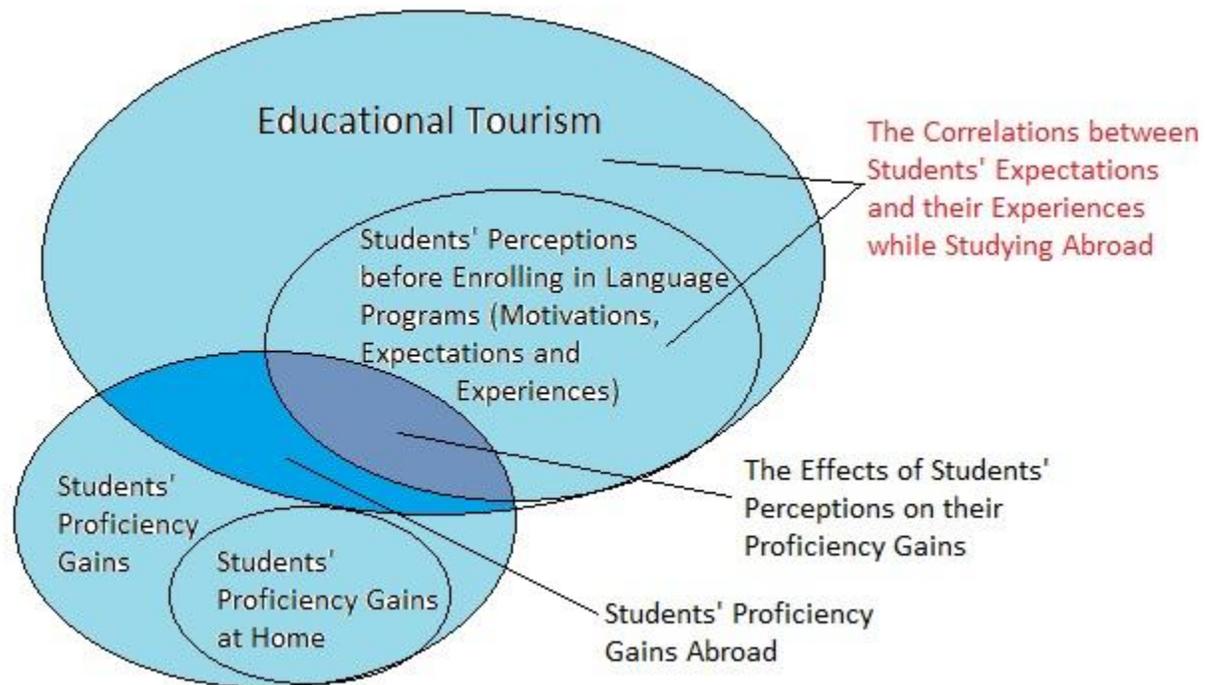
To summarize, the proposed study suggests that there is a gap in the academic literature in exploring participants' expectations prior to enrolling in language programs abroad and their experiences throughout the program. Participant expectations can be a good source of information for language schools to better assess what participants are looking for and what they are discouraged by. This knowledge can provide schools with valuable information on how to improve their programs and make some adjustments to their current system to meet participants' expectations. Satisfying participants' needs can contribute to the school's reputation, ultimately attracting more customers. Participants, by having great experiences, will spread their positive impressions via word of mouth about a school to their friends and relatives or leave positive feedback on the school's website, social media and/or third-party review sites. School representatives need to be acutely aware that their reputation is directly dependent on the quality of services they provide.

This literature review allowed us to clearly see what areas of educational tourism have been studied previously and the findings they generated. It included three main sections: the concept of educational tourism, participants' proficiency gains at home versus abroad, and participants' attitudes before enrolling in language programs, including their motivations,

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expectations, and experiences. Figure Three below provides a concise overview of the literature reviewed and illustrates the interconnections among the main themes discussed in this chapter.

*FIGURE THREE: Literature Overview*



The notion of educational tourism, discussed in the first section, represents a broad field where participants travel to other destinations to take part in study programs that include formal classroom learning and a variety of excursions. This section contains two aspects that were also examined in the main part of the literature review: participant's proficiency gains (language acquisition) and participants' attitudes. While discussing second language acquisition, the study analyzed participant linguistic gains in two settings: at home and abroad. The home environment entails formal classroom learning with little to no access to native speakers. Studying abroad, conversely, implies travelling elsewhere where that language is spoken natively and taking part in extra-curricular activities, as well as classroom learning. As shown in Figure Three, studying

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languages abroad overlaps with educational tourism and language acquisition; however, language acquisition at home does not integrate with educational tourism, since it implies that participants stay in their home countries and learn a second language in local institutions. Lastly, participant attitudes on study abroad tours and language acquisition overlap as well and demonstrate the effects of the former with the latter. This proposed study focuses on participants' expectations prior to enrolling in a short-term English program in Toronto and their experiences throughout the program.

### Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Methods

#### 3.1 Study Site and Context: Toronto

This phenomenological study was conducted in Toronto, Canada, since this city is extensively used as a destination for taking part in short-term language programs. The rationale for choosing Toronto is its proximity to the Waterloo Region and variety of language schools, particularly in the downtown area. Being Canada's largest city and the third largest metropolitan area in North America, with a primarily Anglophone population, Toronto is an appealing destination to learn English as a second language. Toronto is a popular destination not only for its wide selection of schools, but also tourist attractions and other activities in which participants will be interested in taking part.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were carried out at three language schools in Toronto offering short-term English language programs: "*English World*", "*English Time*", and "*Language Paradise*". The interviews were conducted over the course of two months, October and November 2016. The participants were purposefully selected, since it was important to ensure that participants had at least Intermediate or Upper-Intermediate levels of English in order to create a comprehensive dialogue between me, the interviewer, and the interviewees. As this is a qualitative study, it was crucial to elicit answers with a sufficient depth for gaining a thorough understanding of the studied phenomenon. Given the time constraints of completing a master's degree, interviewing fifteen participants provided sufficient insight for my study.

Following the University of Waterloo Ethics Approval on September 12<sup>th</sup>, I began my search for language schools in Toronto and GTA area. Since I did not have any prior connections with the schools or knew anyone working for them, I decided to use online resources, such as

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Google search, Yelp, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google maps, and others. Following this, I created an Excel Spreadsheet with the names of the schools, their email addresses, phone numbers, links to their websites, and their physical addresses. The total number of language schools I found was 38, including 33 schools in the downtown area of Toronto and 5 in GTA, such as Burlington, Hamilton, and Mississauga. Next, I contacted all of them via email and included both the information and recruitment letters, which explained the intent of my research and the process involved. However, shortly after this, I realized that sending emails was not effective for recruiting participants, since they were received by the receptionists, who did not forward this information to the schools' academic managers. Therefore, ringing the schools and requesting to connect directly with the managers was viewed as a better strategy, which consequently allowed me to gain access to the sites. The next section aims to provide detailed information about selecting phenomenology as an appropriate methodology for this study and justifies the reasons for implementing an interpretative type of phenomenology.

### **3.2 Methodology**

The literature review presented in the preceding chapter highlighted a dearth of research carried out to date demonstrating participants' expectations prior to enrolling in language programs abroad and their experiences throughout the programs. Some studies examine the effects of students' expectations on academic performance and progress (Wilkinson, 1998; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ketsman, 2012), while others explore the factors leading to unmet participant expectations, referred to as "expectation gaps" (Pitts, 2009; Lobo & Gurney, 2014). However, little to no academic literature focuses on participants' study of English as a second language. Instead, many studies examine native English speakers learning other languages, such

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs as French (Wilkinson, 1998; Allen & Herron, 2003; Freed et.al., 2004; Allen, 2010) or Spanish (Collentine, 2004; Segalowitz et.al., 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Isabelli-García, 2006; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Serrano et.al., 2014) while taking part in language programs abroad. Therefore, exploring the expectations and experiences of participants who are taking part in short-term English programs would be crucial for understanding the educational tourism industry.

The significance of this study lies in its application and benefit to two groups: language schools and participants. The former, representing the supply and providing language services, will be made aware of participants' needs and expectations and the ways they are formed. They will be able to formulate clearer strategies on how to effectively organize the learning process to maximize participants' experiences. Moreover, by providing good services and satisfying participants' needs, schools will be able to promote their programs to a wider audience and attract more clients. The participants, who are the consumers of language services, should also benefit from the results of the study. If their expectations are exceeded, they will be more likely to have positive experiences and become more motivated to make significant language improvements. Moreover, by having positive experiences, they will be willing to come back to the school they studied at and/or promote it via word-of-mouth.

Previous studies in this field were conducted utilizing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches with a wide range of methodologies, such as grounded theory, case studies, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative enquiry, and others. This information can be found in Figure Four, which provides a short description of the most relevant studies included in the literature review. For the purpose of this study, phenomenology is the most appropriate choice,

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs since it allows one to gain a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon and people's experiences.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore participants' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto. More specifically, this study aims to explore the ways participants' expectations are formed, in order to make language schools aware of participants' needs. The results should provide schools with clearer strategies on how to improve their programs to exceed participants' expectations.

The research questions include:

1. What expectations do participants have before taking part in language programs abroad?
2. How are the expectations of participants on language programs formed?
3. What experiences do participants undergo while studying abroad?

### **3.2.1 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology originated in Europe, but has undergone many changes since its first appearance. Derived from philosophy, Edmond Husserl is considered to have founded it at the end of the nineteenth century (Zahavi, 2003). However, the term phenomenology first appeared earlier than this in the works of other philosophers, including Kant. In continental Europe, the main emphasis of phenomenological studies was on gaining the essence of people's experiences. The researchers frequently used the concept of *bracketing* in their studies, which is defined as "a process of suspending one's judgment or beliefs, about the phenomenon under investigation in order to see it clearly" to avoid one's judgment or interpretations (Burton et al., 2006). The reason for this was to let the interviewees share their stories accurately. The European approach

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to phenomenology was critical and used the concept of first-person experience, emphasizing the importance of the pure experience isolated from the social and cultural context (Barkway, 2001).

However, there was a battle to go “back to the things themselves,” with a major shift from the European perception of phenomenology to the North American that brought many changes (Crotty, 1998, p. 78). Since then, researchers have realized that it is difficult to elicit pure knowledge, since everyone lives in, and is influenced by, society and various external cultural factors. Instead, their idea was to interpret the participant’s stories and avoid bracketing. Thereafter, phenomenology became subjective and non-critical, with the main emphasis on gaining a deep understanding of individual’s perceptions and experiences within a social context.

Phenomenology is commonly used in education; therefore, since short-term language programs are part of educational tourism, and this study aims to gain a deep understanding of participants’ expectations and experiences while taking part in those tours, this methodology would be the most appropriate. There are two types of phenomenology, descriptive and interpretive, each with its own goals; therefore the outcome of the study depends, to a certain extent, on the choice of which type to employ. Descriptive phenomenology is defined as an epistemological approach, which tries to investigate the pure knowledge and the essence of people’s experiences, avoiding personal judgments and ideas (Gill, 2014). However, my study will utilize an interpretive approach, which relies on the ontological stance, looking at the physical existence of the phenomenon and the ways it can be interpreted. Furthermore, one of the other differences between conducting a descriptive or interpretative phenomenological study is that the former focuses on providing general information and a description of the phenomenon, whereas the latter aims to articulate the commonalities of individuals’ experiences within a

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs particular context (Gill, 2014). Overall, the general goal of phenomenological studies can be described as gaining a deep understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday people's experiences (van Manen, 1990). Language is presented as the key component that allows people to derive meaning from their experiences and share their stories with the researcher.

The reason for using interpretative phenomenology aligns with my personal experience of studying in two private language schools in Central London. In March 2014 I completed a General English course taught at TTI School of English in Camden town, while in August 2014 I was enrolled in a 4-week IELTS exam preparation course at Delfin School. The following year, I worked as an English teacher at Frances King School of English on a family program. Seeing the field from the perspective of both student and teacher is one of the reasons for using interpretative phenomenology. Furthermore, since English is my second language and the students participating in short-term English programs are also non-native English speakers, I feel a connection between them and myself. Having faced with this form of educational tourism myself should allow me to gain a rapport with the participants and include my own voice and experience in this study.

The most influential scholars who have used phenomenology are Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Max van Manen. In the traditional Husserl approach that originated in Europe, the goal of phenomenology was to demonstrate the rigorous study of things as they appear (Moran, 2001). This implies that the researcher aims to have an essential and deep understanding of human consciousness and experience, free from the social and cultural context. According to van Manen, gaining "a natural and original knowledge" is essential before reflecting on or critiquing the experience (van

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Manen, 1990, p. 18). Therefore, explanations and interpretations are not used until the phenomenon is fully studied. Heidegger was another German scholar who made a significant contribution to phenomenology; however, his approach was radically different from Husserl's in the way that he determined truth is discovered. Heidegger devised Hermeneutics, or Interpretive Phenomenology, where lived experiences are based on an interpretative process (Mapp, 2008). Instead of looking at the essence of the phenomenon, the main emphasis here is on critiquing and making assumptions about the shared stories. A researcher can bring his or her own understandings of the particular phenomenon without bracketing, as Husserl's approach suggests. Another significant researcher, Merleau-Ponty, conceived the notion of "primacy of perception", which aims to rediscover the participant's first experience (Racher & Robinson, 2003, p. 26). The concept of bracketing, as well as in Husserl's views, is used here to gain a pre-reflective experience and reach an original understanding of the phenomenon. Discovering the essence of the experience and reaching an original awareness are the key components (Moran, 2001). Gadamer, conversely, uses a different approach, emphasizing the role of the researcher and his or her active involvement in the study. According to Fleming et al (2003), there is a natural dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee, and each such interchange is followed by interpretation and analysis of the collected data, as well as feedback and discussion. Van Manen, in contrast, implemented the combination of both descriptive and interpretative phenomenology. He argued that the term *phenomenon* equals *experience*, and therefore interpretations can be clearly linked with pure knowledge and the essence of people's experience. The following section provides information about a research method used in this study.

### **3.3 Research Method**

Data collection for this phenomenological study took place over a two-month period (October and November 2016). Research data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the international students enrolled in short-term English programs in downtown Toronto. The following section will discuss the method used and the incentives for implementing semi-structured interviews.

#### ***3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews with International Students***

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants attending language schools. The choice of participants was purposeful in regard to their level of English, since language barrier can cause difficulties in maintaining a dialogue between me and an interviewee. I obtained participants with at least Intermediate or Upper-Intermediate levels of English, while their ability to comprehend the questions and provide insightful answers was crucial for this study. However, the selection of participants was not limited to any specific age group, nationality, gender, occupation or other demographical factors. Nevertheless, in this study I did not interview children; the interviews were conducted with the participants who were over 18. Different demographics were represented, therefore the collected and analyzed data provided a deeper insight and helped to uncover the main questions addressed in this study. The participants were interviewed on a one-on-one basis, in a school's classroom. Even though I had a semi-structured interview guide in front of me, I tried to maintain natural conversations with the interviewees and prompt them based on their answers; therefore I did not strictly follow the order of the questions. Note taking was part of the interviews, as well as audio recordings, which were transcribed into a word document later for the analysis portion of the study. The interviews

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lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes, depending on the conversation flow. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews, I maintained a friendly and informal environment to ensure the interviewees did not feel much pressure and were able to share their experiences with me.

Overall, the conducted interviews revealed the expectations participants had before enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in a much deeper context. An interview guide for semi-structured interviews is presented in Appendix E.

Semi-structured interviews are commonly found in phenomenological research; scholars from the Recreation and Leisure Department at the University of Waterloo have implemented them in their phenomenological studies (Genoe & Dupuis, 2011; Miller & Mair, 2015).

Regarding the use of this type of the interviews, scholars generally aim to introduce the topic of their research, providing the participants with an opportunity to share their stories. The use of open-ended questions, minimal interruptions, and lack of pressure from the interviewer puts interviewees at ease. The participants in phenomenological interviews are normally purposely selected, since the researcher wants to be certain those people have a deep knowledge of the topic being studied.

Regarding the ethics of the study, I obtained ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics prior to the start of the data collection process. This was a mandatory step, since my study is qualitative and entails direct contact with the participants.

Initially, I filled in an ethics application form and submitted all the necessary documents.

Following that, after having received an approval and starting the interviews, each participant was given the option of using a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. I used their chosen names throughout the transcribing of the interviews and analysis part of my research.

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Furthermore, each participant received a consent form that provided information about his or her rights and the main procedures, which they needed to sign before the interviews commenced.

Lastly, the participants were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded, and the recordings would be kept in a safe place on my password-protected laptop. The transcripts were only accessed by myself and supervisor. The next section discusses the stages in analyzing the gathered data and presenting the results.

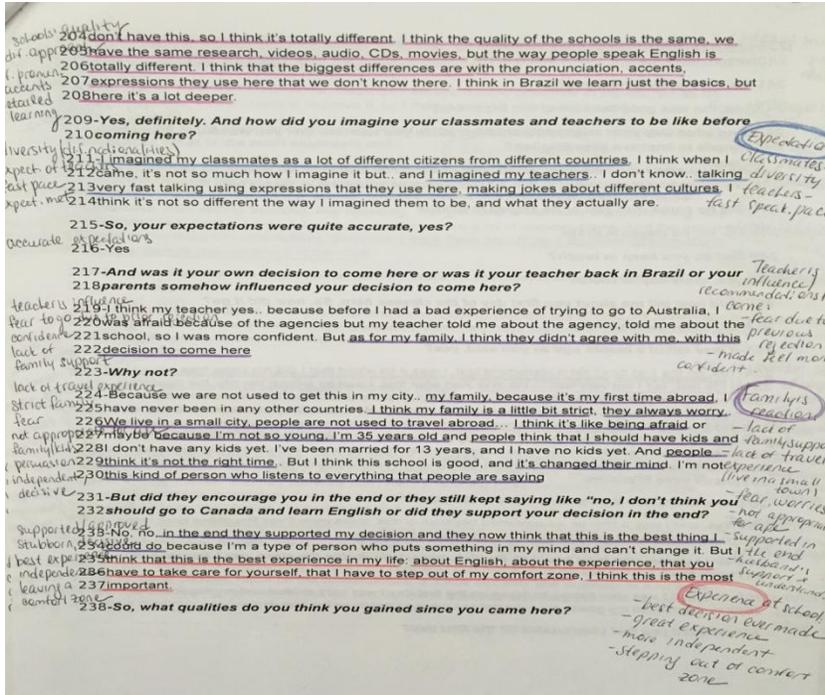
### **3.4 Data Analysis and Coding**

Once fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, I began transcribing them for the analysis portion of the study. This was a long process, but it allowed me to familiarize myself with the stories interviewees shared with me. Since my previous experience in analyzing interview transcripts was limited, I chose to employ the traditional method of analysis and representation in this study. I learnt that it is commonly used by novice scholars and serves as a good introductory basis. The research analysis was comprised of two main stages to produce clear and thorough results.

During the first stage, I printed the interview transcripts and began reading them line by line paying particular attention to the key words and phrases in each line; this process is known as a line-by-line coding. This step required a lot of concentration as it was important to identify the prime codes and write them down in the margins. Illustration One shows an example of the codes written in the margins, so a reader can visually see what this process involved. While rereading the transcripts, it became apparent that some interviewees shared similar experiences.

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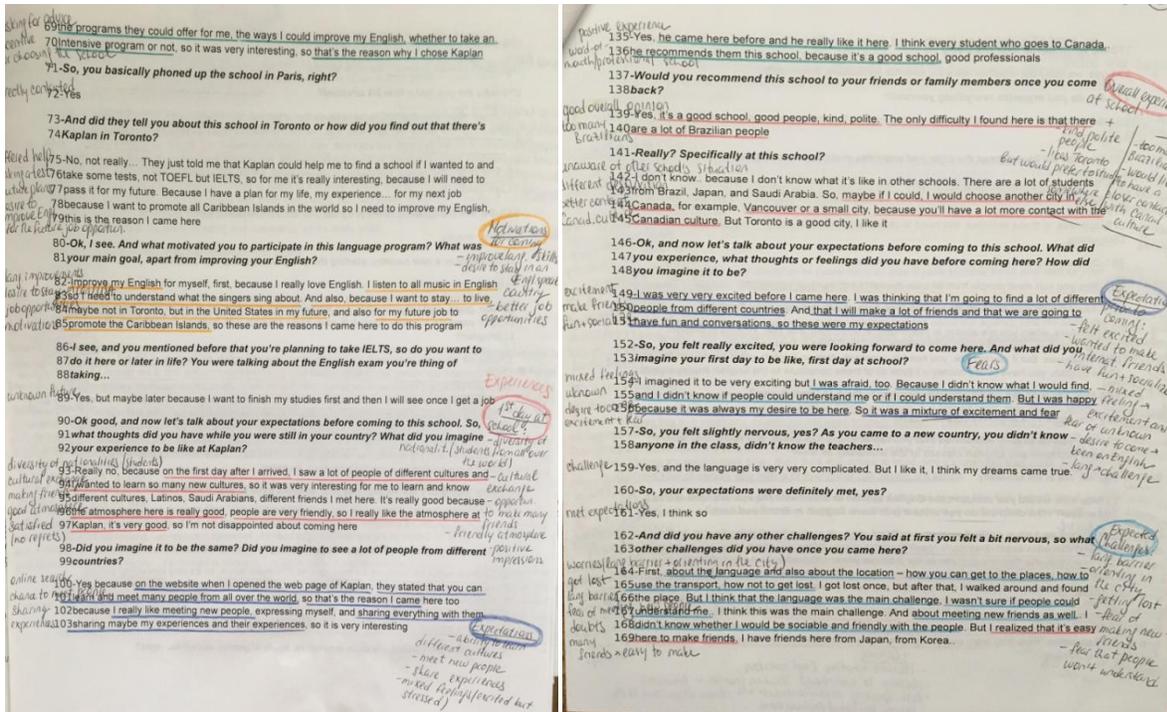
## ILLUSTRATION ONE: Line-by-line Coding



The second stage was implementing a focus coding technique and going back to the start of the interview transcripts. At this stage I began identifying categories, which are depicted as the larger units containing the codes. The categories were entered into a Word document file on my laptop. Based on the categories identified in the transcript, I was able to recognize the main themes. Following that, I went back to the transcript, and started highlighting words and phrases, which corresponded to each theme, in different colours. As shown on Illustration Two, students' motivations were highlighted in orange, experiences at school in red, experiences while living with a home-stay family in pink, expectations in blue, sources of information used prior to their arrival in black, suggested recommendations for language schools in brown, and so on.

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## ILLUSTRATION TWO: Focus Coding



By the end of the second stage, four main themes were identified:

- Recalling students' expectations prior to coming to a language school;
- Comparing educational systems and the process of learning English in home countries versus Toronto;
- Reflecting on students' experiences at language schools;
- Suggested marketing strategies for language schools

However, as each theme was large and complex, dividing them into sub-themes was the next step. For example, the first theme was made up of three sub-themes, such as fears and challenges, positive expectations and hopes, and parents' roles in the decision-making process. After this step was completed, it became apparent that these sub-themes could be also narrowed down into smaller units. Students' fears and challenges, for example, included the language

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barrier, cultural shock, adjusting to the new environment, leaving family and friends back home, and others. Therefore, the final outcomes were comprised of themes, sub-themes, and specific examples, as described in the previous sentence. Once this step was over, I went back to the transcripts, copied all the necessary quotes I underlined during the focus coding process, and pasted them into the Word Document; each quote was matched with a theme and/or sub-theme it belonged to. Lastly, a frequency counting technique was implemented to present the numbers of the interviewees stating certain points.

Giorgi (1975, 1985, 2009) provided a well-structured approach for analyzing the results, specifically obtained from a phenomenological study. This approach includes four stages that logically follow one another. The first one is called “open reading”, which allows a researcher to familiarize himself with the data and gain a sense of ideas participants expressed (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011, p. 131). Charmaz stated that this step “involves no judgment, no selectivity, and an openness to all details”, which eliminate subjectivity. During the next stage, known as “discriminating meaning units”, the researcher aims to link the gathered data to the research questions the study was guided by. At this stage, he or she also assesses the relevance of the provided answers, therefore determining which results are valuable to the study (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011, p. 131). The following step, described as “psychological reflection”, is considered to be the most challenging, where the researcher aims to find a meaning for each data unit; therefore, this step involves an in-depth analysis of collected data. The last step, depicted as “structural understanding and description”, seeks to combine all meaningful findings, thoroughly discuss them, and present them in an organized and concise way (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011, p. 132).

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Overall, the analysis part aimed to identify the primary themes and sub-themes and provide clear information on the research findings. The analysis part included of a variety of steps, such as reading the interview transcripts line-by-line, writing down codes in the margins, creating categories, implementing focus coding, and identifying themes and sub-themes.

**CHAPTER 4: Research Findings**

**4.0 Introduction to Research Findings**

This chapter presents the results from data collected over the course of two months with fifteen international students learning English as a foreign language. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data. Since this is a phenomenological study, I as a researcher, needed to fully immerse myself in the process of data collection to gain accurate information. The table below visually presents the research findings with themes and sub-themes, which will be further discussed in this chapter.

*TABLE ONE: Research Themes and Sub-Themes*

| <b>THEMES</b>  | <b>SUB-THEMES</b>   |
|--|---|
| 1. Recalling students' expectations prior to coming to a language school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Anticipated fears and challenges</li> <li>● Positive expectations and hopes</li> <li>● Parents' roles and their influence in the decision-making process</li> </ul>  |
| 2. Comparing educational systems in home countries VS Toronto            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussing differences in teaching approaches</li> <li>● Determining motivating factors for studying abroad</li> </ul>   |
| 3. Reflecting on students' experiences at language schools               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Describing experiences in the school environment</li> <li>● Reflecting on experiences while participating in extra-curricular activities</li> <li>● Revealing students' experiences with home-stay families</li> </ul> |
| 4. Marketing strategies for language schools                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Suggestions for enhancing students' experiences</li> <li>● Motivations behind a destination/school choice</li> <li>● Sources of information affecting a study program image</li> </ul>                                 |

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### **4.1 Recalling Students' Expectations prior to Coming to a Language School**

A thorough analysis of the interview transcripts showed that the interviewees experienced mixed feelings prior to their arrival in Toronto and the commencement of the program. For most, this was their first time participating in a short-term English program in a foreign country, which resulted in a variety of hopes and anticipated fears. Some had never travelled outside of their home countries before, which put additional pressure on them. Others, on the other hand, were more adventurous and saw this as an opportunity to make new friends and improve their English. The influence of their parents was also important in the decision-making process. While some parents provided support and encouragement to their children in undertaking this experience, others were either concerned about them travelling solo or did not understand their motives. This theme is comprised of three sub-themes which will be discussed below:

1. Anticipated fears and challenges
2. Positive expectations and hopes
3. Parents' roles and their influence in the decision-making process

#### ***4.1.1 Anticipated Fears and Challenges***

Fear was experienced among many participants prior to their arrival in Canada and the commencement of their language program. Specifically, eight out of the fifteen interviewees stated that one of the challenges they anticipated was the language barrier. They did not feel confident in their abilities to speak English freely and/or be understood by other people during class and in everyday life. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) expressed his fear of making mistakes and the necessity to speak English:

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*I felt stressed because I knew I would need to speak English every day, so it was a little bit difficult for me to adapt, but [...] now I don't feel stressed any longer. I'm better, more relaxed, more motivated, so it's good for me now. But at first I was feeling stressed about talking in front of other people and making some mistakes; I'm always scared of my mistakes*

Daniel's response shows that he was not fully prepared to speak English in everyday life and was unsure whether he had the capability to express himself without making any mistakes. Kevin (22, South Korea) also felt nervous, but similarly to Daniel, he confirmed that his level of English significantly improved since he first arrived. Kevin stated: *"I was nervous because I didn't know any information about English World or Canada, and I couldn't speak English very well compared to my current level. So, I was just nervous [...] it's also the first time coming to an English-speaking country for me"*. Other students were uncertain in their abilities to either understand others or be understood. Margaret (35, Brazil) said the following:

*It was a mixture of excitement and fear [...] I was afraid because I didn't know what I would find, and I didn't know if people could understand me or if I could understand them [...] I think that the language was the main challenge, I wasn't sure if people could understand me*

Mark (24, Ecuador) shared the same concerns as Margaret while talking about the language barrier: *"I was nervous about different things, including the school [...] because I didn't know how to speak English, what is going to happen on my first day [...] so maybe I can't understand anything, maybe I can't make any friends or maybe I can't explain my ideas"*.

Phrases, such as "feeling scared", "afraid" or "nervous" about not being able to communicate with others, understand what other people are saying, or making mistakes were

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs frequently expressed by many participants. This is the result of either having a low level of English, not being previously immersed in a native English environment, and therefore not being able to practice it, or some personal characteristics such as low self-esteem and introversion.

Another challenge that stood out while analyzing the data was the process of adjusting to a new environment. Eight out of fifteen participants commented that it was difficult in many ways for them to adapt to a new place. David (22, Turkey) expressed his concerns by saying the following:

*I was also slightly nervous because I didn't know the rules, I didn't know the city rules and how everything works here, so I was nervous [...] This is my first time traveling abroad so I wasn't so sure whether I would get used to living here, adapt to living here. But from the first day onwards, I easily adapted here*

David was not the only one who mentioned difficulties in orienting themselves around the city and learning its rules and idiosyncrasies. Mark (24, Ecuador) experienced the same and stated:

*“My fear was to get lost here because if you compare Toronto with my city [...] my city is really small, I mean if you have a car and you want to cross the whole city, it's going to take you 20 minutes. So, here in Canada it's totally different, Toronto is a big city”.* Margaret (35, Brazil)

also thought that finding places was a challenge; however, she was also concerned about the process of making international friends:

*I was nervous about the location – how you can get to the places, how to use the transport, how not to get lost. I got lost once, but after that, I walked around and found the place. And about meeting new friends as well [...] I didn't know whether I would be sociable and friendly with the people. But I realized that it's easy here to make friends*

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Feeling nervous about making new friends could be connected with introversion or lack of experience travelling and/or with different cultures. Kevin (22, South Korea) also anticipated challenges in socializing with the other students:

*I was nervous and I didn't know how to contact my family, how to use my phone and get data on my phone, how to save my money and so on [...] I was also scared because I didn't have any experience in making foreign friends, that's why I felt scared and nervous*

Apart from an anticipated language barrier and the challenge of adjusting to a new environment, four out of fifteen participants identified cultural differences as one of their fears. Even though Toronto is widely known to be a multicultural city that welcomes people of different nationalities, Susan (19, South Korea) was concerned about racism:

*It was my first experience abroad and I didn't know anything about Canada [...] cultural differences, traffic system, everything is just so different so I was very nervous [...] I was worried about racism because my cousin was learning English in Australia and he said that he experienced a lot of racism*

Susan's fears seemed to be based on her friend's experiences of racism in Australia; therefore she was worried about it prior to coming to Canada. Some other examples of cultural differences regarded day to day expectations. For example, David (22, Turkey) said this:

*I thought that my host-family would serve me pork, [but] I'm a Muslim, so I don't eat pork [...] but no, the school made all the arrangements for me, they told my home stay family that I was Muslim and can't eat pork at all. And I was like [...] very relieved. Another cultural difference was [that] they enter their houses with the shoes; we take our shoes off before getting inside our houses. What else? What other differences? People choose to live an ordinary life [here], they just buy basic things. In Turkey we like to buy special things, for example, hand cream, we choose a well-know brand, but here people don't think it's important, they don't care about the brands*

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For three out of fifteen participants, leaving home and their parents was a big challenge. Some students travelled long distances from home, for example Anthony (21, Mali) said: *“I was scared, I was really scared because I didn't want to leave my dad, my parents, my mum, everyone”*. Steven (36, Italy) also shared the fact that he left everyone behind in Italy, but he feels happy to be in Canada: *“I had left everything in Italy, my family, my friends, but I'm happy to be here”*.

For some, the main reason for feeling scared to leave home was due to a lack of prior travel experience; therefore it was a fear of travelling on their own for the first time. Mark (24, Ecuador) was one of those students who said: *“I was really nervous, of course, because I thought it would be hard [...] in general, this is my first time to travel alone, and I'm also being independent here, so if I have a problem, I don't have an easy connection with my parents”*.

Interestingly, two out of the fifteen interviewees revealed that they had no fear coming to Toronto on their own. This was connected either with an adventurous personality and willingness to explore new places or with a family connection to Canada. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands), who is used to travelling on his own, enjoyed the experience:

*I didn't have any fear because I really love that feeling [...] really love discovering new places. Even if I don't know anyone for me it's not a problem. I know that after some time I will meet new people, share some experiences with them, so for me it's not a problem to be in another country on my own*

Mary (23, France) had family connections in Canada, due to the fact her mother was French-Canadian; therefore, she was already familiar with the country and knew what to expect:

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*I grew up not only in a French environment, but in a Canadian environment too because of my mother, she is French-Canadian, so I didn't have any fear. I knew the country [...] the first time I came to Canada was when I was just 5 or 6 years old, so I knew this country really well*

Overall, interviewees revealed that they anticipated many challenges prior to their arrival. Two of the most evident were the language barrier and having to adjust to a new environment, with eight out of fifteen students discussing these challenges. Following that, four participants shared that they were expecting cultural differences and, as a consequence, culture shock. Three interviewees stated that leaving home and their families was a big challenge for them. Lastly, only two students felt comfortable coming to a foreign country and integrating into society. The following sub-theme looks at positive expectations and hopes participants had prior to their arrival.

### ***4.1.2 Positive Expectations and Hopes***

Most of the interviewees were excited and hopeful for the adventure ahead, as this was their first time attending a language school in an English-speaking country. Among positive expectations, they named the process of internalization, facilitated through cultural exchange, anticipation of how the classes would be structured and the teaching methods used, and the social aspect of meeting and interacting with other participants from different countries.

Regarding the process of internalization, six out of fifteen interviewees revealed that they expected to meet people from all over the world. For some, this was one of the motivations for coming to Toronto; for example, Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) said the following: “*On the website when I opened the web page of Language Paradise, they stated that you can learn and meet many people from all over the world, so that's the reason I came here [...] I really like*

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*meeting new people and sharing experiences*". Daniel was not the only one who looked forward to making international friends; Steven (36, Italy) shared his sentiments, stating: *"I was very excited, I thought that it would be a good school. There aren't that many European students here, they are mainly either Chinese or Arabic. It's very interesting to meet people from other countries"*.

However, one of the interviewees expecting to study alongside a diverse group of international students was disappointed as their expectations were not met. For example, Helen (23, Japan) shared that she did not expect her school to have so many students from the same country: *"Before I came to this school, I thought there would be more international students, but in this school more than half of the students are from Brazil"*. This can potentially limit her opportunities to practice English, as students from the same country are more likely to socialize together and speak their native tongue.

The anticipated class environment was another aspect that five out of fifteen participants touched upon. Two of them were pleasantly surprised with the small number of students in each classroom; they were used to bigger classes in their home countries. Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) said the following: *"I expected to see a lot of students in my class, but there aren't that many. The maximum number of students in my class now is just 5"*. Helen (23, Japan) confirms this and goes on to say that she thinks it is beneficial to study in a smaller class:

*I imagined a bigger class, more people in the classroom, but it's a small class with lots of conversations, which is good. I expected that many students would stay here for a longer period of time; most students stay here only for one month or 2 months, so it's very difficult to make friends, I think*

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The other noticeable anticipation was about the formality of the lessons; two out of fifteen participants stated that they were expecting a formal classroom setting. For example, Jeff (26, Turkey) stated the following: *“I imagined that we could go there and sit in a class; they would teach us grammar or some other material, and then after school we would need to go home [...] that’s what I was thinking about”*. Mark (24, Ecuador) anticipated the same by saying: *“I thought that the teachers would be really strict or even sometimes angry or annoyed with us”*. These thoughts could be the result of prior language learning experiences in their home countries. However, each teacher has his or her own style of organizing and delivering lessons, therefore one should not assume that learning a language is always a formal process.

The other sub-theme interviewees shared was their aspirations of making international friends. This was considered a significant part of their anticipated experience. David (22, Turkey) expressed enthusiasm saying: *“I was really excited before I came to Toronto. All in all, it’s a totally new experience for me travelling abroad and meeting new people, making some new friends [...] I knew that it would be better than my days in Turkey, and it was”*. Margaret (35, Brazil) was also expecting to meet others and make friends with them. This excitement is understandable, given the opportunities travelling provides for meeting others and making new friends. Making connections with those who are having the same experiences is crucial in adjusting to a new environment and can make the process a lot smoother. Margaret stated: *“I was very very excited before I came here. I was thinking that I’m going to find a lot of different people from different countries [...] that I will make a lot of friends and that we are going to have fun and conversations, so these were my expectations”*.

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Two participants were slightly concerned and hesitant, however, about the process of making friends. For example, Mark (24, Ecuador) anticipated challenges due to the diversity of students at language schools “*As for my classmates, I thought that it would be difficult to have a friendship, maybe I thought that they were going to be serious, keep away from me*”. Mark was afraid of facing difficulties in making friends due to a diversity of the student population. Since everyone comes from different countries and holds different cultures and beliefs, he was concerned about not being able to make connections. Lastly, Helen (23, Japan) revealed that her expectations were not met as she thought her classmates would socialize during class and also in their free time:

*Before coming to the school, I imagined that after school, the classmates would go together somewhere, but here it's not happening. Like after school... in class we talk a lot and everyone is friendly, but after classes, we go out separately because as I said, Japanese go with Japanese, Brazilians go with Brazilians*

This shows there is a tendency among students to socialize with those who speak the same native language, since it is more natural and requires less effort. This results in limiting students' social circles and their opportunities to practice English, as well as making some feel excluded.

In summary, the interviewees were driven by a variety of positive expectations and hopes for the overall international language experience. Coming to a foreign country meant that they would immerse themselves into a new culture, make international friends and experience a different classroom environment. The next sub-theme will explore the roles the participants' parents played in the decision-making process.

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### ***4.1.3 Parents' Roles and Their Influence in the Decision-making Process***

For the majority of the participants, coming to Canada to study was one of the most important decisions they had ever made in their lives, and their parents played crucial roles in assisting them to prepare for this trip. While some parents supported their children through the enrollment process, others either completely opposed their decision or did not understand their motives. The participants with supportive parents were motivated to study hard and had reduced anxiety levels, whereas the group without parental support faced uncertainty and increased anxiety. In some situations, students had to persuade their parents to let them go by explaining the importance of this opportunity.

Familial encouragement is important when it comes to studying abroad. Six out of fifteen interviewees shared that their parents supported their decision and helped them along the way. Robert (20, Saudi Arabia) said the following: *“My father was the only one who supported me all the time. He realized how important it would be for me, he told me to go abroad and study there for a little bit, see how it goes and if I like it – continue, if I don’t like, I can always come back”*.

Giving children the freedom to choose shows that parents trust and respect their decisions. Additionally, a student is more likely to have a positive experience when he or she has family support. Daniel (24, Caribbean islands) shared the following:

*My mum always told me that if I want to go somewhere, I should go. If I want to discover and visit a country, I should do it. She really helped me and pushed me to do what I really wanted [...] my mother always supports me a lot. The first time I told her that I wanted to go to Toronto to learn English, she asked me if I was really sure but she said that if I’m sure, I should go. She asked me if I wanted her to help and pay for it [...] but I*

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*said that I could pay for it myself, but she really pushed me to improve and I really appreciate it*

In Daniel's case, his mother offered not only moral support but also a willingness to assist him financially. Other parents were happy for their children to have a new chapter in their lives, for example William (21, China) mentioned: "*My parents helped me to come to Canada because they wanted me to have a new life*". This shows that his parents wanted him to have new experiences and become more independent. Antony's (21, Mali) family was also supportive in the same way: "*They were just happy, and they told me to study hard here and not to forget what brought me here, to Canada. They were really excited for me [...] for my future as well*". Other parents were used to their children travelling on their own, and even if they were worried about them, kept their feelings to themselves. Helen (23, Japan) made the following comment on this subject:

*Maybe they were worried about it, but they were hiding it. Also, when I was at the university, I used to travel abroad for 2 or 3 weeks, sometimes even longer, so my parents kind of got used to the fact that I go abroad on my own [...] I think my parents trust me [...] they supported me*

While six out of fifteen interviewees had their family's support, five participants revealed that they argued with their parents prior to coming to Canada. Disagreements were caused by various reasons, such as a perceived lack of previous travel experience or leaving a close family unit.

Margaret (35, Brazil) shared that her parents did not initially support her desire to study in Canada, since they thought the timing was inappropriate:

*As for my family, I think they didn't agree with me, with this decision to come here [...] because it's my first time abroad, I have never been in any other countries. I think my family is a little bit strict, they always worry [...] We live in a small city, people are not used to traveling abroad. I think it's like being afraid or maybe because I'm not so*

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*young, I'm 35 years old and people think that I should have kids and I don't have any kids yet. I've been married for 13 years, and I have no kids yet. And people think it's not the right time [...] But I'm not this kind of person who listens to everything that people are saying so in the end they supported my decision and they now think that this is the best thing I could do*

Margaret's (35, Brazil) parents wanted her to have different priorities in life, and as she had never traveled outside of Brazil before, they were concerned about her going abroad. Susan's (19, South Korea) mother experienced similar feelings and did not want her daughter to go: "*My mother refused my decision to come to Canada, because she is always worried about me and she thinks it's so dangerous, but I convinced her because I really wanted to go to some different countries*". It is natural for parents to protect their children and worry about their safety and well-being, but both students managed to explain to their families the importance of this decision and convince them to change their mind. Jeff's (26, Turkey) mother was also worried because she thought he would never come back, these are his words:

*My mother was even in conflict with me [...] She said that if I go there, I will never come back. My dad always told me that it's my own decision, so if I wanted to go, I should go. So, they were like fighting against each other, and then my mother came to me during the night and said: "Please, don't go, please, my son", and my father said: "Go, go, don't listen to her". And then my mum said that she was happy for me to go after that situation*

Another source of confusion for some parents was an unawareness of their child's motives for studying abroad. Kevin (22, South Korea) stated that he did not have a clear goal; therefore his family thought it would be a waste of money for him to come. This is what he shared with me: "*They said no, never, no because I didn't study English before, I didn't show any interest in it [...] At that time I couldn't tell them what my purpose was [...] Of course, they said no because I didn't have a goal*". While most families reached a consensus promptly and encouraged their

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children to enroll in a program, Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) had to protest and not speak with her parents for a month before they relented. Her situation was particularly challenging, since she applied for a government scholarship, but without her father's agreement she was not allowed to leave Saudi Arabia. She stated:

*At first my parents didn't want me to come here [...] they said no. When I told them that I was planning to apply for a scholarship; my mum didn't say much, she didn't say definitely yes or no, but my father said no. But then, maybe for one month, I just didn't talk to anyone at home, and then my mother talked to my father and explained everything to him, and I ended up coming here. As my father initially said no, the government wouldn't give me the scholarship, because I needed to give them an agreement from my father*

Certain countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have strict rules governing whether their citizens can leave and study abroad. They are required to provide written consent from their parents clearly indicating their permission. Clearly, the lack of support received by this informants' parents created a stressful environment and potentially making the decision to travel increasingly difficult.

To conclude, while some participants were encouraged to study in Toronto, others had a challenging time convincing their parents to allow them to leave. The former group found it easier to adjust to the new environment, since they knew their parents respected their decision and could be relied upon for support, whereas the latter group experienced stress prior to their arrival, which had an impact on their expectations. Overall, this theme allowed us to explore participants' expectations and thoughts formed prior to coming to Toronto. By examining their anticipated fears and challenges, positive expectations and hopes, as well as their parents' roles in the decision-making process, we can clearly discern the emotions they felt prior to their

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs arrival. The following theme aims to compare different educational systems and the process of learning English in the interviewees' home countries versus Toronto.

## **4.2 Comparing Educational Systems and the Process of Learning English in Home Countries versus Toronto**

The language learning environment plays a crucial role in language acquisition, especially in students' academic performance and their desire to continue their studies. Even within a particular location, educational systems may vary depending on the specific institution, its operations and curriculum. All interviewees had prior experiences of learning English in their home countries in either schools or universities; however, they revealed that it was not the same as learning in Toronto. Examining the differences in teaching approaches will allow an opportunity to identify which environment is more advantageous for students and what factors affect their academic achievements. Additionally, exploring the motivating factors for studying in Canada should reveal the reasons why students choose to continue learning English overseas. This theme is comprised of two sub-themes which will be analyzed and interpreted below:

1. Identifying differences in teaching approaches
2. Determining motivating factors for studying abroad

### ***4.2.1 Discussing Differences in Teaching Approaches***

The most frequent phrase reiterated during the interviews when asking participants to compare their experiences of learning English in their home countries versus Toronto was "it is totally different". This response encouraged me to explore the differences, which included the

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Regarding the language focus, eight out of fifteen participants revealed that while learning English at home they were unable to practice all four language skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking). In their school's curriculum, very little emphasis was placed on practicing speaking skills, even though verbal communication is considered the ultimate goal of learning any foreign language. The priority instead was given to explaining grammar rules, writing strategies or mechanical reading and translation of texts. Jeff (26, Turkey) stated the following:

*It's very different because in my country they just teach you how to write papers, for example; they don't teach you to speak English with people. When you see some information written down, you just know whether something is right or wrong [...] you know the grammar, but when you want to pronounce some words or speak, you don't really have much knowledge about it [...] We never used to speak English in my country or listened to any recordings, I don't remember us listening to anything*

Based on Jeff's comments, speaking and pronunciation aspects were neglected, and the priority was giving to explaining either grammar rules or writing strategies. Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) had the same opinion, revealing a similar situation in her country: "*I've been studying English since I was in elementary school, when I was just six years old but it wasn't good because we didn't used to practice English as much as here*". Helen (23, Japan) also confirmed that learning English in Toronto emphasizes not only grammar, reading and writing, but speaking as well:

*In Japan we only do grammar [...] But here we can improve our pronunciation, and we speak a lot. In my class the teacher encourages me to speak in front of the class, so that's very different. In Japan it's only grammar, but here we can do reading, speaking, writing, and listening*

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Mark (24, Ecuador) also stated that learning English in Toronto gave him an opportunity to practice a variety of skills, since an equal amount of class time was dedicated to each of them.

He also stressed the importance of teachers encouraging students to socialize in English not only during class but also outside of the classroom. He shared the following information:

*In Ecuador it was mainly reading [...] I didn't have any contact with native speakers and couldn't practice my listening, speaking or writing skills [...] And we also didn't have a chance to speak English, so we only had to take English exams [...] So here is totally different, here we have an obligation to speak English all the time because if a teacher sees us speaking our own language, they are going to give us advice – like hey, you are paying a lot of money, so it means that you have to speak English [...] it is really good for me, I agree with this [...] teachers here encourage us all the time to speak English*

Based on the comments above, learning English in countries, where it is spoken natively, encompasses a focus on a wide range of skills, such as pronunciation, speaking, listening, writing, reading, and grammar. Instructors realize the importance of implementing diverse techniques to allow students make progress in different aspects. Compared with learning English in home countries, teachers in Toronto seem to encourage students to communicate in the language, since communication is an ultimate goal.

Class size is another aspect that the interviewees discussed throughout the interviews. Five of the fifteen participants stated that the number of students in the class in their home countries was significantly higher than in language schools in Toronto. In their opinion, they had a better connection with their teacher and more opportunities to practice skills while learning English in Canada. For example, David (22, Turkey) stated the following:

*The class size for learning English was bigger in my country. There were over 30 students in the class [...] but here I never saw more than fifteen students in the class.*

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*Now there are only 5 students, so you can always find a chance to speak, to ask questions, to join the class*

The situation is the same in public schools in China, as Nancy (20, China) revealed:

*In a public school, it will be like forty or fifty students in class. The classes in China are too big, there are too many students [...] here in Toronto when I first arrived, there were ten students in the class. I couldn't believe that there were only ten students, it's not many at all*

The participants also indicated a preference for smaller class sizes; Helen (23, Japan) noted:

*“Japanese classes are bigger, nearly forty people in the class. I prefer smaller classes, like here”*. Overall, a smaller class size allows students to maintain more conversations with their classmates, improve their language skills, and ask questions. Additionally, this class setting provides more one on one attention and leads to getting to know other peers more intimately, which could allow for individuals to either practice the language with one another or work together on the same projects. Lastly, this environment also encourages students to actively participate in class discussions and contribute in various ways as a smaller class is less intimidating.

Another downside that was frequently discussed was a tendency for teachers to switch to their native language while explaining material in class. Six out of fifteen interviewees stated that their teachers used to do this back home regularly for various reasons, such as students' inability to understand the material in English, loss of interest and concentration, and the teacher's desire to use simple language to ensure that everyone in class comprehended the concept being taught. Nancy (20, China) shared her thoughts about this:

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*If we're learning English in China, most of the teachers will be Chinese. Sometimes they would speak Chinese to students instead of English, for example, because when they speak English with the students, they may not necessarily understand what the teachers are trying to say, so then the teachers will explain it in Chinese. So, this is the main problem. Many students think that they don't need to understand too much, because the teacher can explain everything using their native language, Chinese [...] they want to ensure that the students follow a topic or whatever it is. But in here it's totally different: if you don't understand something, you just ask and ask, and the teacher will keep explaining it in English. This way you can always find your way to improve your level of English, you can push yourself to make some improvements*

As Nancy stated, explaining the material in one's native language does not encourage students to think in English, thereby making them less productive. While in China they can always expect their teacher to switch to speaking Chinese, it is not the case for learning English in an English-speaking country when one is taught by a native speaker. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) had experienced the same and stated:

*In my country, when I learnt English [...] if I didn't understand something, the teacher would start speaking French to me, this is the reason I prefer studying English here because if I don't understand, the teachers would still continue to speak English and find a way to explain things using a simpler language*

Learning English in a native environment forces students to work harder, therefore they are more likely to improve. Kevin (22, South Korea) revealed that in Canada students can improve not only their speaking skills but also their pronunciation as they immerse themselves in an English environment and are always shown the correct ways of pronouncing words and phrases. He stated the following:

*The lessons were different. When I was in Korea, they taught me and explained everything in Korean. They explained a bit of grammar and vocabulary, but again using Korean, but here all the explanations are given in English, we are taught English by native English speakers. We can also fix our pronunciation with our Canadian teacher whose mother tongue is English*

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Interestingly, two out of fifteen interviewees noted that classes in Toronto are a lot more interactive compared to those in their home countries. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) shared that teachers in Canada implement various activities and games during the classes; therefore making them more interesting and memorable for the students. Instead of mechanically memorizing grammar rules and working on exercises, students are given a chance to learn in an interactive way. These are his words:

*Here is better because we practice a lot of different topics, so it's very interesting. We play some games to understand better, but in my country [...] we didn't use to play any games to understand better, we just had one lesson per day and after that, maybe we had a test [...] it's not really good in my country. It's good at the beginning but after that, if you really want to improve your English, you need to go to another country. Grammar classes are very interesting; every day the teacher gives us some exercises to practice, he shows us different videos; for example, every Friday we start with a song; so it's very interesting to begin like this*

Mary (23, France) shared the same opinion after comparing learning English in France versus Canada. She thinks that following a book and attending formal lessons decreases students' interest and willingness to learn English; she stated the following:

*In France we just used to memorize, memorize, memorize various information [...] lessons were just aimed at memorizing material, doing exercises, there were no conversations but here for teaching English they use games [...] in France it's very formal and not fun to learn English*

Overall, interactivity increases students' interest and enthusiasm to continue to learn any foreign language. By implementing various activities, teachers are able to keep students' attention and make them more motivated. This is partially connected with the next aspect, which interviewees identified as teacher's attitudes. Five out fifteen participants revealed that their teachers in Toronto are a lot more encouraging, understanding, helpful and approachable. Robert (20, Saudi

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Arabia) stated the following: *“They teach you every aspect here, and if you don’t understand a topic, you can come to the teachers and they explain it to you. So, everyone in this school just tries to help you”*. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) has the same opinion about his teacher, and he believes he has improved his English in Toronto, despite being slightly shy during the classes:

*The teacher I have [here] is really amazing, I know I can improve my English with him because he pushes me to improve. I think he knows that I’m a little bit shy, so he sometimes asks me some questions, but it’s good. But in my country if you’re shy, the teachers don’t really care about you*

The comparison indicated in the comment above shows that native English-speaking instructors in Canada may have a different pedagogical approach, as they treat all students the same way. If some students are slower at comprehending material and/or more shy in expressing their opinions, teachers give them an opportunity to do so nevertheless. They realize that students have different capabilities and unique personalities, and it is important to give everyone a chance to contribute. The support of teachers and their encouragement facilitates the adjustment process for students and makes them believe in their own capabilities. This, therefore, can lead to students achieving academic success and being willing to continue their studies. Jeff (26, Turkey) stated that becoming fluent in English partially depends on the teacher’s attitudes and support: *“Here you can learn to speak English very fluently because the teachers are so funny and they encourage you to speak English all the time [...]that’s what you need so you can improve your English”*.

Lastly, three out of fifteen interviewees believe that a native English setting is more advantageous, since they can immerse themselves in the language environment and practice

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English not only during the class but also outside of classroom. Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) shared her thoughts saying that:

*Here is a lot better because we practice English everywhere, whereas in Saudi Arabia we would do it just during the class, we would speak English only in class. We didn't use English outside of school or outside of university, whereas here we learn English in class and practice it not only during the class but also outside the school*

Learning English in a non-native environment limits the opportunities to practice the language, therefore it takes longer to master skills, particularly speaking skills. Nancy (20, China) also thinks that learning English in an English-speaking country drastically differs from learning it in a non-native setting. The example she gave describes her experience in China:

*Your experience as a student will be totally different. When you go outside the classroom in China, everybody speaks Chinese [...] in Canada you can become more motivated because everything is done in English and you can also learn a lot outside of the class when you ask a driver for directions or bus numbers and so on [...] if a teacher explains the differences between how much and how many, I can easily forget, but if I learn something outside of classroom, I'll never forget it [...] also all the people you're surrounded by speak English. But when you're in China and you take a bus or a subway, people around you speak Chinese, so you can't improve or practice your English there*

The implication is that one can gain knowledge by simply being immersed in a native environment and experiencing various situations in an everyday life, not necessarily purposefully studying English at school where participants can practice their language skills in a practical environment. For example, conversations outside of the classroom may enhance their language skills, such as asking for directions, using public transport, making enquiries in banks, post offices or hospitals. Overall, this sub-theme compared two language learning settings and ascertained the differences between potential gains in both of them. The majority of the interviewees stated that they strongly believe a native environment is more advantageous for

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs learning languages. The following sub-theme discusses what motivates one to choose to study abroad instead of learning English in his or her home country.

#### ***4.2.2 Determining Motivating Factors for Studying Abroad***

By exploring motivations for enrolling in international language schools, we can determine the common factors influencing students' decisions to study abroad. One can be driven by a variety of goals, such as further or higher education, future career opportunities, or anticipated cultural or social interest. While some students are self-motivated and make their own decision to study abroad, others are influenced by external sources, such as employers requiring their employees to study, or parents thinking an opportunity is promising for their children's future.

Three out of fifteen participants honestly stated that their decision to study abroad was influenced by either their parents or the company they work for. For example, Helen (23, Japan) revealed that her company chose a business program for her and fully covered the costs of tuition so she could gain knowledge in this particular area: *"I was sent here by my company, so my company is paying for this [...] my company chose the business class for me"*. The other two interviewees indicated that their parents insisted on participating in this study program; Mark (24, Ecuador) shared: *"My parents influenced me to make this decision and come here [...] they said that this can open a lot of doors for me in the future"*. Mary (23, France) had a similar opinion and said that her parents wished her a bright future: *"It was primarily my parents' influence but I agreed with them because it was the best choice for me, so I was happy to go"*.

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While those students were primarily guided by what their employer or parents thought would be best for them, five out of fifteen interviewees revealed that coming to Canada to study was their own choice. William (21, China) stated the following:

*It was my decision to come to Canada because I wanted to change my life and gain more knowledge. You know, life is very short and if I always stay in China, it will be boring, but I like having a challenge. Maybe in the future I'll go to another country, but as English is the first [international] language in the world, that's why I'm studying it now*

William was driven by gaining new knowledge and expanding his horizons. He was also determined to live overseas and engage in new experiences. Margaret (35, Brazil) showed her passion for learning English and said: *“English is a language that I love studying, I always loved studying English, so that's why I especially wanted to improve it”*. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) shared the same opinion and emphasized the importance of learning English: *“I take an intensive program to really improve my skills and my English because it's very important for me. I really love English, and I always wanted to learn and speak [it] fluently”*. These examples clearly show that the interviewees were interested in self-development and wanted to improve their language skills. Susan (19, South Korea), however, revealed that she suffered from depression and thought that travelling abroad and having new experiences would help her overcome psychological problems. She shared:

*Actually last year I was a freshman at my university, but I couldn't get used to my university. Everything was so different compared to high school; I couldn't make any friends, I had some mental problems, I had a low self-esteem, I thought that I was really bad and ugly, I always thought like this. I didn't have any confidence, my life was so boring so I decided to take a year off [...] I wanted to rest and find something different, so I chose to go abroad, meet other people from all over the world [...] I wanted to be more outgoing and extraverted, and I really wanted to change my personality [...] one of the other goals I had was to improve my speaking skills because I can study reading and*

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*writing by myself or in Korea but speaking is very different and difficult to improve [...] I wanted to have an ability to communicate with people in English*

Interestingly, Susan was determined not only to improve her English, but also to find herself and engage in a cathartic and transformational experience whilst overseas learning a new skill.

Taking time off from the university and travelling abroad was an essential step in curing her depression and looking at the world more positively.

Increasing career opportunities was another motivating factor for studying abroad. Seven out of fifteen interviewees believed that improving their level of English would provide more job opportunities in the future and/or working for a more prestigious company. Margaret (35, Brazil) shared her plans with me:

*When I go back to Brazil, I intend to apply for a position in a multinational company [...] I'm an accountant, so I have a good experience in it. So my plans are now to improve English and I would like to change a job. Because, yes, I like what I do in my current job but I like challenges. I think in a private company you have more opportunities to grow [...] I will try, it's one of my plans*

Margaret stated that having relevant work experience, as well as being knowledgeable in a specific industry, may not be enough when it comes to working for a large international corporation; fluency in English increases the chance of being hired. In certain countries, such as France, some positions require one to be bilingual, based on Mary's (23, France) comments:

*"Now I really need to speak English because if I want to get a job in France, I need to be bilingual and it's also a lot easier to meet people around the world if you can speak English well".* Additionally, if one intends to teach languages to international students, it is also

advisable to be fluent in English; these are Susan's (19, South Korea) thoughts: *"Actually, my dream is being a Korean teacher for international people, so English is also important for my*

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*job, so I chose to go to Canada*". Therefore, English fluency may not be simply a preferred asset that employers look for while interviewing potential candidates, but it may also be a requirement for certain positions.

In Turkey, being bilingual is not a requirement, but is typically expected of those in managerial positions or who earn higher wages. Jeff (26, Turkey) stated the following:

*I'm a civil engineer. In my country we have a lot of engineers, so if you want to be a top engineer and have good salary and good life, you need to be able to speak a second language and you need to have a master's degree, as well as some experience from other countries*

A combination of qualifications, relevant work experience and an ability to speak another language all contribute to building a successful career.

Cultural and social interest was another motivating factor, identified by two participants. They were particularly interested in making international friends and participating in cultural exchange with students from different backgrounds. Helen (23, Japan) stated the following: "*I'm more interested in making international friends and talking to foreign people from different backgrounds. I'm more interested in those things, and those things are more useful rather than the classes, but we have to attend the classes*". The lack of motivation in improving her language skills was not a surprise, since she was sent to Canada by her employer. As it was not her own decision to study overseas, she was more driven by the opportunity to socialize with others and make new friends. Robert (20, Saudi Arabia) also commented on the importance of the social component in his experience: "*As English is the first international language in the world, if you speak English, you can keep in touch with all those people you've met who live in different*

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*places*". Overall, fluency in English gives more opportunities to those who learn it as a foreign language.

Lastly, a large number of interviewees, eight out of fifteen, revealed that they were planning to continue their studies and apply to either a college or university upon completion of their language programs. Laura (21, Saudi Arabia), for example, is planning to pursue a bachelor's degree from McMaster University; therefore she is currently studying for the IELTS exam, as this is one of the application requirements:

*My goal is to get accepted into McMaster University because I really want to do my bachelor's degree here. I applied to do a bachelor's degree in radiology. As I want to complete this program here, I need to gain a good score in IELTS in order to be accepted [...] for my program I need to get a minimum of 6.5 points*

Other students are considering pursuing a master's degree, like William (21, China) who said:

*"After English World I'm planning to go to Halifax Acadia to do a master's degree in business"*.

Mark (24, Ecuador) reveals that the requirements for master's programs tend to be higher and require one to have a solid level of English:

*My dream is to study in Boston, so this means that I have to learn English, of course, and it is really hard if you want to apply to a university in Boston. And even in my country, if you want to get a scholarship, your ability in English has to be really high. So, now I want to apply for a master's degree that's why I'm studying here*

It became apparent that certain language schools, such as *English Time* and *English World*, have partnerships with colleges and universities in Toronto. These schools offer students an Academic Pathway Program, which is specifically tailored to those who plan to attend a college or a university and want to increase their chance of being accepted. In this case, students are not required to take any additional exams; having a certificate of program completion from a

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accredited language school is normally enough. Nancy (20, China) is one student who is undertaking this program: *"I'm planning to go to a university or a college [...] English Time offers an Academic Pathway Program and has partnerships with some colleges [...] So the first goal would be to go to college, of course"*. Steven (36, Italy) is Nancy's classmate, and he also intends to go to college:

*I'm planning to go to college after I've finished this program [...] in order to be accepted in a college you have 2 ways: firstly, through taking TOEFL or IELTS or through the Pathway Academic Program at English Time, and I chose to do a Pathway program at English Time*

Anthony (21, Mali) studies at *English World*, which also offers an Academic Pathway Program. He stated the following: *"I'm doing a University Pathway program; with this I will attend some universities that have partnerships with this school. Before coming to the program, I just wanted to learn English. But now, as I've almost finished, I want to go to a university"*.

Many interviewees shared that continuing their education was a major motivating factor for undertaking a short-term English program. Once completed, they thought that it would give them a solid base for pursuing either a bachelor's or a master's degree overseas. Since some language schools are affiliated with certain colleges and universities, one is not required to take any additional exams, which facilitates the admissions process.

To summarize, this theme presented findings connected with the motives and goals driving participants prior to enrolling in a program. While some students were self-motivated and eager to gain new knowledge, others were influenced to engage in this experience by either their parents or employers. The most frequent motivations identified through analysis of the data can be divided into three groups:

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1. An increase in potential career opportunities;
2. Cultural and social aspects;
3. Desire to continue education.

The next theme will provide a detailed description of students' experiences in Toronto, focusing on three environments:

1. The school/classroom setting;
2. While participating in organized extracurricular activities;
3. While living with home stay families

### **4.3 Reflecting on Students' Experiences at Language Schools**

Exploring students' experiences provides a deep understanding of their feelings and thoughts, as well as insights into their life abroad while undertaking a language program. This helps determine whether they feel satisfied with their programs or not. This theme is divided into three sub-themes:

1. Describing experiences in the school environment
2. Reflecting on experiences while participating in extra-curricular activities
3. Revealing students' experiences with home-stay families

#### ***4.3.1 Describing Experiences in the School Environment***

Many students identify the school environment as the most crucial, as this is where they spend a significant amount of time, gain new knowledge, and make friends. Additionally, this is

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs where they make a significant financial investment and the primary reason for their trip. Their first impressions of the school environment may differ from their experiences later in the program. This sub-theme explores the relationships students build with their classmates and their teachers. Additionally, this sub-theme will reveal information about students' gains in qualities, such as becoming more independent and culturally aware, and language improvements. Furthermore, it describes the negative feelings students experienced in the initial stages of their programs, such as fear, being lost, shyness and stress. Lastly, it concludes with their overall experiences in the school setting.

Thirteen out of fifteen interviewees commented on their relationships developed with classmates. Eleven informants revealed they cultivated close friendships and interacted with each other in school and out of school, visiting various attractions and dining out. For example, Anthony (21, Mali) said this:

*I met my friends who make my life really good, and I met some friends who are in the same position as me; we are helping out each other, push each other to succeed. We have good bonds here [...] people are coming and going back each week, but with some of them we are really close. We organize various activities, we go out a lot [...] we go to restaurants, Cineplex to watch movies; we hang out a lot to see some shows.*

Bonding with others helps students overcome many challenges a new environment holds, resulting in more rapid integration in society. Building strong friendships and supporting each other may also improve confidence. An area for future research would be to explore the notion of social capital as it relates to relationship building and its impacts on one's experiences and level of satisfaction. This study did not intend to investigate this aspect in a great detail, but this could

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be an opportunity for future scholars to work on. Robert's (20, Saudi Arabia) experience is identical to Antony's, since he is surrounded by encouraging friends:

*I like having a lot of friends both outside and in the school, so I like the fact that I met so many new people in Canada [...] the relationships between me and my classmates are very close, we share different ideas, talk together [...] usually we like group work, so when you work with your team, you can answer each other's questions which is helpful for all of us. They are not just friends at school, we also go out together somewhere.*

Based on the previous two comments, another noteworthy element in the relationships among classmates is that they tend to interact not only at school, but also afterwards. This helps strengthen their bonds so they can learn more about each other. The significance of this is that this eventually leads them to creating strong friendships with international peers and making their experiences more memorable. Mark (24, Ecuador) also confirmed this, saying that: *"The environment during the class is really good, you feel comfortable, you have friends and after classes you can make some plans for the afternoon"*. However, some other students revealed that their relationships with classmates were not as ideal as they wanted them to be. For example, Helen (23, Japan) expected to socialize with her classmates outside of school, but due to the dominance of Brazilian students in her school, she felt lonely: *"It's quite difficult to make friends from other cultures, people of other nationalities [...] They are friendly, very kind and considerate, they help me. In class we talk a lot and everyone is friendly, but after classes, we go out separately"*.

While a lack of diversity in the student population may result in some students feeling excluded, one can also be introverted in nature and feel shy to engage with others. For example,

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Steven (36, Italy) said he belongs to this category of people: *“I don't spend time with the other students after we finish the classes because I have an introverted character, I'm an introvert”*.

Regarding the relationships between students and teachers, all interviewees shared that they were informal and respectful. “Supportive”, “encouraging”, “helpful”, “friendly”, and “patient” were some of the words participants used for describing their teacher's characteristics.

For example, Margaret (35, Brazil) said:

*They are very respectful and helpful. I don't have any complaints about my teachers. They are very good [...] they can always explain everything that I ask, and I always participate in the class discussions. So, I would say we have good relationships [...] they don't keep a distance from the students.*

Nancy's opinion (20, China) coincides with Margaret's, when she stated that teachers always make an effort in providing clear explanations and clarifying certain aspects:

*The teachers are so nice, they know that most students come here by themselves. They're so patient and friendly; they can understand, they can easily tell by looking at your face whether you understood a question, and they can also explain everything to you in a simple and straight-forward way [...] We are just like friends with each other.*

The teachers' attitudes and personal qualities were widely discussed among the participants.

Susan (19, South Korea) revealed that her teachers motivated her to work harder by offering their support: *“We have amazing teachers, and they just made my experience, they always support me and they ask questions, they pay attention, compliment other students [...] they made me work hard.* David (22, Turkey) provided further confirmation of this and concluded that he feels comfortable in the classroom setting:

*The teachers are just fine, I cannot say anything bad about them, thanks all of them. Our teachers are very friendly [...] the relationships are being more like friends, not like*

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*teachers and students, which is very important. I feel very comfortable in the class [...] I have a great time in my classes.*

Lastly, many interviewees thought of teachers as their friends, showing how close their relationships were and how comfortable they felt interacting with them. For example, Jeff (26, Turkey) said: *“They are always like your friends, all the time. I’ve never seen even just one teacher being formal with the students [...] It’s like a family in here, you feel that you belong to this place, it’s the best part of English World”*. Robert (20, Saudi Arabia) also shared his experience, stating: *“Most of the teachers are not just teachers to us, they are like our friends instead [...] Our teacher is very friendly, she always stays with us, always helps us with whatever we need, always gives us some advice”*. Overall, all participants revealed they were satisfied with their relationships with the teachers.

Another component shaping participants' experiences at school were the qualities they gained and the improvements they made throughout the programs. Two out of fifteen students indicated they became more independent and confident, and that studying at a language school helped their self-development; for example, Anthony (21, Mali) shared:

*Now I feel like at home, really [...] I can do whatever I want, I don't need any help from anybody [...] there are many things I can do by myself. I feel like I'm independent now, I can make my own choices. And coming here really helped me to grow because I was always asking things from my parents. I didn't know the difficulty of life, but now I feel like I have developed a lot and keep developing.*

Margaret (35, Brazil) revealed that coming to Canada on her own and learning English at a language school made her stronger and more confident, and helped her shape her priorities in life. She described this as a life-changing experience:

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*I think that this is the best experience in my life: about English, about the experience, that you have to take care for yourself, that I have to step out of my comfort zone, I think this is the most important. I think I'm more confident now, my self-esteem is higher [...] I think I'm a stronger person, more mature. I'm a woman who know what I want from my life.*

Cultural awareness was also a benefit participants gained throughout their experience. Jeff (26, Turkey) shared that cultural exchange was an essential part of his overall experience:

*All your friends have different cultures and are from different countries, and you can share some stories about your country and culture with them. They had no idea about your culture before coming here, and you had no idea about their cultures, so it's not just about learning English, you can also improve your mind and imagination, everything [...] so, this was my experience.*

The comment above indicates that participants on study programs have an opportunity to expand their horizons and develop various qualities in different ways. Apart from becoming more independent, confident, and culturally aware, six out of fifteen interviewees shared that they improved their language skills. Mark (24, Ecuador) revealed that at first he experienced many challenges due to his incompetence in English; however, as the program progressed, he started noticing language improvements which made him feel more comfortable:

*During the first week, when I started the classes, it was really hard for me because all my classmates were really good at English, they started talking almost fluently and I was panicking and thought that I wouldn't be able to do so [...] but after one week I felt comfortable and more confident.*

Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) stated that learning English in a small classroom setting contributed to improving her abilities in English. This setting allows everyone to participate in discussions, practice skills, and receive more attention from the teacher. This is what she said:

*There are just 5 of us in the class, so this is good because the teacher can focus on and help each individual student, and we also have time to focus on various skills and*

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*practice English a lot more because of the small class size [...] I like the fact that there aren't many Saudi Arabian students in one class too [...] we focus on different language skills like vocabulary and grammar and other ways we can improve our language, our level of language and writing.*

Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) also noted that classes with a diverse student population, meaning a large number of different nationalities, helps maintain conversations in English as the common tongue, therefore providing them with an opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the language environment. Mary (23, France) revealed that she is also the only French-speaking student in her class, which forces her to socialize in English: *"I'm the only person who speaks French here, so I have no choice but to speak English, so it's good because my English can improve a lot faster"*. Students like Anthony (21, Mali), were anxious at the start of their programs and considered whether to quit; however they persisted and continued working hard. Their effort eventually led to significant language improvements and confidence gains. Anthony shared his memories:

*Right now I'm confident at speaking but before coming here, I couldn't say anything I'm saying now. I started with Level 3, so my English was very poor. I've experienced a lot of changes in my speaking, in my writing, and even in my listening. I couldn't understand anything people were saying, so I almost cried. One day I actually cried and I really wanted to go back home.*

Anthony (21, Mali) was one of fourteen interviewees who revealed that their initial experience at school was different to what they experienced afterwards as the program progressed. These participants revealed that they felt "lost", "shy", "stressed", and "uncomfortable" at the beginning of the program, due to factors such as: unfamiliarity with a new environment, a different educational system, a low level of English comprehension, among others. However, a

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friendly setting and teachers attending to the students' needs helped them overcome those feelings. For example, Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) shared his initial experience:

*The first day I arrived in class, I was really stressed and I stayed at the back of the classroom because I needed to see at first [...] maybe the people, to see if they were friendly, to see if I could really understand. The first time I was like a baby in front of the class because I didn't speak, I was just waiting if the teacher would ask me some questions. [Then] I realized that I was in an English school, so it was good, I just need to enjoy and appreciate every moment, everything in this school. So, it was really stressful for me, but after that, the teacher made all of us feel comfortable, he helped us not to be stressed out, not to be scared, so it was good.*

Jeff (26, Turkey) also preferred sitting at the back and observing the class prior to actively engaging in discussions. He revealed that being new in class was challenging for him:

*I was shy, it was a new phase, new culture, new country, and new language for me. I remember I was actually in this class, I sat over there just in the corner [...] And then during the first break I met all the students, so they showed me around the school [...] it was really hard at first.*

Many participants thought that feeling shy was natural for them, since it takes time to adjust to new environment. David (22, Turkey) stated that interacting with his teachers and classmates facilitated his adjustment: *"I was new in the school, new in the class [...] I was a little bit shy. But when my teacher and classmates started speaking to me, I felt so much more comfortable after that and I felt like I came to the right place"*.

Mary (23, France) said the same of her first experience: *"I was a little bit lost because I didn't know the people's names and the names of the teachers. I was also a little bit shy and I didn't know where to sit but at the end of the class the teacher made me feel a lot more comfortable"*.

While the majority of the students felt somewhat shy and lost but quickly transitioned, others, like Susan (19, South Korea), were overwhelmed and depressed:

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*I was scared and the first day was so terrible, I lost my token and I also couldn't find my way to English World, because English World doesn't have any signs [...] and the weather was so cold in April [...] I felt I was completely alone because I couldn't understand and I couldn't speak so I lost my confidence [...] the first month was so bad, I didn't go to any activities, I was scared and I couldn't speak English. I just laid down in bed all days long, but then I realized that it was a waste of time, I was wasting my time, my money, so I decided: "ok, let's just try", and after that, I tried to go to some activities and talk with other people, and ask teachers some questions.*

Overall, everyone managed to overcome these initial challenges due to their teachers' positive attitudes, a friendly and encouraging school environment and bonds formed with new friends. As the programs progressed, participants started feeling more accepted, which boosted their levels of confidence and triggered language improvements. Jeff (26, Turkey) stated the following: *"The second week I understood that we were all the same and came here for the same reason [...] the rest of the students were like me. This way you feel more comfortable, you want to improve your English"*.

Mark (24, Ecuador) also revealed that he felt welcomed, which helped him adjust: *"When I got to Language Paradise on my first day, it was really amazing [...] because the way they presented Language Paradise as a school, the way they received the students, it was really amazing"*.

Being in a culturally diverse environment was also beneficial for many as it allowed them to have group experiences; Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) said:

*On the first day after I arrived, I saw a lot of people of different cultures and I wanted to learn so many new cultures, so it was very interesting for me. It's really good because the atmosphere here is really good, people are very friendly [...] I really like the atmosphere at Language Paradise [...] I'm not disappointed about coming here.*

Lastly, analyzing participants' overall experiences allowed me to explore their level of satisfaction and the changes they have gone through. Margaret (35, Brazil) shared that this

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experience not only helped her improve English, make international friends, and become more independent, but also changed her as a person; she stated the following:

*I think this is the best experience in my life. I'm going back as another person with other thoughts about myself, about my job, about my English. I think when you decide to do an exchange program, it's not all about English, it's also about the experience, meeting people, and as I've said before it's about stepping out of your comfort zone [...] I think you become a better person, a stronger person. I think this is an experience that I will always keep in my mind.*

Describing participation in a short-term language program as the “best” or “one of the best” experiences in life was common among the participants. Mark (24, Ecuador) was confident that this would provide him with many opportunities in the future: “*It is one the best experiences in my life [...] I'm never going to regret it, and also I'm sure that it is going to open me a lot of options [...] I will be able to get a better job*”. Many students stated that they would recommend the school to others interested in studying abroad. David (22, Turkey) shared that his expectations formed prior to his arrival were met: “*My experience here is better than my expectations, even exceeded my expectations*”.

Susan (19, South Korea) was rather emotional while describing her overall experience. As she suffered from depression prior to coming to Toronto and intended to change her outlook on life and reassess her values, her expectations were to change as a person, and she succeeded in this. This is what she shared with me:

*I think English World is the best choice I've ever made. I LOVE English World a lot, they are so nice and kind, I don't want to say goodbye [...] I decided to accept my personality, I think I improved so much, I was so shy, incredibly shy when I first came here [...] I think I also have a lot more confidence [...] I think it was a really good decision in my life, seriously this is my turning point. If I have a friend who wants to go abroad and learn English in a different country, I really want to recommend all of this, it's so good.*

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To conclude, the participants' experiences evolved over time and were affected by many factors, such as interactions with classmates, relationships between students and teachers, as well as the overall school environment. Even though many students faced challenges and felt lost, nervous, or shy at the start of the programs, they quickly managed to adjust. The friendly and accepting environment created at their schools facilitated their transition to a new system. Participants shared that they became more confident and independent, as well as gained many positive qualities throughout their stay in Toronto. Their overall experience was typically described as "life-changing", "turning point", "best", and "unforgettable". The next sub-theme focuses on students' experiences while participating in extra-curricular activities outside of school, such as organized tours and visits to tourist attractions.

### ***4.3.2 Reflecting on Experiences while Participating in Extra-curricular Activities***

Participation in extra-curricular activities shape students' overall experiences. These activities are generally organized by staff at the school and take place after classes. Trips to tourist attractions, such as museums and art galleries, organized sport activities, coffee and conversation clubs, and boat tours are a few examples of events students can engage in. These activities are intended to encourage participants to bond with one another, create friendships, apply knowledge gained in the classroom to the outside world, learn about the culture of their host country, and explore the city. According to David (22, Turkey), extra-curricular activities tend to be popular among students, as they enhance their overall experience and make it more memorable; he stated:

*I tried to attend all the activities, because almost everyone is coming to those activities, and I can improve my English with them [...] The most exciting was a Niagara falls trip,*

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*it was in my bucket list. The trip was amazing and I will never forget it [...] We also played soccer against each other, it was such a good day, somewhere here in a park close to English World [...] We went to downtown to eat something in a restaurant, in a fine restaurant [...] I will never forget that day too.*

These activities tend to be not only entertaining, but also educational, as they allow students to gain practical experience in English. Jeff's (26, Turkey) opinion coincided with David's assertion that active participation is beneficial for learners:

*They have many activities, like one month ago we had Olympic Games in the park, we had different challenges in the park [...] it was funny. Next week we're going to celebrate Halloween, so we'll go outside the school and do treat-or-trick [...] we play soccer every week with the other students [...] It's very beneficial, of course. When we go to some restaurants, we can learn different types of food and ingredients, how to order food, and how to communicate with the rest of the students or a waiter.*

The social aspect of extra-curricular activities cannot be underestimated; while the school environment provides a limited opportunity for students to socialize due to busy schedules and short breaks, engagement in activities allows one to make more friends. Nancy (20, China) gave several examples of events her school organized for creating bonds:

*The school organizes different festivals, parties. For example, while we were celebrating Thanksgiving, we had a party with various games; in one of the games everyone needed to bring a picture from their childhood and we needed to guess who was who by looking at the pictures of the babies. And the teachers also joined us so it was fun. One of the other activities we've recently had was a boat party, it's a party where you can meet many people and make friends with the students from other language schools. They also have a picnic here but it's only once per year. You can have a lot of fun there because you have a chance to meet so many different students from this school. Most of the time you know only your classmates but not the rest of the students from other classes, but this way you can meet many other people.*

Lastly, social activities organized by schools allow one to have new experiences, as Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) stated in his interview: "It was my first Halloween last week [...] in my

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*country we don't celebrate it. I decided to buy a costume for the first time, I danced with my teacher, it was really amazing [...] we all had a great time".*

However, two out of fifteen participants revealed that they did not engage in any activities for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of free time due to their heavy work load, a preference for staying at home, and others. Helen (23, Japan) stated that some people may already have their own pre-planned itineraries or may prefer going on tours with their friends, who speak the same language; she said the following:

*There are school activities, but not a lot of people join the activities, this is what I heard. I was quite busy these last two weeks so I couldn't join any activities, but my teacher told me that, for example, on the last event there was only one student, or in the downtown tour there were only three people, three students, so not many people join the activities [...] People prefer go out with the friends of the same nationality, it's easier and more comfortable for them. And also, people stay here for only a month or 2 months, so there are many places they want to go to in a short period of time. So, they want to go to Toronto Islands, New York, many places... so they don't have time to join the school's activities.*

Due to a short stay, some may not follow their schools' planned schedule and choose to engage in something else they are personally interested in. Others may be either introverts and find it challenging to socialize or, like Laura (21, Saudi Arabia), prefer communicating with their families and friends back home: *"I don't know about the activities because when they have some sort of activities, I just go back home. I prefer to communicate with my family, call or message them instead of being involved in the activities organized by the school".*

Overall, the majority of the interviewees revealed that they benefitted in many ways from engaging in extra-curricular activities. First of all, this helped them make new friends and socialize with people of different nationalities. Furthermore, active participation allowed them to

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practice and improve their English, as well as implement theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom into the real world. Lastly, some students stated that they tried new things that they had never experienced before. The following sub-theme will explore participants' experiences with their home-stay families.

#### ***4.3.3 Revealing Students' Experiences with Home-stay Families***

Staying with a local family while participating in a short-term language program is one option students have while selecting their accommodation. Alternatively, they can rent an apartment or a house, as well as stay in a hostel or a hotel depending on their preferences and financial situation. However, home-stay is a preferred option for many participants for a variety of reasons. Firstly, schools tend to listen to students' needs and priorities and match them with appropriate families. Furthermore, staying with a native English-speaking family provides an additional opportunity to practice the language in everyday life. Additionally, host families are obliged to cook for their guests (students) and provide at least breakfast and dinner, which is convenient. Lastly, most families are genuinely interested in cultural exchange and hosting international students gives them a chance to share their own culture, as well as learn other cultures.

A significant proportion of students, nine out of fifteen, revealed that they had a positive experience staying with their home-stay family. They shared that socializing with the family allowed them to overcome the language barrier and improve their language skills; for example, Anthony (21, Mali) stated:

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*In my home stay, they are very helpful [...] they are very patient which is important. Sometimes you don't know how to say something, and they take their time to understand what you are saying and they do as much as they can to help people [...] because they know that you are learning a foreign language and they really take their time to understand and support you.*

A supportive home environment encouraged Anthony to practice his English. Robert (20, Saudi Arabia) had the same experience, as his family also assisted him in expanding his vocabulary, as well as explaining things he was confused about; these are his words:

*I improved my English when I stayed with a Canadian family because I could clearly hear their Canadian accent and I tried to imitate it, I tried to learn some words and phrases from them. Sometimes when I didn't understand something or a word, I would just ask them to stop for a moment and explain it to me, so it was really cool, they used to explain everything to me.*

Improving the language was not the only benefit; participants also spent quality time with their hosts engaging in various activities. David (22, Turkey) revealed his host parents warmly welcomed him and made him feel a part of their family: *"They look after me really well, they take care of me like their son [...] I'm just comfortable, it's just great. We watch TV shows together at home, listen to music, we sit outside in the garden [...] they're good people, they are so precious to me"*.

Susan (19, South Korea) also felt accepted and spent a lot of time with her hosts: *"My home stay mum is really kind and the food she cooks is really good. We spend a lot of time while having dinner, talk together, watch the news, TV shows"*. Many families were described as "welcoming", "friendly", "kind", "generous", "understanding", and "supportive", which indicates interviewees had positive experiences staying with them.

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However, five out of fifteen participants underwent some challenges with their home-stay families. For example, Mark (24, Ecuador) said his expectations, which were based on reading a description of the home-stay family prior to his arrival, were not met. Firstly, he anticipated and paid for sharing a room with only one person, but on arrival found out he would be sharing with two others. Secondly, he did not realize that all guests would need to use the same washroom, which was described as inconvenient for him. Lastly, nobody warned him that the family was Muslim and they did not cook any dishes with meat, which was problematic for him. Mark felt frustrated at the beginning of his stay and stated the following:

*At the beginning it was very difficult for me [...] When you apply to Language Paradise, they send you a letter to describe what the place is going to look like [...] So, my expectations were very different because when I read the description, it mentioned other things, for example, it said that the host family is very friendly, they have barbecues every weekend or maybe they pick up students from the school when it's cold or they hang out with the students [...] But when I got to Canada and got to my home stay, it wasn't the same. First, I had two roommates even though I paid to only share my room with one student [...] The problem was that they were really messy, so I didn't like this kind of environment; they had dishes all over the bed. And also we had only 1 washroom for seven or eight students, so it means that in the mornings when we wake up, we need to make a line to take a shower [...] So, in the beginning I wasn't particularly happy and also because they are Muslims so it means that they are not allowed to cook or eat pork. But in Latin America we are used to eating a lot of pork with rice. So during the first week it was very difficult for me to adjust to this environment [...] In the end I made a decision to talk to my host mum and I was honest and after that, all the things started to change, so now I'm really happy.*

Luckily, after talking to his host mother, the problem was solved, as she made some adjustments to meet his needs. A challenge faced by another student was the result of a long commute from the host family to school, combined with a lack of opportunities to talk with the family due to their busy schedules; Susan (19, South Korea) stated: “I changed my home stay two months ago.

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*My first home stay was good but it was just too far from here, and they were also very busy. I couldn't talk with them a lot, because home stay is also another opportunity to practice and improve English".* Robert (20, Saudi Arabia) was also disappointed that he could not practice English with his hosts, which affected his decision to move out:

*I lived with a home stay, they were originally from the Philippines but they had a second nationality, which was Canadian. I wasn't particularly happy with them because they mainly spoke Filipino at home and when they spoke in English, they spoke just briefly and they had an accent. So, I didn't improve my English with them.*

Overall, most of the interviewees had a positive experience staying with host families. The home stay was described by participants as an additional opportunity to improve their language skills, engage in cultural exchange and interact with locals. However, others went through some challenges, and thought that this was not the best option for them. In summary, this theme allowed us to explore participants' experiences in three different settings: the school environment, outside of the classroom while participating in extra-curricular activities, and with home-stay families. Collectively, such components contributed to the interviewees' overall experiences and shaped their opinions of the language programs they engaged in.

### **4.4 Marketing Strategies for Language Schools**

The last theme aims to provide language schools with valuable information on how to improve their marketing strategies and attract a wider range of students. Despite many benefits language programs offered, when questioned, students said that certain areas could be enhanced to meet their expectations. Additionally, this theme seeks to determine what factors affected participants' destination and/or school choice in such a competitive market. Lastly, an analysis of

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the sources of information used for shaping a language program's image prior to their arrival will be presented. The following sub-themes will be discussed below:

1. Suggestions for enhancing students' experiences
2. Motivations behind a destination/school choice
3. Sources of information affecting a study program's image

### ***4.4.1 Suggestions for Enhancing Students' Experiences***

Interviewees provided a variety of recommendations based on their experiences that would help language schools enhance the quality of their services, therefore their overall reputation. Some suggestions are related to the class structure, teaching approaches, and timetable, whereas others focused on attracting a wider range of students, promotion and collaboration with other educational institutions. Our hope is that schools will directly benefit from the results of this sub-theme, as it provides practical recommendations for improvements.

Helen (23, Japan) and Margaret (35, Brazil) at *English Time* complained that the school mainly targeted a Brazilian market. This resulted in a number of negative consequences, such as making non-Brazilian students feel excluded and restricting their opportunities to practice English, as those students preferred socializing in Portuguese during the breaks and outside the classroom. Margaret revealed that she was disappointed with the fact that there were many Brazilian students at school: *"It's a good school, good people, kind, polite. The only difficulty I found here is that there are a lot of Brazilian people"*. This affected her overall experience, and next time she may not want to return to the same school. Helen (23, Japan) also stated that she

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expected to immerse herself in a diverse international environment; however, her expectations were not met:

*I'd like to have an environment with different multi cultures, but at lunch time Brazilians go with Brazilians, Japanese go with Japanese, so this is quite different from my expectations [...] I expected to be in a group of different nationalities [...]it would make the school more international*

Helen (23, Japan) mentioned in her response that there is a tendency among students of the same nationality to interact with each other and by doing so, they exclude others. Instead of making international friends, those students prefer socializing with people who speak the same language, as it is more natural and requires less effort. Later in our interview she provided a potential solution to this problem:

*Maybe if I was a teacher, I would ask my students in the class to go for a lunch with me. If you don't force them to go together, it's easier to go with people of the same nationality, so I would make the situation that the students would need to [...] socialize with students of other cultures*

Helen's recommendation is based on teachers showing an initiative in creating a friendly environment where everyone would feel accepted. She thinks that if teachers were to organize some activities, or simply suggest going for a lunch together, this would make students more open-minded and encourage them to socialize with those who they have not met or spoken before. Based on this, there is a role here external to the teacher to organize social outings for the international students to encourage cross-cultural engagement. The social element, therefore, is an important factor in deciding to go on this kind of international learning experience. Apart from feeling excluded and having challenges in forming social circles, another negative consequence of targeting one specific culture is that the students would often speak

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their native language. This will affect not only their own academic progress but may also influence other students' academic performance. Helen (23, Japan) mentioned that even though her school tries to encourage everyone to speak English, not everyone follows this: *“There is a rule that all students must speak English while they are at school, but, actually, Japanese speak Japanese [...] many people break the rules [...] maybe it needs to be stricter”*. As discovered during the study, the reason for attracting students from one specific country is connected with international schools having affiliations with certain schools, countries and/or agencies that help market their program.

Regarding the curriculum and class organization, three out of fifteen participants revealed that they would prefer to always have a choice while selecting classes. They recommended schools listen to their students' needs more attentively so they are placed in a class based on the aspects of English they aim to improve. Mark (24, Ecuador) stated that his school receives many students, and it cannot accommodate everyone's preferences, therefore placing them in classes that do not match their expectations; here is what he said:

*I heard that some students are not happy with the classes they are put in [...] you know, sometimes the rooms get overcrowded, and Language Paradise can decide to put students in other classes instead. Some of these people are not happy because if you are interested in improving speaking, listening, and pronunciation, but you don't have a chance to go to that class, and Language Paradise takes you to Film and Drama classes, you are not going to feel comfortable because you are not interested in it*

Placing students in classes they are not interested in may affect their experiences in a negative way. Helen (23, Japan) faced the same problem at *English World* and proposed the following solution: *“If I was the manager, I would give students a choice to select the classes they want to attend [...] maybe if I can select classes I want to take and make my own schedule, it would be*

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great". Providing participants with an opportunity to choose a class they want to attend as well as ensuring that the capacity of the classes is bigger than the number of students enrolled could be the right step.

Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) revealed that *English Time* should consider working on the following aspects and try to improve them: making classrooms technologically-advanced, expanding the size of the classrooms, and cancelling a make-up test, which allows students to retake any test in case of failure.

*I don't like the fact that they don't have much technology in the classrooms; just the board, I would like to see a projector. And also, I think that the room is very small, I don't like this fact either. I think the school needs to be bigger [...] Also I heard that some students have a make-up test, I think it needs to be cancelled [...] This is If they don't get a certain percentage on the course, they can get another chance. And if they get a higher grade on their second exam, teachers would take into account their highest grade. I don't like this because I think they should study hard right in the beginning, and if students know that they will have a make-up test, they won't care about the first one because they have another chance to get a higher grade. I will cancel that*

Looking at the language side, Steven (36, Italy) noted that little emphasis is placed on the speaking component in his school. He thinks that it is crucial to give students more opportunities to practice the language in the school setting. The rest of the skills can potentially be improved while studying in students' home countries, but practicing English in a native environment is a completely unique experience and needs to be reassessed in value. He stated the following:

*I like the program but I think this school doesn't focus on how the students speak [...] They prefer focusing on writing, listening, and reading skills [...] I will make a bigger focus on the speaking part, for sure because for me the most important is to speak face-to-face with people*

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Nancy (20, China) expressed an interesting idea of offering a special introductory course for the newcomers that would focus on the Canadian culture to smooth students' transition into the new environment. She said:

*As for the classes, I would make one more class for the beginners where they can learn some information about Canadian culture because some of them come here for a month or 2 for the first time in their lives, and as they're going to live in Toronto, many things are new to them and they want to feel more comfortable in this society [...] it would be nice if they can learn about culture as well as improve their English while they are here*

Another component of the school organization interviewees touched upon was the schedule.

Four out of fifteen participants found the starting time of the lessons to be too early, and they would prefer them to start slightly later. For example, William (21, China) said: *"I would change the starting time of the first lesson – I would change it to 10am. I feel like we start a little bit too early [...] right now we start at 8.30am"*. Based on the quotes, there is an impression that the students wanted to feel as though they were on holiday as well, therefore, this is an important piece of information for schools to consider. David (22, Turkey) also complained that the breaks were not long enough, especially for having lunch, he stated: *"I would extend the breaks because the classes are for an hour and a half and it's too much actually for me without any breaks [...] also 45 minutes is just not enough for having lunch"*.

Another complaint students had was a result of poor signage, which made it difficult for them to locate the school on their first day. Nancy (20, China) revealed that her school did not have any signs outside the main building. She stated the following:

*When I first came to school, it was a little bit difficult for me to find the school because it doesn't have any signs. Only once you've entered this building, you see a sign with*

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*English time, but when you look for it from the outside, there is no indication that it's here [...] it was difficult to find this school*

Steven (36, Italy) was Nancy's classmate, and he faced the same problem on his arrival. Good signage is important for language schools, since they receive many new students each week, who can easily get lost. Providing an address and/or an office number may not be enough, therefore schools should consider investing in better signs and giving more detailed directions for approaching the building. Steven commented: "*It was difficult for me to find the school because there aren't any signs, it's just 5 Park Home Avenue, but where exactly is it in the building? Then I understood that I had to take an elevator to the sixth floor*".

Lastly, two out fifteen participants emphasized the importance of promotion and collaboration for language schools with other educational institutions. Steven (36, Italy) thought that his school had a potential to expand and attract a wider range of demographics due to teachers' professionalism and the opportunities the school offers. He stated the following:

*I think this school has got a capacity to attract the students from abroad because the teachers are professional here, also the arguments and topics for discussions are interesting, and it's important that the school gives you a possibility to enroll in a Pathway Academic program which helps you to get into a college or a university*

Mary (23, France) also revealed that better promotion and collaboration with other organizations would benefit the language schools. Regarding promotion, she suggested creating information stands and potentially having them in different places to raise people's awareness of the services provided. Collaborating with the agencies, which are middlemen between students and schools, would also result in attracting more students, in her opinion:

*Maybe I will try to open this school in another country [...] in USA, for example, because it's also an English-speaking country, or in Australia. I would also promote this school a*

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*lot more because, I think, there is no promotion, I think it's just mainly through word-of-mouth [...] it would be a good idea just to have a stand and promote the school. And also, go to other countries, and just talk with some agencies and with some other schools [...] making connections and collaborating with some other schools would be great*

Overall, interviewees provided a variety of recommendations on how language schools could enhance the quality of services they offered, as well as their overall reputation. All suggestions were based on participants' own experiences, which could be viewed as a valuable source of information. The following sub-theme will examine factors that directly affected students' destination and/or school choice.

### **4.4.2 Motivations behind a Destination/School Choice**

Students face many challenges while choosing a destination to study English. This is due to the size and competitiveness of this industry, which is comprised of a large number of schools. This may result in some students feeling overwhelmed prior to making a decision. The interviewees revealed that certain factors, such as safety, price, schools' prestige, convenient location, affected their destination choice. Additionally, while some participants decided to study in Canada, specifically Toronto, due to their personal interest and/or childhood desire, others' decisions were formed based on recommendations by their teachers, parents, or employers.

Eight out of fifteen interviewees revealed that their destination choice was influenced by recommendations. For example, Margaret (35, Brazil) was influenced by a recommendation made by her teachers since she had a prior experience taking students to the same school and had a positive experience:

*I talked to my English teacher who stayed in Toronto for 2 months, and he told me that this is the best place where you can learn English, because Canadian English is very*

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*clear, you can understand a lot, so I decided after talking to him to come to Canada [...] my teacher recommended [...] this school. He came here before and he really liked it here. I think he recommends this school to every student who goes to Canada because it's a good school*

While Margaret's (35, Brazil) choice was shaped by her teacher in Brazil, many students referred to recommendations made by their parents. Nancy (20, China) for instance stated:

*My mum has some friends who live in Vancouver, Canada, and she just asked her friends for some information about Canada [...] Then I asked my mum why she was thinking of sending me to Toronto instead of Vancouver, and she told me that she wanted me to be independent, of course, she wanted me to live by myself and see if I can do it. If she had sent me to Vancouver, there would be so many friends around me and they would take care of me [...] My mum said that one of the other reasons she chose this school was connected with a low number of Chinese students here, so I wouldn't be able to speak Chinese at school. It is definitely beneficial because if you want to learn a foreign language, you have to forget about your native language*

Nancy was not involved in making the decision, the decision was made by her mother instead. She arranged for her to study in Canada because she already had some friends living in Vancouver. However, as she wanted Nancy to become more independent and mature, Toronto was a preferred choice. Furthermore, she was specifically looking for a school with a low number of Chinese students, so her daughter would have an opportunity to learn and practice English. Anthony's (21, Mali) father also recommended Canada, specifically the Anglophone part of Canada, so he would have more opportunities to improve his level of English: *"My dad said that now the world is based on English, and if you don't speak English, it's not good for you and your career, that's why I chose Toronto and English part of Canada"*.

Susan (19, South Korea) and Kevin (22, South Korea), however, relied on those people who had previously lived or studied in Canada. Kevin explains why Canada is a popular place for Koreans: *"Canada in Korea is considered to be a popular country for learning English as a foreign language [...] Canadian people are very warm to foreigners, they are friendly and kind.*

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Susan, who is also from Korea stated the following: *“Everyone said that Canada is the best country to study English because everyone uses standard English [...] people are so kind, they are not racist”*. Therefore, Koreans generally have a positive impression of Canada and are inclined to choose it for studying purposes.

While the previous interviewees' choices were shaped based on recommendations, four out of fifteen participants revealed their personal desire to study in Canada for a variety of reasons. For example, Steven (36, Italy) had dreamt of living in Canada since he was eleven and had previously visited Canada four times. He thought that becoming a student and staying on a study permit would ease the process of gaining a permanent residence:

*I chose Canada because Canada is the best country in the world for me; I dreamt about living in Canada since I was 11. I came to Canada 4 times before, in 1999, in 2012, 2013 as a tourist all those times and now. I wanted to study in Canada because it was the safest and easiest way of getting a permanent residency here [...] my goal is to get a permanent residency and live in Canada*

Two informants considered studying in Canada for a long time. Anthony (21, Mali) was influenced by pop culture and specifically a Canadian musician: *“Since I was a child, I always said to my dad that I wanted to go to Canada to study. I like a rapper Greg [...] he is a singer and I always wish I could come here, to Toronto”*. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) revealed that he was impressed with some pictures of Toronto he saw when he was younger. Additionally, he wanted to immerse himself in an English environment and restrict potential interactions in his native language. He stated the following:

*I've always been attracted by Toronto. Even when I was young, I saw some pictures of Toronto, it's a beautiful city, that's the reason I chose Toronto. And also [...] I didn't want to have any French friends with me because if there are some French people with me, I can't improve my English*

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Another factor that affected participants' decisions to come to Toronto was its support of multiculturalism. Seven out of fifteen interviewees revealed that they were aware of the fact that Canada, as a whole, is welcoming to foreigners and treats everyone with respect. Furthermore, coming to a big city offers many opportunities for making international friends and experiencing a culture exchange. For example, Mark (24, Ecuador) stated the following: "*Canada has more than 100 different cultures, so you can see people from all over the world here and also you can learn about cultures*". Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) thought of another benefit of studying in a large Anglophone city, like Toronto, as it allows one to practice English in everyday life:

*I wanted to go to a big multicultural city, and also it is easier to practice the language here because you see many different students from other countries spending time together and practicing English with each other. And also, I chose it because it's close to the capital, Ottawa, and if I need something from my embassy, it will be fairly easy for me to get there*

The data also revealed attractive notions of friendliness and politeness as appealing factors for choosing Canada. Helen (23, Japan) said: "*There are a lot of immigrants here, people who come from many different countries. In Japan I've heard that Canada is a good country, people are friendly, and you don't need to hesitate to speak English even if you don't speak very well*".

Nancy (20, China) also mentioned that Canadians are generally polite and treat everyone equally:

*My mum spoke to her friends who sent their children to other countries, and many people recommended us to choose Canada, because people here are so nice [...] The Chinese population in Canada is very big, so you'll be accepted and feel comfortable here. People here are not rude [...] some of my friends experienced a situation of racism in other countries by being Chinese, but it never happened in Canada, at least neither me nor my friends have experienced it here*

Safety and price were another two factors participants considered as important factors when choosing a destination. For example, Mark (24, Ecuador) stated that Canada is perceived as a

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safe country in Ecuador, and pricewise, staying and studying in Canada is cheaper than in the US, so more students can afford this:

*Canada is known in my country as a really safe place to live, and that's true, because I experienced it. Also it is cheaper to come to Canada rather than to the States [...] we use American dollars in my country and if I want to exchange them to the Canadian dollars, I win. That's why I pay less money than I would if I was to go to Boston, for example*

Margaret (35, Brazil) shared a similar understanding revealing that people in Brazil also consider Canada to be a safe place. Moreover, due to Toronto's proximity to the American border, if one wishes to travel to the US as a tourist, he or she can easily do so. Margaret also touched upon the currency exchange in her response:

*I have always been thinking about studying abroad, it was always my desire, so I was taking a look at some countries I could go to [...] And I saw Canada, it's a good place, a safe place, a safe country. I chose Toronto because it's close to the US border [...] and our currency has no value if you compare it to the American dollar, but to Canadian dollar it's a little bit cheaper. And that's why I chose to come here*

Interestingly, many interviewees compared studying in the US and Canada and justified their choice of Canada based on safety reasons. For example, Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) stated the following: “*I preferred what people told me about Canada and [...] I'm personally afraid to go to America, I wouldn't feel safe there, that's why I chose Canada*”. Nancy's (20, China) brief comment is similar to Laura's; she said: “*Canada [...] the fact that it's a safe country; this was the most important reason*”. Living and studying in a safe environment was a priority for both of them. The comparison between these two countries was based not only on the safety component, but also on the quality of education, future opportunities, and location.

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Prestige of the Canadian education was also widely discussed among the interviewees. Four of them stated that studying in Canada would provide many opportunities in the future and increase chances of making a solid career. For example, Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) came to Canada to pursue a bachelor's degree in radiology, and she believed that knowledge gained while studying in Canada would be valuable upon her return to Saudi Arabia:

*I think Canada has a better higher education [...] I think, studying in Canada and getting a bachelor's degree from a Canadian university will give me many opportunities when I go back to Saudi Arabia. I will have a better income and better education compared with the other people*

Nancy (20, China) described her program at a language school as a bridge, which would allow her to attend a college afterwards. She also emphasized the importance of having a study experience abroad in her response: "Having an international educational background is very important [...] when I started searching, I realized that English Time has some partnerships with the Centennial College and they offer this Pathway academic program". William (21, China) revealed that the prestige of Canadian education was one of the motivating factors for him to come: "In China I heard that Canadian education and universities are good, really good, so we chose Canada for this reason". It is worthwhile to note that language schools in the USA can also be viewed as prestigious by these same cultures; however, Canada holds a combination of attributes, which were discussed above, that made it appealing to international students.

Lastly, two participants spoke about the location of the language schools and the convenience of getting there. Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) was one of them, who thought that being in a close proximity to school would be a big advantage, especially in winter. She said the following: "English Time is the nearest school to my home, that's why I chose it because it

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*wouldn't take a long time to get here. And also, I thought about the weather in winter and if I chose a school in downtown, it would be difficult to get there".* Mary (23, France) also touched upon the convenience aspect but from a different perspective. Since she has a dual nationality, French and Canadian, she found it a lot easier to come to Canada. She also stated that this was reassuring for her mother, since they have family living in Canada.

*It's a lot easier for me to come to Canada because I have a Canadian citizenship and I like this country [...] It was safer for my mother that I went to Canada because she knows the country really well, and I have family in Montreal and Quebec City, so if I had a problem, I could go and see the family, so it was a lot safer from her point of view*

In summary, this sub-theme provided an opportunity to examine various factors that affected participants' choice of the destination. Canada was perceived as a safe country with reasonably priced language programs compared to the United States. Additionally, many thought of Toronto as a multicultural city, which welcomes people of different nationalities and treats everyone equally. Furthermore, many students considered the Canadian education as prestigious and thought that studying in Canada will provide them with many opportunities in the future. Lastly, data revealed that while some students had thought of coming to Canada since they were young, others' decisions were shaped based on the recommendations of their parents, teachers, or companies. The following sub-theme aims to explore sources of information interviewees used prior to coming to language schools, which helped them form an image of their schools and language programs they enrolled in.

#### ***4.4.3 Sources of Information Affecting a Study Program's Image***

This sub-theme examines the sources of information participants relied on prior to their arrival to Toronto and commencement of their programs. This data should allow language

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schools to become more aware of the media platforms and/or external organizations, which are worth investing in, in order to attract a larger number of students. Creating a website and keeping all information up-to-date may seem an obvious step; however, knowing precisely what platforms clients use for searching purposes, is important.

Nine out of fifteen interviewees revealed that initially they searched for language schools on either Google or the equivalent of Google in their respective countries. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) stated that, while doing a Google search, he was able to read the reviews of the students who have previously studied in language schools, which helped him select a suitable school:

*I was using Google and I just typed in language schools, and the Internet showed me that there was Language Paradise [...] then I saw a lot of comments about Language Paradise, good comments, sometimes bad comments too. I decided to call them to discuss with them the programs they could offer for me, the ways I could improve my English, whether to take an Intensive program or not*

Kevin (22, South Korea) used a Korean equivalent of Google, called “Neighbour” for selecting a language school: *“In Korea there is a website called “Neighbour”, so I used [it] for searching purposes, I found some information on this website”*. Another platform, which was commonly used among the interviewees, was Facebook. Each school had a public Facebook page offering a variety of information, such as programs, tuition fees, accommodation options, and location. Steven (36, Italy) decided to directly contact his language school via Facebook with specific questions: *“I sent a message to the school on Facebook and they provided me with the details about their school and about Centennial [...] and also everything to do with the programs: costs, programs and their duration, everything”*. Mary (23, France) stated that she could also view various pictures and videos that her school uploaded on their Facebook page, which provided visual information about the programs and activities they offered: *“I also found their group on*

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*Facebook and saw many posts with pictures and videos*". Obviously, they attracted Mary's attention and influenced her choice of school. Mark (24, Ecuador) used a variety of social media platforms such as, Facebook, Google, and schools' websites, prior to making a decision:

*First, I used Fabebook because it's easy to connect with different schools [...] I watched different advertisements on Facebook. And of course, when I was interested in a language school, I was trying to google it and after that go to their website. You can find the courses, prices of the courses, you can also read the students' opinions of the schools. So, I was reading a lot of reviews for different schools, and after that I decided to come to Language Paradise*

Lastly, several participants used more interactive platforms, such as Youtube and blogs, where they could read and/or watch real-life stories of the students with prior experience of studying abroad sharing their experiences. Margaret (35, Brazil) said the following:

*I looked at a lot of websites [...] on Youtube I saw some videos about interchange. Some Brazilians' videos, on Brazilian channels especially. "Canada for Brazilians" is the name of the site, too. There's also a blog named "Gabi in Canada", who's been here for a long time and she talks about the places, about the real life in Canada*

Many students benefited from using social media platforms, which helped them select a language school in Toronto. They were able to read the schools' reviews, learn information about the programs, tuition costs, dates of enrollment, and accommodation options, as well as view videos and photos. Surprisingly, only a couple of interviewees went directly onto schools' websites; instead they preferred to use Youtube, Facebook, Google, and various blogs. This information should allow language schools to form their marketing strategies in order to attract more students.

Agencies were another key source many participants relied on in selecting schools and study programs. An agency can be described as a "middleman" between clients, students and their parents, and language services providers. Anthony (21, Mali) briefly explained the role of the agencies:

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*Back home we have an agency that helps people to go abroad, so I went there and they helped me out to come here [...] They send people to different countries. They were my initial contact [...] The agency helps people to find a school wherever they are interested in going to; when the school accepts you, they will send a letter to the agency. And with that, you have to bring some banking information, you have to provide a health insurance card to prove that you are in good health, provide some information about your family situation and so on*

Susan (19, South Korea) added that the agencies collaborate not only with the language schools worldwide, but also home stay families: “*It’s a Korean agency but they are connected to some companies in Toronto. They helped me with finding a home stay [...] I asked many questions about the whole process, and they informed me about many things. For me, it was just very useful, they helped me a lot*”. Going through the agency is not a mandatory step, but as many interviewees stated, their assistance significantly eases the process of applying to language schools and preparing the documents. Nancy (20, China) discussed the benefits of going through an agency in our interview:

*I used the agency because it was difficult for me to connect with a college or a university and compare their advantages and disadvantages prior to making a decision. Agencies are normally experts, they know how the system works, they can help you in an application process and help you translate all your documents and certificates in English [...] it’s also safer to go through the agency, because they are experts in sending students to study abroad; they have a lot of experience in this industry [...] the agency gave me some suggestions of the potential language schools I could go to and English Time was one of them [...] they work directly with this school and they know that it’s a good place for sending students to learn English*

Additionally, students from certain countries, such as Russia, Turkey, and China, are required to apply for a visa to study abroad. One of the agencies’ responsibilities is to assist them with gathering the right documents, translating them into English, and going through a visa application process with them. Jeff (26, Turkey) revealed that it is safer and quicker to go with

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the agency if you are from one of those countries, since they are well aware of the process and guide you through it:

*It depends on what country you're applying from. In my country applying for a visa is a very difficult process so you need to have an agency for this, they know the documents you need to submit, how you should present yourself at the embassy to get a visa. But if you don't need to have a visa, you don't need an agency [...] for security reasons, it's better, otherwise you can't get your visa. It's hard, it's really hard, in my country, especially after all these recent events, maybe you've heard of them, it's even harder now to get a visa than when I came here, so you need to have an agency*

However, students are not obliged to use these services and can go through the process by themselves. This would save a lot of money, but they would need to be prepared to face certain difficulties, as Steven (36, Italy) stated:

*I think doing everything on your own is very difficult if you want to study abroad, especially when it comes to the documents, visa [...] they helped me to translate my degree in English and other documents, like my marks from school, visa, passport, everything, so it was very useful*

Overall, going through the agency is an individual's choice. Nine out of fifteen interviewees used their services and found them beneficial, whereas others applied to language schools directly and saved some money by doing so.

Word-of-mouth was another powerful source of information. Seven out of fifteen interviewees revealed that they listened to their friends and/or teachers' recommendations in selecting a destination for studying abroad. David (22, Turkey) revealed that some of his friends had previously lived in Canada and their English significantly improved upon return. He was motivated and followed their example:

*Some of my friends came to Canada with their families to live for a year or maybe more than a year. And when they came back, I saw that they improved their English [...], they could speak fluently, and then I thought that in the future I must go, I should travel*

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*abroad to improve my English, too. Some of them studied at English World [...] it's such a professional school, so I chose English World because of that*

Mark's (24, Ecuador) choice of school was also based on his friends' recommendations, and he did not regret it:

*I have some friends who were studying here, in Toronto [...] and I also know a lot of people who were studying at Language Paradise, they were really happy, so they recommended me Language Paradise as the first option. So, I didn't have any doubts to choose Language Paradise, and actually I don't regret because for me it's a really good school*

Lastly, Laura's (21, Saudi Arabia) experience was unique, since she won a government scholarship, which covered all the costs. She revealed that even though applying for a scholarship was a long and competitive process, it was worth the effort. Additionally, despite her failure in receiving the grant the first time, she continued working hard and revising for the tests, which showed her determination and enthusiasm. Laura stated the following:

*In Saudi Arabia we have a government program where people apply for a scholarship [...] many people, including my friends applied to get a scholarship, and I decided to do the same [...] I had to do many tests so they could make a decision whether to reward me with the scholarship or not. I applied twice: in the first year they didn't accept me, but then with the second attempt they accepted me [...] I also indicated the country I wanted to go to and the program I was interested in doing, and they accepted me, so I came here with this scholarship [...] In order to be considered for a scholarship you need to receive 90 or more in high school in the science side [...] It's not easy but at the same time not too difficult. So now I get 5 years of the government's help to study in Canada, they give me money each month, and they also pay for the school*

To conclude, participants were open to many sources of information while selecting a destination and/or school for studying abroad. Using social media and going through the agency were equally popular choices among the interviewees. Language schools need to realize the importance of collaborating with the agencies worldwide, as many students tend to use their

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services. Solid partnerships with the agencies would serve as a good advertising strategy, which would bring more clients in return. Additionally, keeping their websites, Facebook pages, and Youtube channels up-to-date would increase chances of being selected. Lastly, word-of-mouth was recognized as a powerful mechanism of attracting clients; therefore, exceeding students' expectations and providing excellent services is crucial. The next chapter is going to discuss the research findings and relate them to the research questions.

## **CHAPTER 5: Discussion**

Phenomenology was adopted as the theoretical lens to explore this project. The purpose of this particular study was to explore participants' expectations formed prior to enrolling in language programs in Toronto and their experiences throughout the programs. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What expectations do participants have before participating in language programs abroad?
2. How are the expectations of participants on language programs formed?
3. What experiences do participants' undergo while studying abroad?

Additionally, the research aimed to explore the interviewees' recommendations on potential improvements language schools could make for attracting a wider range of students and enhancing the school's reputation. The discussion chapter intends to further discuss the research outcomes and bridge them with the research questions. Moreover, this chapter provides clear connections between previous studies conducted in the educational tourism field, which were thoroughly discussed in the literature review, and the findings of this study.

### **5.1 Research Question 1**

#### **What expectations do participants have before participating in language programs abroad?**

The table below visually depicts the findings and the specific examples given by the interviewees in regard to the first research question. Additionally, the third column provides the exact number of participants who provided specific examples, which was achieved by the frequency counting. Looking at the table, the participants' expectations are divided into two

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categories: anticipated fears and challenges experienced prior to the commencement of their language programs, and positive expectations and hopes.

TABLE TWO: Participants' Expectations

| <i>Research Questions 1</i>  | <i>Sub-themes</i>                   | <i>Examples</i>  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| What expectations do participants have before participating in language programs abroad? | 1. Anticipated fears and challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language barrier – 8/15</li> <li>• Adjusting to the new environment – 8/15</li> <li>• Anticipated cultural differences (culture shock) – 3/15</li> <li>• Leaving home and family – 3/15</li> <li>• No anticipated fears – 2/15</li> </ul> |
|  | 2. Positive expectations and hopes  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internalization – 6/15</li> <li>• Class organization and environment – 5/15</li> <li>• Socializing/making new friends -5/15</li> <li>• Anticipated language improvements – 1/15</li> </ul>  |

Based on the interviewees' responses, it is evident that many anticipated language barriers and culture shock as the most significant adjustment. The gathered data showed that a variety of factors led students to experiencing linguistic challenges such as incompetence, fear of making mistakes, low self-esteem, and introversion. Culture shock was justified by leaving the home environment and connecting with people of other cultures and beliefs. The findings of Allen and Herron's (2003) study aligned with ours and stated that the participants had experienced anxiety, particularly prior to and/or at the start of the program. The authors further elaborated that this feeling was caused by a combination of linguistic incompetence and culture shock. While the incompetence was based on limited knowledge and a lack of prior experience speaking English in the native environment, the culture shock was affected by the feeling of

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uncertainty of what the other culture entailed. Allen and Herron's (2003) mixed methods study concluded that the participants needed some time to adjust to the new environment, accept cultural differences, and become more confident in speaking the language. The results of a more recent study showed that students possessed high expectations prior to the start of the program, which potentially caused worries. Liu and Wei (2013) identified that the biggest fears were "culture shock, classroom participation, intercultural interaction, security, language barrier, heavy workload and homesickness" (Liu and Wei, 2013, p. 79). The authors proposed to provide an orientation to students prior to departure so they can become aware of similarities and differences in life styles, classroom settings and other aspects. Overall, our study not only confirmed the previous findings regarding the language barriers and culture shock but also expanded the reasons for experiencing these challenges. Based on the data, participants' personalities affected their overall experiences. Those who were shy, introverted, had a low self-esteem, and lacked confidence found it harder to immerse themselves in the language environment. However, others who were more open, extraverted, keen on learning and socializing with new people, were able to adjust quicker.

Leaving home and family was identified as one of the fears three out of fifteen interviewees had experienced. The results of our study indicated the following reasons for the participants feeling this way:

1. Some students were closely attached to their families and friends and the thought of leaving them was viewed as a big challenge.

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2. A lack of prior experience of travelling solo made some feel nervous. Leaving a home country and going abroad for the first time without parents/family was not an easy decision.
3. Some participants travelled long distances from home (countries like Mali, China, Saudi Arabia), which added fear and uncertainty.

Foster's (2014) study shared similar results, stating that being away from home could be one of the challenges. However, his study did not specify why traveling away from home could be hard, whereas our study expanded on this and listed the explicit reasons. Foster's (2014) study, on the other hand, determined that the high cost of tuition and difficulties in obtaining financial assistance were some of the barriers that might have potentially prevented one from studying abroad. Nevertheless, the participants I interviewed did not comment on financial constraints, as such it seemed as though they were able to support themselves throughout their stay. Interestingly, one of the participants, Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) mentioned she had won the government scholarship, which covered all the costs. She stated the following:

*In Saudi Arabia we have a government program where people apply for a scholarship [...] many people, including my friends applied to get a scholarship, and I decided to do the same [...] now I get 5 years of the government's help to study in Canada, they give me money each month, and they also pay for the school*

Another participant, Helen (23, Japan) revealed that her company chose a business program for her and fully paid for it so she could gain knowledge in this particular area: *“I was sent here by my company, so my company is paying for this [...] my company chose the business class for me”*. Daniel (24, Caribbean Islands) stated that his mother offered him to pay for the program, but he did not accept: *“The first time I told my mother that I wanted to go to Toronto to learn*

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*English, she asked me if I needed some help to pay for this experience [...] she asked me if I wanted her to help and pay for it. But I said that I could pay for it myself*". This example shows that he could afford the program and wanted to be independent from his parents. Overall, the collected data revealed the existence of other ways for paying for tuition. A few participants shared that they were either sponsored by their employees to travel and learn English abroad or one of them won a grant from the government.

A requirement to obtain a tourist visa or a study permit, which would allow staying in Canada and study short-term, was another challenge some participants had to go through. However, agencies' assistance helped eliminate these difficulties, since the participants were guided throughout the application process by the agents. For example, Jeff (26, Turkey) stated the following: "*It depends on what country you're applying from. In my country applying for a visa is a very difficult process so you need to have an agency for this, they know the documents you need to submit, how you should present yourself at the embassy to get a visa*". Steven (36, Italy) also explained the benefits of going through the agency in his response:

*I think doing everything on your own is very difficult if you want to study abroad, especially when it comes to the documents, visa [...] they helped me to translate my degree in English and other documents, like my marks from school, visa, passport, everything, so it was very useful*

The results of Eder et.al's (2010) study, which followed international students studying in the United States, confirmed the above findings. Depending on the country of origin, the process of obtaining a visa is a mandatory step for studying overseas. If one chooses to use the services of the agencies, this process becomes significantly easier and smoother. However, it involves paying additional fees but some people view it as a worthwhile investment. Others prefer

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applying for study programs directly through language schools, which saves money but adds stress and can be more time-consuming.

Overall, the research findings revealed that many participants had faced a variety of challenges, such as the language barrier, culture shock, distance from home and families, and realized the necessity of having time to adjust to the new environment. Surprisingly, two out of fifteen interviewees revealed that they had had no fears prior to the commencement of their programs. This is a result of either prior extensive travel experience or personal qualities, such as confidence, independence, and ability to quickly adapt to new places.

Regarding positive expectations and hopes, the process of internalization was valued the most among the participants. To be precise, the findings showed that the interviewees prioritized making international friends, interacting and sharing experiences with the classmates from different backgrounds over the language acquisition. This being said, only one out of fifteen interviewees stated that she had anticipated language gain by the end of the program; others either assumed this would happen regardless or forgot to mention it. The previous academic studies, nevertheless, highlighted the language acquisition component. For example, Badstübner & Ecke's (2009) quantitative study, which followed Americans studying on a short-term program in Germany, revealed that most of them were primarily driven by the desire to improve their language skills rather than the social component and the cultural immersion. The findings of Eder et.al's (2010) study also recognized language gain as the most important incentive for studying abroad. Their qualitative study was carried out in a form of Skype interviews with open-ended questions and concluded that the students wished to improve their language skills.

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The expectations of five out of fifteen interviewees were related to the class environment and teaching approaches at language schools in Toronto. Some commented on the small class sizes compared to what they were familiar with in their home countries, while others assumed that the lessons would be formal and would strictly follow the curriculum. These predictions align with the findings in Foster's (2014) study, where he concluded that the participants had anticipated facing a different system of education and thought that their experiences overseas would not be the same as at home.

Overall, the interviewees revealed that they had experienced a variety of feelings prior to their arrival to Toronto and the commencement of their programs. On the one hand, they anticipated challenges due to the language incompetence, long distance from home, and a lack of prior independent travel experience. This made them realize that they would need some time to adapt to the new environment before they could fully immerse themselves in it. On the other hand, many viewed studying abroad as a valuable opportunity, which would allow them to make international friends, engage in a culture exchange, experience a different system of education while being taught by native English speakers, and others. The research findings on students' expectations are meant to contribute to the existing academic literature in the educational tourism field. The following section discusses the outcomes related to the second research question, which examines the ways participants' expectations were formed.

## 5.2 Research Question 2

### How are the expectations of participants on language programs formed?

The Table below presents the results corresponding to the research question on the ways participants' expectations were formed. Specifically, it reveals factors that influenced their destination and/or school selection and the role their parents played in the decision-making process will be discussed.

*TABLE THREE: Creation of Participants' Expectations*

| <i>Research Question 2</i>  | <i>Themes</i>  | <i>Examples</i>  |
|---|--|--|
| How are the expectations of participants on language programs formed? | 1. Factors affecting a destination/school selection                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influenced by external people (teachers, parents, companies etc) – 8/15</li> <li>• Personal interest/ Childhood desire – 4/15</li> <li>• Multicultural society – 7/15</li> <li>• Safety and price – 7/15</li> <li>• Prestige and future opportunities – 4/15</li> <li>• Convenience – 2/15</li> </ul> |
|   | 2. Sources of information used for forming an image of a study program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online search and social media – 9/15</li> <li>• Agency – 9/15</li> <li>• Word-of-mouth – 7/15</li> <li>• Through the government – 1/15</li> </ul>  |
|   | 3. Parents' roles and their influence in the decision-making process   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family support and encouragement – 6/15</li> <li>• Disagreements with the family – 5/15</li> </ul>  |

Regarding the destination selection, two factors play a crucial role: a country's image and the ways it is perceived by public. Seven out of fifteen participants justified their choice of studying in Canada by a safety criterion. For example, Mark (24, Ecuador) explained: "*Canada*

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*is known in my country as a really safe place to live, and that's true, because I experienced it*".

Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) also chose Canada based on safety reasons: "*I preferred what people told me about Canada and [...] I'm personally afraid to go to America, I wouldn't feel safe there, that's why I chose Canada*". Additionally, the interviewees discussed the currency exchange and stated that a Canadian dollar is worth less than American, which makes studying in Canada more appealing. Margaret (35, Brazil) said: "*Our currency has no value if you compare it to the American dollar, but to Canadian dollar it's a little bit cheaper [...] that's why I chose to come here*". The results of Gertner's (2010) quantitative study partially correspond to ours in the way the image can affect one's decision to choose a country to study. The author determined that destination images, impressions and the beliefs one holds about a place influence the participants' decision. He explained that those images could either draw or repel one from choosing the destination. Interestingly, the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (2004) portrayed Canada "as a safe place to study" and stated that "[it] also represents value for money and [is] a great place to live" (Canadian Association of Private Language Schools, CAPLS, Participant Profile, 2004, p. 33).

The language school's reputation and location are important for those who choose to study abroad. The gathered data showed that four out of fifteen interviewees had selected a school based on its prestige and the opportunities it offered after a thorough search and comparison online. For example, Nancy (20, China) stated: "*Having an international educational background is very important [...] when I started searching, I realized that English Time has some partnerships with the Centennial College and they offer this Pathway academic program*". Since Nancy wished to continue her education and apply for a bachelor's degree upon

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completion of the language program, she valued the partnerships her school had with other colleges and universities. Regarding accessibility, Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) justified her school's selection by its location and proximity to her house: "*English Time is the nearest school to my home, that's why I chose it because it wouldn't take a long time to get here. And also, I thought about the weather in winter and if I chose a school in downtown, it would be difficult to get there*". Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), who carried out a mixed-methods study, came to the same conclusion. Their study reported that the participants were attracted by the reputation of the academic institutions and the quality of education they provided. The authors added that the students became more serious in selecting an academic institution and comparing it with its competitors; therefore the more prestigious the institutions were the better chances they had of being selected. The findings of Cristobal and Llorca's (2006) research correlate to the previous study and revealed that the school's prestige and the quality of teaching were two most essential factors for the applicants. Furthermore, they admitted that an accessibility factor could also be important and the school's location.

The findings of our study revealed that while some participants were driven by their personal interest in a country and/or culture, the choice of others was influenced by their parents, teachers, or employers. Daniel (24, Caribbean islands) justified his choice by his fascination of Toronto since he was a child: "*I've always been attracted by Toronto. Even when I was young, I saw some pictures of Toronto, it's a beautiful city, that's the reason I chose Toronto*". Anthony (21, Mali), on the other hand, connects his decision to study in Toronto with being a fan of a Canadian singer: "*Since I was a child, I always said to my dad that I wanted to go to Canada to study. I like a rapper Greg [...] he is a singer and I always wish I could come here, to Toronto*".

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These data indicate that the students selected Canada, specifically Toronto, based on their personal desire. Weger's (2013) study followed international students studying in the United States to determine the factors that motivated them to choose the country. The author concluded that some students had "a strong motivation for the US-learning context", including their personal interest and desire to immerse themselves in the American culture (p. 91). The findings, therefore, supported the results of this study; however, this study went beyond this and revealed that some students could potentially be influenced by other people, such as their teachers or parents. For example, Nancy (20, China) stated that her mother had selected a school for her to ensure a low number of Chinese students: "*My mum said that one of the other reasons she chose this school was connected with a low number of Chinese students here, so I wouldn't be able to speak Chinese at school*". Margaret (35, Brazil), conversely, relied on her teacher's recommendations back home: "*My teacher recommended me this school. He came here before and he really liked it here [...] I think he recommends this school to every student who goes to Canada because it's a good school*".

Another notable finding our study brought to fruition, which was not found in the literature, is the fact that some students choose to study in Canada due to its multiculturalism. Specifically, seven out of fifteen interviewees expressed their delight that Canada warmly welcomes foreigners and treats them well. Helen (23, Japan) stated the following: "*There are a lot of immigrants here, people who come from many different countries. In Japan I've heard that Canada is a good country [...] people are friendly*". Furthermore, going to a multicultural city, like Toronto, provides an opportunity to make many international friends and experience a cultural exchange; for example, Mark (24, Ecuador) said: "*Canada has more than 100 different*

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*cultures, so you can see people from all over the world here and also you can learn about cultures*".

While conducting a literature review, I did not pay much attention to exploring what sources of information students relied on while forming an image of a country and/or a language school prior to their arrival. However, once I commenced the interviews, I realized the value of this information, particularly to language schools. Knowing what websites their clients use may give them a better idea of what sources are worth investing into, therefore maximizing the numbers of new and/or returning students. Lam et al.'s (2011) quantitative study briefly mentioned the significance of word-of-mouth in spreading information about the students' experience. He stated that positive feedback from the former participants attracted others to select the same destination and/or language school. The results of our study coincide with Lam et al.'s statement; specifically seven out of fifteen interviews revealed that their choice was influenced by other people's recommendations, such as their friends with prior experience of studying abroad, or teachers, who had previously sent other students on similar programs and were pleased with the outcomes. Additionally, the results of our study ascertained that while many were guided by the agencies in their home countries, others independently selected a language school based on Google search and social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, and online blogs. The former group of students benefited from the agencies' guidance, which involved provision of detailed information about various destinations and assistance in applying for a visa and preparing the right documents. The latter group, conversely, chose to go through the whole process themselves and make their own decision. However, some students combined both methods: relying on the agencies' help and reading the reviews online and

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looking at the schools' websites. Interestingly, one student, Laura (21, Saudi Arabia) applied for a government scholarship and was fully sponsored to study in Canada. Overall, our study highlights the importance of both social media and the agencies in assisting with the decision making of students.

Lastly, many interviewees revealed that they had shared their thoughts about studying abroad with their parents; therefore the role of parents in the decision-making process should not be underestimated. While six out of fifteen participants were supported by their family members, five experienced disagreements and misunderstandings and needed to persuade their family members in the benefits of learning English abroad. The literature, however, mainly focuses on the ways parents can aid their children in studying overseas. For example, Twombly et al.'s (2012) study emphasized that the parents' financial support and social background could facilitate their children's participation in language programs. While examining the demographics of educational program participants, he determined that one from a wealthy family would be more likely to partake in this experience, since his or her parents could afford it.

Overall, this section presented the findings of the ways participants' expectations were formed prior to their arrival. A variety of factors affecting a destination and/or school selection were discussed, such as safety, price, prestige, location, and others. Following that, the sources of information participants relied on were analyzed, which aims to guide language schools on selecting the most effective online platforms for advertizing their services. Lastly, a brief discussion of the parents' roles was presented, which was already thoroughly described in the research findings chapter. The following section discusses the findings guided by the last

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 research question, which focuses on the participants’ experiences throughout the language  
 program.

### 5.3 Research Question 3

#### What experiences do participants’ undergo while studying abroad?

The table below presents the research findings related to the participants’ experiences in three different settings: school/classroom environment, while participating in organized extra-curricular activities, and while living with home stay families. All these elements contribute to their overall experience of studying abroad.

*TABLE FOUR: Participants’ Experiences while Studying Abroad*

| <i>Research Question 3</i>                                       | <i>Themes</i>   | <i>Examples</i>  |
|--|---|--|
| What experiences do participants’ undergo while studying abroad? | 1. Describing experiences in the school environment                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships among classmates – 13/15</li> <li>• Relationships between students and their teachers – 15/15</li> <li>• Gaining independence – 2/15</li> <li>• Cultural exchange – 1/15</li> <li>• Language improvements – 6/15</li> <li>• Feeling lost/shy/stressed in class – 15/15</li> <li>• Accepting and diverse environment – 6/15</li> <li>• Describing overall experience – 8/15</li> </ul> |
|  | 2. Reflecting on experiences while participating in extra-curricular activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation – 13/15</li> <li>• Not engaged in the activities – 2/15</li> </ul>   |
|  | 3. Revealing experiences with home-stay families                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive experience/ Additional opportunity to practice English – 9/15</li> <li>• Challenges with a home stay family – 5/15</li> </ul>  |

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The literature review emphasized a lack of research carried out presenting participants' expectations and experiences. Instead, significant work has been accomplished in determining the effects of expectations on students' academic performance (Wilkinson, 1998; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ketsman, 2012). This study, conversely, aimed to explore students' experiences in language programs in Toronto.

Language gain is one of the aspects that was discussed by six out of fifteen interviewees. They stated that their level of English had significantly improved since their first day at school. They began to feel more confident in expressing themselves and making conversations with others. Studies by Freed (1995), Coleman (1998), and Allen & Herron (2003) related rapid language improvements to the power of language immersion. Being taught by native English speakers, surrounded by other international students, and encouraged to speak English not only in the classroom but also in everyday life, pushes one to practice the language. This, therefore, leads to the fluency and confidence gain. Coleman (1998), for example, concluded that those who study overseas dramatically expand their vocabulary, become familiar with different styles of writing and speaking, and gain confidence in leading conversations and expressing their own opinions (Coleman, 1998, p. 172). The results of Allen and Herron's (2003) mixed-methods study provided further confirmation of this and stated that their participants were able to overcome the language barrier by learning French in Paris. Overall, learning English in the native English environment is more advantageous, since it allows the participants to enhance their language skills more quickly.

All interviewees, however, revealed that they felt "nervous", "shy", or "lost" at the start of the program due to many factors, such as unfamiliarity with a new environment, a different

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educational system, and a low level of English comprehension. The feeling of anxiety, which can be experienced by many new students, was also discussed in Allen and Herron's (2003) study. The authors justified anxiety by a combination of linguistic incompetence and culture shock. They concluded that over time students managed to overcome this feeling and adjusted to the new system of education.

The significance of a teacher's role was also thoroughly discussed during the interviews. All participants in our study characterized their teachers as supportive, encouraging, helpful, and friendly. Many revealed that they felt comfortable asking for help and further clarifications while facing challenges. Additionally, they stated that the relationships between them and their teachers were informal, opposite to what they were used to in their home countries. The same aspect was touched upon in the academic literature; for example, Magnan & Back (2007) discussed the significance of the teachers in creating a friendly learning environment to engage every student in a variety of activities. The authors stated that this environment encourages students to take an active part during the lessons, therefore helping them master the language.

Regarding the relationships among the classmates, most of the interviewees stated that they created strong bonds and socialized in school and out of school. These friendships allowed them to learn about different cultures, practice English and not feel lonely despite being far from home. However, several participants noted that it was difficult to make friends due to the dominance of students coming from the same country, who spoke their native language, therefore excluding others from the conversations. For example, Helen (23, Japan) stated that the majority of the students at her school were Brazilian and spoke Portuguese during the breaks and after the classes: “*It's quite difficult to make friends from other cultures [...] In class we talk a*

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*lot and everyone is friendly, but after classes, we go out separately*". This made her feel uncomfortable and limited both her social circles and opportunities to practice English.

Hernandez's (2016) quantitative study brought similar results and revealed that the participants preferred to stay within their own communities instead of making new friends. This was explained by the simplicity of communicating in native language and unwillingness to create new friendships. Furthermore, Hernandez (2016) suggested that this could be related to the length of the study abroad program, which could not be long enough to make strong connections with other people.

While asking the interviewees to reflect on their overall experience, they described it as "life-changing", "turning point", "best", and "unforgettable". These words indicate the participants' satisfaction with the language programs they engaged in. Positive experiences show that their expectations were at least met, if not exceeded, and therefore they are likely to either come back and/or recommend the school to their friends and family. Serrano et.al's (2014) study also aimed to determine Spanish students' experiences while learning English in England. They characterized it as "enriching" due to their ability to live in a different country, engage in a cultural exchange, be fully immersed in an English environment, and meet other international students (p. 404).

The results of our study significantly contribute to the already existing academic literature on the students' experiences while studying abroad. Firstly, six out of fifteen interviewees stated that their overall experience was fulfilling due to the accepting and diverse environment created at their schools. Encouraging teachers, well-planned curriculum, comfortable school environment, and international friends made them feel welcomed. These also

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facilitated a quicker adjustment, make language improvements, and gain confidence.

Furthermore, several students noted that they also became more independent, since they came to Canada on their own and went through many challenges without relying on their parents. For many, this was their first independent travel experience and/or first time studying abroad. Lastly, cultural exchange was an essential part of their experience, as it allowed them to become more aware of other existing cultures and learn many new things about other countries that may not have known before.

Regarding the extra-curricular activities, thirteen out of fifteen participants in our study benefitted from the active engagement in various activities. They looked at them as the opportunities to create friendships, practice the language, explore the city, and have memorable experiences. However, two interviewees did not show much interest in this due to either their busy schedules or an introverted personality and preference to stay in and communicate with their families back home. Ritchie (2003) in his "Managing Educational Tourism" book indicated that extra-curricular activities were a significant aspect of a study abroad experience. Going back to the notion of Grand Tours, these activities were considered as important as the educational component. The participants were able to engage in various activities, such as horseback riding and dancing, subsequent to the classroom learning. This engagement was aimed to provide a deeper immersion into other people's lives and learning about other cultures and traditions. Moreover, Segalowitz and Freed (2004) discovered that participation in extra-curricular activities positively affected the students' linguistic improvements. This way they were able to practice the language not only during the lessons, but also outside of the school environment.

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Overall, the impact of extra-curricular activities on the participants' overall experiences should not be underestimated.

Lastly, as discussed in the research findings chapter, many participants chose to live with a home-stay family during their language program. In our study, nine out of fifteen interviewees revealed their satisfaction with this type of stay. Firstly, the families were responsible for providing meals, making it convenient for the students, who, in most cases, were in their early twenties and might have not known how to cook. Secondly, this was a safe option, since language schools could match one with a family based on his or her needs and preferences. Finally, families would genuinely have an interest in hosting international students and sharing their cultures with them, therefore making them feel accepted. However, five interviewees faced challenges while living in the home-stay. While some complained about an inconvenient location of their home-stays and a long commute to school, others were disappointed with how limited their interactions were with the host families. The families were either busy or did not show much interest in their guests, therefore making them feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed. This aspect was also discussed in the literature; for example, Segalowitz and Freed (2004) stated that those who chose to stay with host families interacted only superficially and had limited conversations. Rivers's (1998) quantitative study further confirmed the previous findings and indicated that the existing interactions between hosts and guests were brief, and leisure time was mostly spent passively watching television. This led to visitor dissatisfaction, since they expected to create good bonds with their hosts and considered their stay with them as an additional opportunity to practice English outside of school. Additionally, Rivers noted that the guests experienced a lot of tension and discomfort while occasionally communicating with the families.

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This made them choose to stay in their own rooms instead of common areas. Rivers's (1998) study concluded that it is necessary to find ways to improve this aspect of the study abroad experience, and he suggested matching participants with the families depending on their needs and preferences. *Language Paradise*, one of the schools I carried out the interviews in, offered this service. Despite this, Mark's (24, Ecuador) expectations were not met, since the description of the home-stay, provided by the school prior to his arrival, did not match the reality.

To summarize, this section discussed the participants' experiences while studying in Toronto, which responds the third research question. Examining the data from the participants' experiences in three different settings, such as at school, during extra-curricular activities, and while living with a home-stay, provided a deeper understanding of their overall level of satisfaction. Moreover, links to the already existing academic literature were made to show both the correlations between the findings, and new emerging outcomes. The last section provides an insight into the ways language schools can improve.

### **5.4 Participants' Recommendations**

This study aimed to identify potential improvements language schools could make for attracting a wider range of students while enhancing its reputation. These suggestions can be used as a guide for creating successful and consistent marketing strategies that language schools may employ. This section presents the interviewees' personal recommendations based on their own experience. The table below visually demonstrates the suggestions generated in the data and the numbers of students whose opinions matched each recommendation.

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TABLE FIVE: Participants' Recommendations

| <i>Findings</i>                         | <i>Examples</i>   |
|---|---|
| Recommended improvements and/or changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracting a diverse range of students – 2/15</li> <li>• Encouraging students to speak English – 2/15</li> <li>• Giving freedom in selecting classes – 3/15</li> <li>• Changes to the class organization and teaching approaches – 5/15</li> <li>• Changes to the timetable – 4/15</li> <li>• School's physical layout and signage – 3/15</li> <li>• Promotion and collaboration with other educational institutions – 2/15</li> </ul> |

In the century of internationalization and globalization, language schools should show how welcoming, respectful, and tolerant their staff are towards the international students regardless of their origin and background. However, based on the data collected, it became apparent that *English Time*, for example, targeted mainly a Brazilian market, which made non-Brazilian students feel excluded and limited their opportunities to practice English with the classmates. This model does not positively affect the school's image and discourages many of other nationalities to enroll. Ryan (2011) proposed to use a "transcultural approach", which focuses on the importance of attracting international students and maintaining a friendly environment at school (Ryan, 2011, p. 635). Meeting students' needs and treating them equally results in schools creating a diverse and global image. This approach eliminates the differences between people of different nationalities, therefore making everyone feel accepted in the community. Overall, attracting students from different backgrounds may positively affect the schools' reputation and enhance their popularity.

The participants of our study discussed some ideas in regards to the teacher's role and the learning environment as a whole. For example, two interviewees suggested that it is a teacher's

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responsibility to encourage students to continuously speak English at school and during the extra-curricular activities. They explained that the students of the same nationality can naturally switch into speaking their native language, and this situation needs to be monitored. Close monitoring, while highlighting the importance of practicing the language, will lead to the students' better academic achievements. Goldoni's (2013) study further confirmed this indicating that the teachers were responsible for monitoring the students' progress and adjusting the system to satisfy their needs. The existing literature also highlighted the importance of a good learning environment and the relationships between teachers and students. Kazal-Thresher (1993), for example, established a direct link between schools' inputs and participants' academic achievements. He stated that if a school hired highly qualified teachers, followed a well-designed academic curriculum, and offered small class sizes, the students would be more likely to achieve higher results. The author also noted that this, therefore, depends on the school's financial situation. Ketsman (2012) further highlighted the instructors' role in creating a friendly environment in the classroom to exceed participants' expectations. The author stated that teachers would need to build a rapport with the students, so the latter feel comfortable in the learning setting.

Regarding the classroom organization, three out of fifteen interviewees revealed their disappointment in not having a choice while selecting classes. They were placed in classes regardless of their interest in improving certain skills. Mark (24, Ecuador) stated that *Language Paradise* had a high number of enrollments, and they were unable to accommodate everyone's preferences. This situation needs to be resolved by offering more spaces and/or admitting fewer students so they can be placed in classes that match their needs. Furthermore, aspects, such as a

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lack of technology and a small classroom size, emphasizing the importance of certain skills over the others, limited attention to the new students, and schedule were discussed during the interviewing process. The interviewees suggested more money needs to be invested in making the classrooms well-equipped with the advanced technology. Additionally, offering spacious and well-lit classrooms, comfortable desks and chairs, and a large whiteboard may increase students' productivity. Besides, facilitators should create a curriculum that places an equal emphasis on all language skills, such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Stressing one or two skills means that the other ones will be neglected. Moreover, to facilitate a smooth adjustment to the new environment, Nancy (20, China) suggested an interesting concept of providing an introductory session of Canadian culture and lifestyle for the newcomers. Lastly, four interviewees were unhappy about either the starting time of the lessons or the length of the breaks. They thought that starting at 8.30am was too early and suggested moving it to 9 or 10am to give them more time travel time from their home-stays to schools. Also, they found lunch breaks to be short for having a proper meal and proposed extending them. Overall, all these suggestions should be considered by the language schools' managers to enhance the classroom organization.

Recommendations for a better signage have already been discussed in the research outcomes chapter. Three interviewees could not locate their language schools on their first day due to a poor signage. Due to the language incompetence, they felt anxious and could not ask for directions. Therefore, schools need to ensure that they have a clear signage (both inside and outside the building), provide detailed directions to the students prior to the arrival, and organize measures to better welcome their students. The last, but also important suggestion, concerns

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schools' promotion and collaboration with other educational institutions and agencies. As indicated in the previous chapter, many students used the agencies' services in selecting a language school and a program they want to enroll in. The agencies guided them through the whole process and provided assistance if any questions arose; therefore, collaborating with the agencies is crucial in attracting new students. Additionally, schools having strong partnerships with colleges and universities may attract those who are interested in continuing their education and gaining either a bachelor's or a master's degree. Lastly, language schools should invest more in advertising their programs to the international market, so they have a continuous demand all year around.

To summarize, this chapter further discussed the research outcomes, which were produced once the data had been collected and analyzed. Additionally, the chapter presented clear links between the already existing literature and our findings and showed how our study fits into it. While some findings either matched or contradicted the results from the previous studies, others provided new insights, therefore contributing to the literature review. Lastly, the research outcomes were linked to the research questions the study was guided by in order to thoroughly unpack them. The final chapter summarizes the key contributions this study brought, discusses the research limitations and highlights the areas for future work

**CHAPTER 6: Conclusion**

**6.0 Introduction**

This thesis aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the international students' expectations and experiences while engaging in short-term English programs in Toronto. To begin with, the study explored participants' expectations prior to enrolling in language schools. The data showed that their expectations varied; for example, while some anticipated challenges, others were more optimistic and full of hope. Among fears, the two most commonly experienced were language barriers and need to adjust to new places. Despite this, the data revealed that many students were looking forward to immersing themselves in a different environment, studying with people from other countries, and making international friends. The table below visually represents the findings with the exact number of participants who provided specific examples.

*TABLE SIX: Summary of Participants' Expectations*

| <i>Anticipated Fears and Challenges</i> | <i>Responses</i> | <i>Positive Expectations/ Hopes</i> | <i>Responses</i> |
|---|------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Language barrier                        | 8/15             | Internalization                     | 6/15             |
| Adjustment to the new place             | 8/15             | Class environment                   | 5/15             |
| Culture shock                           | 3/15             | Social aspect                       | 5/15             |
| Leaving home and family                 | 3/15             | Language improvements               | 1/15             |
| No anticipated fears                    | 2/15             |                                     |                  |

The next step involved looking at the ways participant expectations were formed prior to their arrival and what sources of information they relied upon. Initially, we examined what aspects participants prioritized while choosing a school and whether they made their own

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decision to study abroad or they were influenced either by their parents, teachers, or other people around them. Once we realized that parents played an important role in the decision-making process, we acknowledged that only six out of the fifteen participants had family support whereas others either had arguments with their family members or did not comment on this at all. Lastly, the study identified the sources of information participants relied upon while selecting a language school and a program. The findings below provide a deeper insight into these three areas.

*Table Seven: The Ways Participants' Expectations were Formed*

| <i>Selection Factors</i> | <i>Nº</i> | <i>Parents' Role</i> | <i>Nº</i> | <i>Sources of Information</i> | <i>Nº</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| External influence       | 8/15      | Family support       | 6/15      | Online/Social media           | 9/15      |
| Personal desire          | 4/15      | Disagreements        | 5/15      | Agencies                      | 9/15      |
| Multicultural society    | 7/15      |                      |           | Word-of-mouth                 | 7/15      |
| Safety and price         | 7/15      |                      |           | Through the government        | 1/15      |
| Prestige/opportunities   | 4/15      |                      |           |                               |           |
| Convenience              | 2/15      |                      |           |                               |           |

The following step was examining interviewees' experiences in three different settings, such as the school environment, while taking part in extra-curricular activities, and while living with the home-stay families. Below is a summary of our findings that have already been thoroughly discussed in the previous chapters.

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*TABLE SEVEN: Summary of Participants' Experiences*

| <i>At School</i>              | <i>Nº</i> | <i>During Extra-Curricular Activities</i> | <i>Nº</i> | <i>With Home-Stay Families</i> | <i>Nº</i> |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Friendships among classmates  | 13/15     | Active participation                      | 13/15     | Positive experiences           | 9/15      |
| Teacher-student relationships | 15/15     | Not engaged                               | 2/15      | Challenges/barriers            | 5/15      |
| Gaining independence          | 2/15      |   |           |                                |           |
| Cultural exchange             | 1/15      |   |           |                                |           |
| Language improvements         | 6/15      |   |           |                                |           |
| Feeling lost/shy/stressed     | 15/15     |   |           |                                |           |
| Accepting environment         | 6/15      |   |           |                                |           |
| Overall fulfillment           | 8/15      |   |           |                                |           |

Lastly, the findings of the study provided recommendations language schools could potentially use for attracting a wider range of students while enhancing school's reputation. The recommendations below were discussed among the interviewees and were based on their personal experiences.

*TABLE EIGHT: Summary of Recommendations*

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Attracting a diverse range of students                          | 2/15 |
| Encouraging students to speak English                           | 2/15 |
| Giving freedom in selecting classes                             | 3/15 |
| Changes to the class organization and teaching approaches       | 5/15 |
| Changes to the timetable  | 4/15 |
| School's physical layout and signage                            | 3/15 |
| Promotion and collaboration with other educational institutions | 2/15 |

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The study was guided by three research questions, and the research findings answered them accordingly, which could be found in the discussion chapter. Phenomenology was adopted as both the theory and methodology to explore the phenomenon of language learning abroad. Phenomenology was viewed as an appropriate choice because it generally aims to provide an understanding of people's experiences and allows researchers to fully immerse themselves in the process of data collection. Three language schools (*English Time, English World, and Language Paradise*), located in downtown Toronto, agreed to assist me in recruiting participants for this study. Fifteen semi-structured interviews with international students, which lasted from 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted in October and November 2016.

In a theoretical context, the research results added to the existing literature on educational tourism. Based on the literature review, only a few studies have explored students' expectations and experiences. Instead, previous studies have investigated the effects of students' expectations on their academic performance and achievements (e.g. Wilkinson, 1998; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ketsman, 2012). Additionally, limited studies focused on non-native English students learning English as a foreign or second language; conversely, many have been conducted on native English speakers learning either French (e.g. Wilkinson, 1998; Allen & Herron, 2003; Freed et.al., 2004; Allen, 2010a) or Spanish (e.g. Collentine, 2004; Segalowitz et.al., 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Isabelli-García, 2006; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Serrano et.al., 2014), while studying abroad. In a practical context, this study has explored the participants' experiences, which may result in raising language schools' awareness of their clients' needs and expectations. Furthermore, the interviewees provided recommendations, based on their personal experiences, on how language schools could enhance their services and attract a wider range of

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs students while maintaining a good reputation. Overall, I believe that the findings of this study have a valuable theoretical and practical contribution to the educational tourism field. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the limitations this study faced and discuss implications for further research.

### **6.1 Research Limitations**

This phenomenological study was impacted by a variety of limitations. Firstly, time constraints affected the volume and depth of data that were collected and the choice of theory and methodology. Since the timeframe for completing a master's program is typically limited to two years, I was able to devote only two months for carrying out the interviews. An ethnographic study, for example, would allow me, as a researcher, to spend longer on the field, fully immerse myself in the setting of the studied phenomenon, and collect richer data. In a space of two months I conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews, which is a relatively small number. Additionally, since this is a qualitative study, the results cannot be generalized for the whole educational industry.

The second challenge I faced with was a difficulty in recruiting participants and directly connecting with the language schools' managers. Despite having contacted a large number of schools (38 in total) via email and sending information and recruitment letters outlining the details of my study, only three showed an interest. My thoughts and experiences are described below:

*My main concern was that the emails I sent would not go directly to the managers, but to the reception instead, which may not necessarily be interested in assisting me with the study. The receptionists mainly deal with answering the potential clients' emails, providing information about the study packages, pricing, extra-curricular activities organized by school, matching students with the home-stay families, and others.*

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*However, projects like mine needed to be discussed directly with the managers who could make a right decision depending on the benefits of my study to their business.*

Having little to no control over the recruitment process, I began thinking of other ways of approaching the managers. After discussing this issue with my supervisor, Dr. Boluk, we both agreed that it would be more effective to start ringing the schools and requesting to connect directly with the managers. The sentiments I felt at that time are described below:

*Despite having an interest from three language schools, I felt uncertain and overwhelmed about their further steps. These feelings were a result of not having any control over the recruitment process and not physically being there. Being unaware of how long it would take them to recruit the participants, whether they agree in being interviewed and/or available were some of the questions I did not have answers to. I followed up with the schools and asked them to let me know once they have found two or three volunteers; however, after not hearing back from them for about a week, I started feeling very upset. After reflecting on this and talking with Karla, we both decided that it would be better to phone the schools and speak directly with the academic managers. However, being a non-native English speaker, I had a psychological barrier of speaking with people over the phone and fear of not being able to understand and or/ being understood. In the end, I created a phone script and had it as a visual support in front of me while talking with the managers, which made me feel more confident.*

Discussing the details of my study with the managers was a right step, which allowed me to gain their permission to come to their schools and interview the students. However, I could not communicate with the participants prior to the interviews; all the details were discussed with the academic managers. Gaining participants' contact information would allow me to directly arrange the interviews and discuss the details with them:

*The whole time I was contacting the schools, I felt frustrated because I could not directly connect with the participants. Schools tended to keep this information privately and did not want to share it with any third parties. The only way to recruit the students is through making arrangements with the schools and either asking them to make announcements or going there independently and asking their permission. I sent them an in-class verbal script so they could use it for informing students about my study*

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To add to the previously discussed constraint, some managers justified their inability to assist in recruiting participants by their busy schedules. Offering courses throughout the year with the highest demand in summer, they, nevertheless, stated that they were unable to help due to a large volume of work:

*Some academic managers said that they were either busy or not interested in the project at all. They justified this by a large volume of students at that time of year (September/October), and if I were to work on this research in winter, they would have a lot more time to help.*

Another constraint was related to the participants' status in Canada, since not all of them were planning to leave the country at the end of the language program. The initial goal was to interview only those who were in the country temporarily, on a tourist visa, for example. However, during the interviewing process, it became apparent that some students planned to stay after the program's completion and either apply to universities and continue their studies or look for a job. Being unable to reach the students directly did not allow me to restrict their participation based on their status. Eventually, I carried out interviews with those that the schools managed to recruit for me even though it contradicted my initial plan:

*Since my research focuses on language programs offered to tourists, my search was limited only to those organizations that offered short-term English courses to foreigners with an incentive of staying in the country temporarily in order to improve their language skills.*

Moreover, the language barrier was another important limitation, since all the interviews were conducted with the non-native English speakers. Their ability to comprehend the questions and provide insightful answers was crucial; therefore, only those who possessed at least Intermediate or Upper-Intermediate levels of English were asked to take part in the study. However, I realized that the levels system varied depending on a school and having an Intermediate level did not

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guarantee a full understanding of the questions and abilities to share experiences. This resulted in some students facing difficulties in formulating their thoughts, finding the right words to describe their experiences, and expressing themselves in a clear manner. Furthermore, one of the aspects this study aimed to explore was participants' expectations prior to attending language programs. Gaining an understanding of their expectations appeared to be a challenge, since they needed to recollect their memories.

The implementation of a phenomenological study also posed some limitations. Firstly, with a shift from examining the object to the subject, a phenomenological study naturally becomes subjective. After the shift from the European to North American approach, the main emphasis is on people's experiences within a social and cultural context. Instead of purely focusing on the essence of the phenomenon, scholars realized that many aspects may influence a participant's stories, including social norms. This makes a study subjective, since the stories can either be exaggerated, partially made up, or hiding some important information. The subjectivity of the phenomenological methodology is also based on the lack of emphasis on reduction (Crotty, 1998). According to Crotty (1998), interpretive phenomenology, which is commonly used in North America, looks at the interpretations of the phenomenon within social contexts and can be influenced by many outside factors, therefore cannot reveal the true essence of the experience. Furthermore, the influence of culture on the participant's responses is a major concern. Being raised in a society with its own cultural norms and rules does not allow one to think non-critically and can instill a reluctance to express what one truly thinks about a particular topic. Since the North American phenomenological view is interpretative, data analysis focuses on describing participants' lived experiences within the context of culture, not in the universal

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs meaning of it as used in traditional phenomenology in Europe (Caelli, 2000). Lastly, as phenomenology is no longer critical after being introduced to North America, there is "a failure to capture new or fuller meanings or a loss of opportunities to renew the understandings that possess us" (Crotty, 1998, p.85).

The implementation of semi-structured interviews also posed limitations. While conducting interviews, interviewees could assume that I impinged on their privacy, leading to discomfort and hiding of important information. However, Creswell (2014) states that if "private information" is perceived to have been divulged, the researcher may decide not to include it in the transcript and data analysis (p. 191). "Gaining rapport" with some participants was a challenge; however, it is still an important skill for building trust and creating a comfortable environment (Creswell, 2014, p. 191). Carrying out interviews appeared to be difficult, since the presence of the interviewer could create tension in the interviewee, making their responses biased. Finally, not everyone had the same level of articulation and perception, and questions could also be interpreted differently. Overall, this study was affected by a variety of limitations; however, the findings still significantly contributed both theoretically and practically. The following section identifies areas for future research and provides suggestions for future scholars, who would be interested in working in the same field.

## **6.2 Areas for Future Research**

As discussed in the literature review and the methodology chapter, only a few studies had been conducted on exploring students' expectations and experiences while engaging in short-term English programs abroad. This is surprising considering that English is recognized as a global language and is learnt by many non-native English speakers not only in their home

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countries but also in countries where it is spoken natively, such as Canada, USA, England, or Australia. This section provides suggestions for those who are interested in carrying out research in the educational tourism field.

Firstly, this study was only focused on identifying the international students' expectations and experiences, therefore looking at the notion of studying abroad from one perspective. The voices of the language schools' representatives, such as academic managers and teachers, were not taken into account. As such exploring their insights may provide a deeper understanding of this industry and add more value to the research outcomes. Since they represent the supply on the market by providing educational services, they may, for example, add relevant data about the ways they create a positive learning environment, assess students' levels of comfort, and ensure they have good experiences throughout the programs. The potential research questions could look into the ways language schools target their clients, attract returning students, and create a comfortable learning environment.

Furthermore, this study failed to limit participants according to their status in Canada. The initial goal was to interview only those, who intended to stay in the country temporarily, returning to their home countries after the program completion. However, since I had little to no control while recruiting the participants, I was unable to select right candidates. During the interviews, it became apparent to me that some planned to stay and either continue their studies in Toronto or start looking for a job. Future scholars could try to be more involved in the recruitment process by physically going to schools instead of speaking to them on the phone. This way, they might be able to restrict participants to those who intend to stay short-term.

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Regarding the research methods, this study implemented semi-structured interviews. Future scholars should consider utilizing a combination of methods, such as participant observations, keeping personal journals throughout the whole process, focus groups and others, instead of focusing on one. Lastly, a lengthier study would allow a scholar to gain a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon. Carrying out an ethnographic study, for example, and spending longer on the field collecting data, would allow one to have richer data. Overall, this chapter summarized the benefits of the study, discussed its limitations, and suggested some areas for further research.

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## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Appendix A (Recruitment Letter to Language Schools)**

**Name of the language school (e.g. *English World*)**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This letter is a request for your language school's assistance with a project I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada, under the supervision of Dr. Boluk. The title of my research project is "Exploring Students' Expectations and Experiences of Short-term Language Programs". I would like to provide you with more information about this project that explores students' expectations and experiences while participating in short-term English programs.

The purpose of this study is to explore students' expectations formed prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto, Canada. Knowledge and information generated from this study may help other academic scholars in both educational and tourism fields.

It is my hope to connect with the students taking part in short-term English programs at your school to invite them to participate in this research project. I believe that the participants of this program have unique understandings and stories relating to expectations and experiences while studying abroad. During the course of this study, I will be conducting interviews with the students who have an advanced comprehension of English, while their ability to comprehend the questions and provide insightful answers is crucial for this study. At the end of this study the publication of this thesis will share the knowledge from this study with other leisure researchers, leisure programmers, and community members.

Participation of any student is completely voluntary. Each student will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study. Students will receive an information letter including detailed information about this study, as well as informed consent forms.

To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts from the stories will be used labelled with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Names of participants will not appear in the thesis or reports resulting from this study. Participants will not be identifiable, and only described by gender.

If your language school wishes the identity of the organization to remain confidential, a pseudonym will be given to the organization. All paper field notes collected will be retained

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

locked in my office and in a secure cabinet in the Recreation and Leisure Studies Department at the University of Waterloo, Canada. All paper notes will be confidentially destroyed after 10 years. Further, all electronic data will be stored for a minimum of 10 years on a CD with no personal identifiers. Finally, only myself and my advisor, Dr. Boluk in the Recreation and Leisure Studies Department at the University of Waterloo will have access to these materials. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation belongs to you, as a school representative, and the students, as the potential participants of the study.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 226-989-2918 or by email [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca). You may also contact my supervisor, Karla Boluk at 519-888-4567 ext. 34045 or by email [kboluk@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:kboluk@uwaterloo.ca).

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial to your language school, to your students, and to others who are interested in taking short-term English classes, as well as the broader research community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Ekaterina McKnight  
Master's Candidate  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Karla Boluk  
Associate Professor  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### Organization Permission Form

We have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Ekaterina McKnight of the Recreation and Leisure Studies Department at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Boluk at the University of Waterloo. We have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to our questions, and any additional details we wanted.

We are aware that the name of our organization will only be used in the thesis or any publications that comes from the research with our permission.

We were informed that this organization may withdraw from assistance with the project at any time. We were informed that study participants may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

We have been informed this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee and that questions we have about the study may be directed to Ekaterina McKnight at 226-989-2918 or by email [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca) and Karla Boluk at 519-888-4567 ext. 34045 or by email [kboluk@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:kboluk@uwaterloo.ca).

We were informed that if we have any comments or concerns with in this study, we may also contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

Ekaterina McKnight  
Master's Candidate  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Karla Boluk  
Associate Professor  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

We agree to help the researcher recruit participants for this study from among the advanced level students participating in a short-term program at Frances King School of English (as an example)

YES  NO

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

We agree to the use of the name of our school (Frances King School of English) in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

If NO, a pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the organization.

Director Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Director Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Board of Directors Representative Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Board of Directors Representative Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Appendix B (Shortened Recruitment Letter to Language Schools Sent via Email)**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This letter is a request for your language school's assistance with a project I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, under the supervision of Dr. Boluk. The title of my research project is "Exploring Students' Expectations and Experiences of Short-term Language Programs".

The purpose of this study is to explore students' expectations formed prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto. It is my hope to connect with the students taking part in short-term English programs at your school to invite them to participate in this research project. During the course of this study, I will be conducting interviews with the students who have an advanced comprehension of English, while their ability to comprehend the questions and provide insightful answers is crucial for this study. At the end of this study, I intend to share my findings with you and other leisure researchers.

The findings of this study will benefit both language schools and participants. The analyzed data should provide you with valuable information on how to enhance students' experiences and improve your current programs to meet students' expectations. Additionally, the proposed study intends to provide a deeper understanding of who/what influences students' expectations and how that might translate into improved marketing strategies for attracting more clients. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at 226-989-2918 or by email [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca). You may also contact my supervisor, Karla Boluk at 519-888-4567 ext. 34045 or by email [kboluk@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:kboluk@uwaterloo.ca). I will follow up with you in a few days in case you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about your participation.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Ekaterina McKnight  
Master's Candidate  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Karla Boluk  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Appendix C (Recruitment Letter to Students)**

Hello,

My name is Ekaterina McKnight and I am a Master's student working under the supervision of Karla Boluk in the Tourism program in the Recreation and Leisure Studies Department at the University of Waterloo, Canada. I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to participate in a study that I am conducting entitled "Exploring Students' Expectations and Experiences of Short-term Language Programs". I would like to provide you with more information on this project and what your involvement would entail if you do decide to participate.

One aspect of this research is to explore students' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto, Canada. Ultimately, I would like to conduct an interview with you to understand your experiences and the ways your expectations affected them. I feel that your insights are very valuable for this particular research study. I will request your consent in order to use your interview in my research. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Attached to this e-mail is an information letter, to review prior to signing up for the interview. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca) and let me know when you would like to participate from September 26, 2016 – October 14, 2017. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. I will then send a confirmation email indicating that you have been signed up for one of those times, and provide you with further information concerning the location of the study. If you have to cancel your appointment, please email me at [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca)

Sincerely,

Ekaterina McKnight

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Appendix D (Information Letter to Students)**

University of Waterloo

October 4, 2016

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada, under the supervision of Professor Karla Boluk. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

As you may know, short-term language programs as part of educational tourism are becoming more popular; they allow participants to immerse themselves in a new environment, gain new skills, and become more fluent in foreign languages. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore students' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto, Canada. This study will focus on how you, as a participant of a language program, feel about your experiences and whether your expectations were met.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Instead of giving your real name, you will have the option to choose a pseudonym which will be used throughout the interview and its analysis, therefore ensuring that your identity is protected. Data collected during this study will be retained for 10 years in my supervisor's office, which will be locked. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, ext.

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca).

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 226-989-2918 or by email at [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca). You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Karla Boluk 519-888-4567 ext. 34045 or email [kboluk@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:kboluk@uwaterloo.ca)

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to both language schools and students. The study is planned to be shared with those involved in the study, the research community, as well as the language schools aiding me in the recruitment of study participants in Toronto, Canada.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Ekaterina McKnight

Student Investigator

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Appendix E (Semi-structured Interview Guide)**

#### ***Opening Statement:***

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As previously mentioned, I am interested in exploring your expectations prior to enrolling in a short-term English program, the ways these expectations were formed, and the effects of such expectations on your experiences throughout the program. This interview is meant to be carried out in a conversational style. I have some questions I would like to ask, however, I am also interested in exploring new ideas as they arise.

I would like to remind you that you are not obligated to participate in the study or respond to any questions in the interview you do not wish to. You may choose to end the interview and/or your participation in this study at any time without repercussions. In order to gain a more accurate account of our conversation today, I will be audio recording our interview. Is this okay with you?

#### **INITIAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

- What motivated you to participate in a language program?
- How did you choose the destination/school and/or program?
- What goals did you set to achieve by the end of the program?

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Research Question 1: What expectations do participants have before participating in language programs abroad?**

*Probing Question 1A: Tell me about your expectations and feelings before enrolling in a language program...*

Follow-up questions:

- What did you imagine your first day of school to be like?
- What feelings did you experience before the program started?
- How did you think your experience would differ compared with learning English at home?
- How did you picture your classmates and teaching staff?
- What linguistic achievements did you anticipate by the end of the study program?

*Probing Question 1B: Tell me whether you experienced fear or anxiety of the unknown (new class, new classmates, new country, limited language capability etc...)*

Follow-up questions:

- What challenges did you think you would face after arriving in a new country?
- How did you intend to overcome those challenges?
- What steps did you think would be necessary for adjusting to a new environment?
- How did you intend to overcome the language barrier and/or cultural differences?

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### **Research Question 2: How are the expectations of participants on language programs formed?**

*Probing Question: Take me back to the time you first discovered there was an opportunity to participate in a language program abroad...*

Follow-up questions:

- How did you discover the existence of language programs abroad?
- What sources of information did you use for choosing a language school?
- How did other people's experiences influence your choice of school?
  - Where did you find out about others' experiences (e.g. word of mouth, education fair, online – blogs, Facebook, TripAdvisor etc)?
- How influential were your parents and/or teachers in making the decision to enroll in a program?

### **Research Question 3: What experiences do participants undergo while studying abroad?**

*Probing question 3A: Take me back to the first day of class...*

Follow-up questions:

- How did the class go in comparison to how you imagined it to be?
  - How did it compare to the classroom setting you were familiar with in your home environment? If similar were you surprised? If different were you surprised?
- How accurate were your expectations of the course?

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

- Would you say that your expectations were met?
- If you were the manager of a language school, what would you do differently to meet students' expectations?

*Probing question 3B: Tell me how your experience developed throughout the program...*

### Follow-up questions:

- How different were the later classes compared to the first?
- What improvements did you notice in your own development as the program progressed?
- How would you characterize the relationships between you and your classmates?
- How did the environment affect your academic performance?

*Is there anything else you would like to tell me about participating in this language program?*

**Debrief:** That concludes my questions. Thank you for your participation and sharing your experiences about your expectations and experiences of participating in a short-term English program. If you would like, I can return to you your interview transcript when it's ready. This will give you the chance to elaborate on and clarify details from the experiences you have contributed. Thank you.

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### Appendix F (Appreciation Letter to Participants)

University of Waterloo

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study entitled "Exploring Students' Expectations and Experiences of Short-term Language Programs". As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to explore students' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto, Canada.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of students' expectations, therefore letting language schools to become aware of students' needs. The schools, consequently, will be able to formulate clear strategies on how to effectively organize the learning process to maximize students' expectations. Moreover, by providing good services and satisfying students' needs, schools will be able to promote their programs to a wider audience and attract more clients. Regarding the students, the results of the research, if applied, will provide them with better experiences and will motivate them to make more significant language improvements. Moreover, by having good experiences, they will be willing to come back to the school they studied at and/or spread the information via Word-of-Mouth.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by April 2017, I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone as noted below. This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca). The supervisor for this study, Professor Karla Boluk, may also be reached at 519-888-4567 ext. 34045 or email [kboluk@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:kboluk@uwaterloo.ca) for any questions regarding this study.

Ekaterina McKnight

226-989-2918

[e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca)

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

**Appendix G (Appreciation Letter to Language Schools)**

University of Waterloo

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to thank you for agreeing to accommodate me and aid in the recruitment of study participants in this research entitled "Exploring Students' Expectations and Experiences of Short-term Language Programs". As a reminder, the purpose of this research is to explore students' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program in Toronto, Canada.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of students' expectations, therefore letting language schools to become aware of students' needs. The schools, consequently, will be able to formulate clear strategies on how to effectively organize the learning process to maximize students' expectations. Moreover, by providing good services and satisfying students' needs, schools will be able to promote their programs to a wider audience and attract more clients. Regarding the students, the results of the research, if applied, will provide them with better experiences and will motivate them to make more significant language improvements. Moreover, by having good experiences, they will be willing to come back to the school they studied at and/or spread the information via Word-of-Mouth.

Please remember that any data pertaining to participants will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by April 2017, I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone as noted below. This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca). The supervisor for this study, Professor Karla Boluk, may also be reached at 519-888-4567 ext. 34045 or email [kboluk@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:kboluk@uwaterloo.ca) for any questions regarding this study.

Ekaterina McKnight

226-989-2918, [e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:e2mcknig@uwaterloo.ca)

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

**Appendix H (Consent Form)**

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

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I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Ekaterina McKnight of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca).

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO  
— —

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

— —

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

— —

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

### Appendix I (In-class Recruitment Verbal Script)

Hello, I would like to tell you that Ekaterina McKnight, an MA candidate in the Recreation and Leisure Department at the University of Waterloo, Canada, will be joining us shortly to conduct her research in our language school. Her study is entitled "Exploring Students' Expectations and Experiences of Short-term Language Programs". She would like to explore students' expectations prior to enrolling in a language program and their experiences throughout the program.

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes in length, which will take place in a mutually agreed location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, she will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 10 years in my supervisor's office, which will be locked. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

I would like to assure you that Ekaterina's study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you are interested in participating, please write your name down, as well as your email address, and preferred days and times, and Ekaterina will be in touch with you shortly. Thank you.

Name

Email

Best Days and Ti

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

*TABLE NINE: Literature Review Overview*

| <b>Author &amp; Date</b> | <b>Type of Study</b>   | <b>Geographical Focus</b>                            | <b>Contribution</b>  |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| Gertner, 2010            | Quantitative, a self-administered questionnaire                                  | Canada, England, Australia, Mexico, Spain, Argentina | Country Images<br>Study Abroad Programs<br>Tourist Destinations        |
| Lörz et.al., 2015        | Quantitative, survey   | Germany  | Social Inequality<br>Study Abroad                                      |
| Cristobal & Llorca, 2006 | Quantitative, personal questionnaires  | Spain  | Language Schools<br>Market Research                                    |
| Eder et.al., 2010        | Qualitative, online “chat” interviews, inductive analysis                        | USA  | International Participants<br>Destination Choice<br>Travel Decisions   |
| Lam et.al., 2011         | Quantitative, Questionnaire  | Malaysia   | Educational Tourism,<br>Customer Satisfaction<br>Push and Pull Factors |
| Miao & Harris, 2012      | Mixed methods: questionnaires, learning journals, and participant observations   | The UK, USA, Australia                               | Study Tours,<br>Participants' Personalities                            |
| Collentine, 2004         | Quantitative, questionnaire  | Spain, USA   | Learning Contexts<br>Participants' Gains in Vocabulary                 |
| Segalowitz et.al., 2004  | Mixed methods: questionnaires, oral fluency interviews, and computer-based tasks | Spain, USA   | Second Language Acquisition, Learning Contexts                         |
| Allen & Herron, 2003     | Mixed methods: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations          | Paris, France  | Study Abroad<br>Linguistic Outcomes                                    |
| Brecht et.al., 1993      | Quantitative   | The Soviet Union                                     | Study Abroad<br>Language Gain<br>Predictors                            |
| Hernández, 2016          | Questionnaires, language contact profiles, oral proficiency interviews           | Spain  | Speaking Gains<br>Language Contact<br>Short-term Language<br>Tours     |
| Llanes & Muñoz, 2013     | Mixed methods: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires                     | The UK, Ireland, Spain                               | Age Effects<br>Learning Contexts<br>Second Language                    |

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

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|-------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|
|                         |  |                            | Acquisition  |
| Dwyer, 2004             | Quantitative, surveys  | USA                        | Study Abroad<br>Program Duration   |
| Mayo, 2003              | Quantitative   | Spain                      | Foreign Language<br>Acquisition<br>Length of Exposure  |
| Allen, 2010             | Triangulation: semi-structured interviews, participants' learning blogs, and questionnaires  | France, Nantes             | Learning Motivation<br>Second Language<br>Short-term Study<br>Abroad                                       |
| Weger, 2013             | Quantitative, questionnaire  | USA,<br>Washington D.C     | Second Language<br>Motivation<br>Adult Learners  |
| Badstübner & Ecke, 2009 | Quantitative, questionnaires at the beginning & the end of the study program   | Germany,<br>Leipzig        | Participants<br>Expectations<br>Learning Progress<br>Summer Study<br>Abroad                                |
| Ketsman, 2012           | Qualitative: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, examining teaching materials  | Spain, USA                 | Participant<br>Expectations<br>Foreign Language<br>Classroom<br>Participant<br>Achievements                |
| Lobo & Gurney, 2014     | Mixed Methods Approach: a survey and semi-structured interviews  | Australia                  | Participants<br>Expectations<br>International<br>Participants<br>Participant attendance<br>and attribution |
| Isabelli-García, 2006   | Mixed Methods Approach: pre- and post-program oral proficiency interviews, informal interviews, diary entries, and social network contact logs | Argentina,<br>Buenos Aires | Study Abroad<br>Motivation<br>and Attitudes<br>Second Language<br>Acquisition                              |
| Hernández, 2010         | Mixed Methods Approach: a questionnaire, pretest and posttest oral proficiency interviews, and language contact profile                        | Spain, Madrid              | Participant Motivation<br>Second Language<br>Oral Proficiency<br>Study Abroad                              |
| Pitts, 2009             | Ethnographic study: participant observations, narrative semi-structured  | France, Paris              | Participant<br>Expectations<br>Study Abroad  |

## Exploring Participants' Expectations and Experiences of Short-Term Language Programs

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|-------------------------|---|--|--|
|                         | interviews, and unstructured participant journaling   |  | Adjustment, Stress<br>International Study                                    |
| Goldoni, 2013           | Ethnographic case study approach: semi-structured interviews, participant observations, written documents, and emails | Spain: Cadiz, Valencia, and Seville    | Participant Immersion<br>Experience<br>Cultural Clash<br>Study Abroad        |
| Foster, 2014            | Mixed Methods Approach: questionnaires and focus groups   | United Kingdom                         | Participant<br>Destination Choice<br>Study Abroad<br>Push and Pull Factors   |
| Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002 | Mixed Methods Approach: questionnaires (surveys) and focus groups   | Australia                              | Decision Making<br>Process<br>Push and Pull Factors<br>Study Abroad          |
| Wilkinson, 1998         | Ethnographic study: written surveys, ethnographic interviews, observations, and documents checking                    | France, Valcourt                       | Participant Beliefs<br>Expectations<br>Study Abroad                          |
| Ruddock & Turner, 2007  | Interpretative Phenomenological Approach: in-depth interviews   | Jamaica, Malta, Greenland, Australia   | International Learning<br>Experience<br>Cultural Sensitivity<br>Study Abroad |
| Amuzie & Winke, 2009    | Mixed Methods Approach: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews   | The northern part of the United States | Learner Beliefs<br>Study Abroad<br>Learner Autonomy                          |
| Rivers, 1998            | Quantitative, surveys   | Russia                                 | Second Language<br>Gain<br>Homestay placements<br>Study Abroad               |
| Magnan & Back, 2007     | Mixed Methods Approach: questionnaires, oral proficiency interviews, and language contact profiles                    | France, Paris and Montpellier          | Linguistic Gain<br>Social Interaction<br>Study Abroad                        |
| Cubillos et.al., 2008   | Quantitative, questionnaires  | Spain and Costa Rica                   | Listening<br>Comprehension Skills<br>Short-term Study<br>Abroad Tour         |
| Martinsen, 2010         | Quantitative, surveys   | Argentina                              | Linguistic Gains<br>Oral Skills<br>Short-term Study<br>Abroad                |