

The careers of French language study abroad alumni

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Larger Mixed-Methods Study Research Questions

- To what extent and how is language ability valued, recognized and cultivated across the lifespan of U.S.-based FL learners?
- How have language ability and study abroad figured in the career development of these participants?

Project Partners

- *Survey design, field testing, administration:* American Councils for International Education
- *Recruitment:* The Forum on Education Abroad, partner universities and SA providers
- *Dissemination:* WPSU Public Television, Multilingual Matters/ Channel View Publications
- *Funding:* United States Department of Education

Project Design

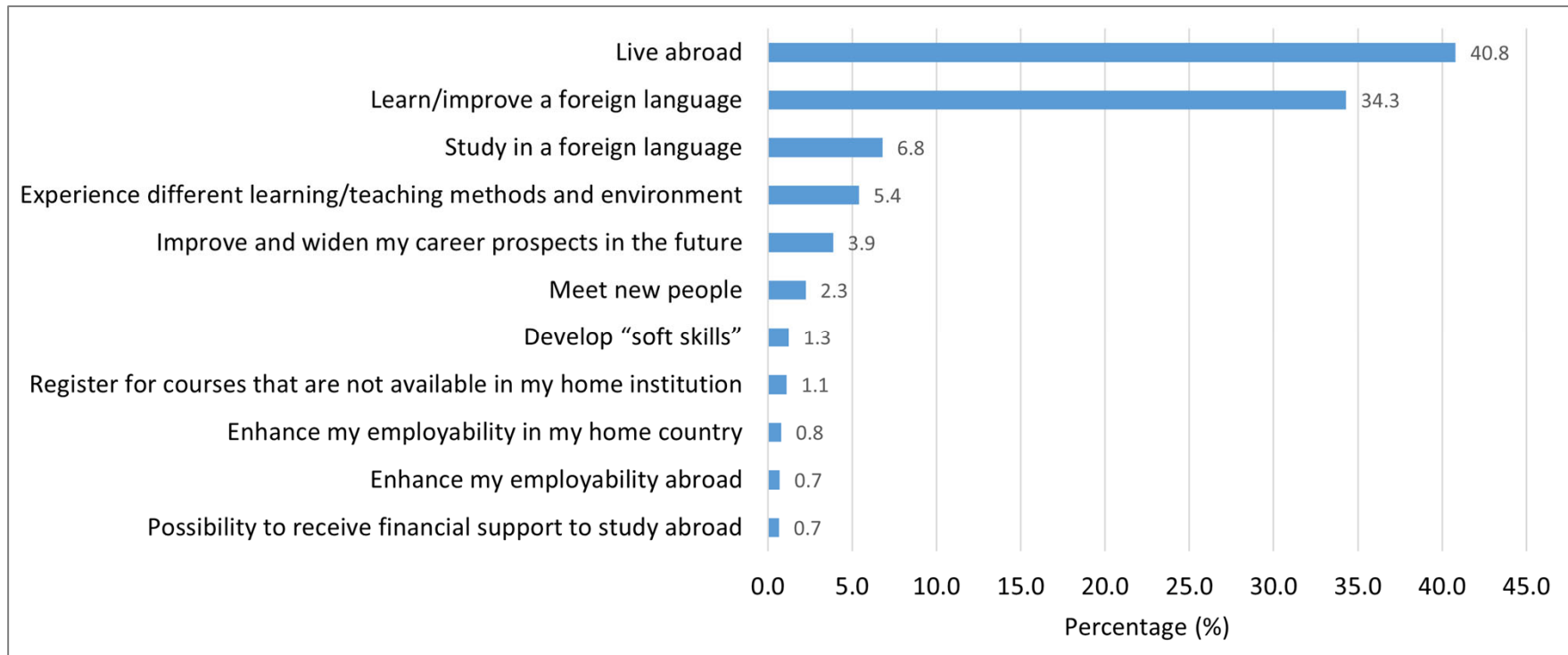
- Open to members of the U.S.-based **general educated public of all ages** who claim study abroad experience and proficiency in a language other than English
- Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design
 - First strand: Large-scale quantitative online survey (February - June 2019; N = 4899)
 - Second strand: Qualitative professional life history interviews with selected survey participants (September 2019 - June 2020; N= 54, **N=20 learners of French**)

Motives for language learning

Q21. Top one reason they have chosen to study language(s)



Motives for study abroad

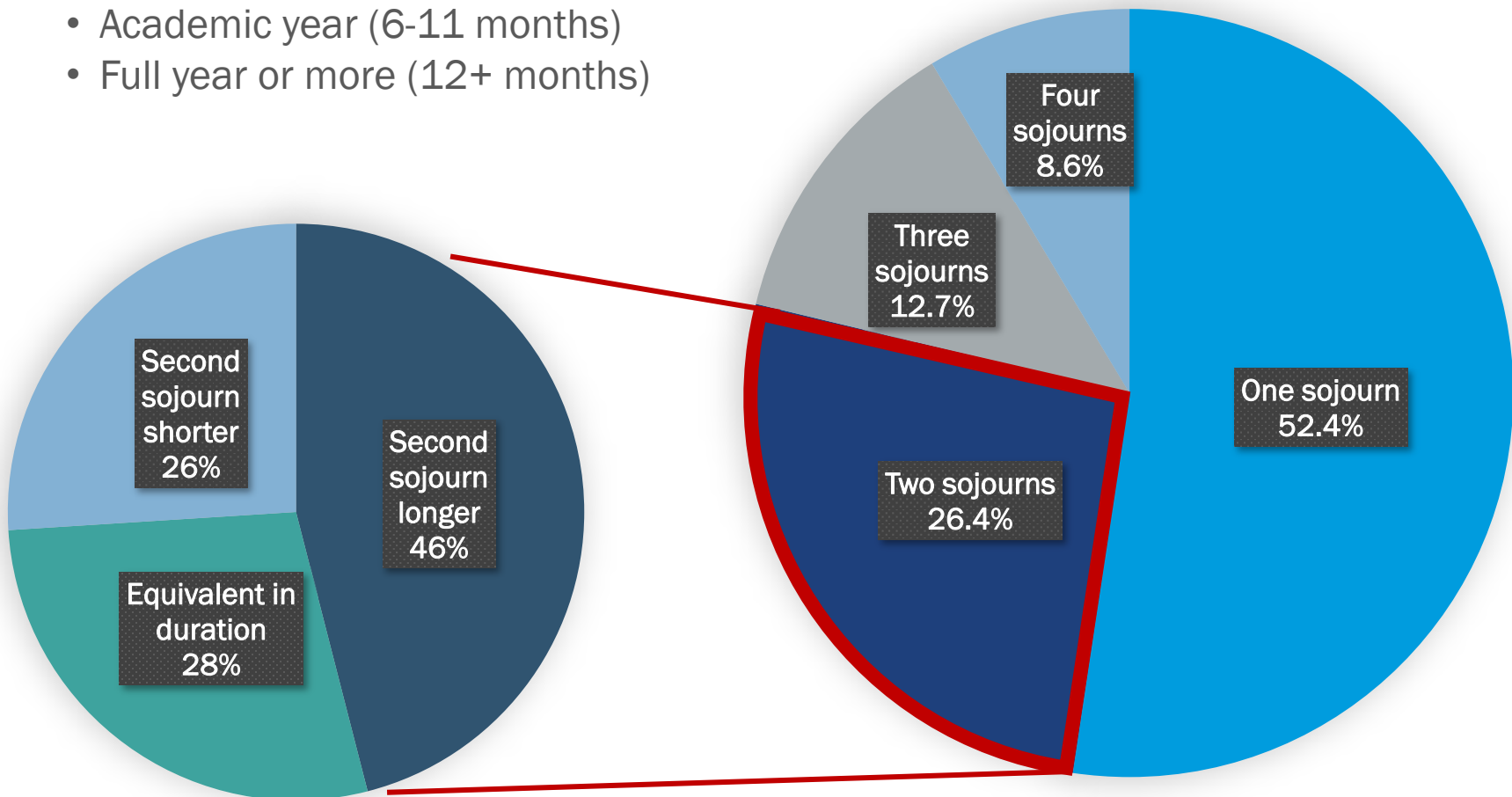


Multiple sojourns and their durations

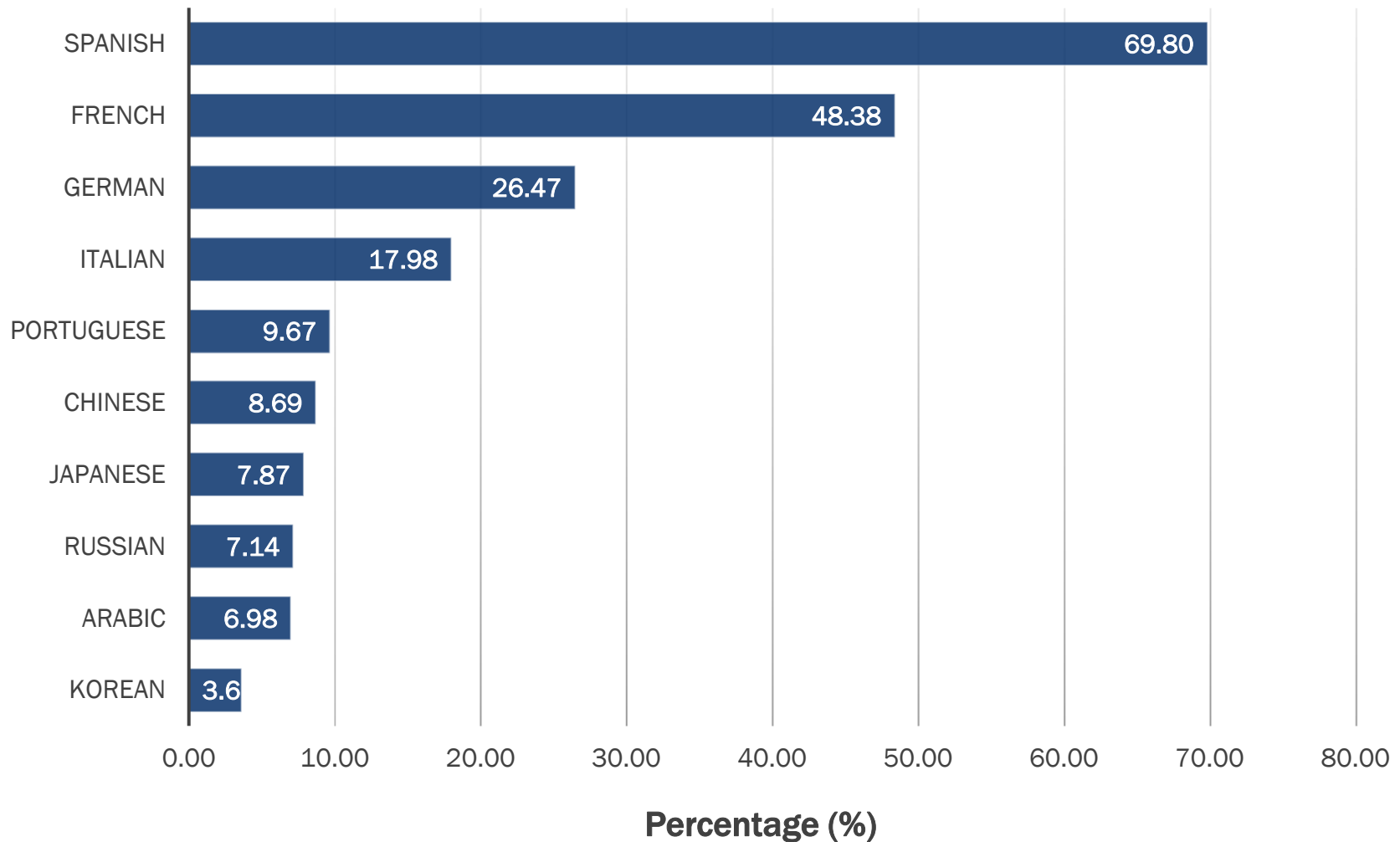
Duration of study abroad:

- Short term (2-8 weeks)
- Semester (2-5 months)
- Academic year (6-11 months)
- Full year or more (12+ months)

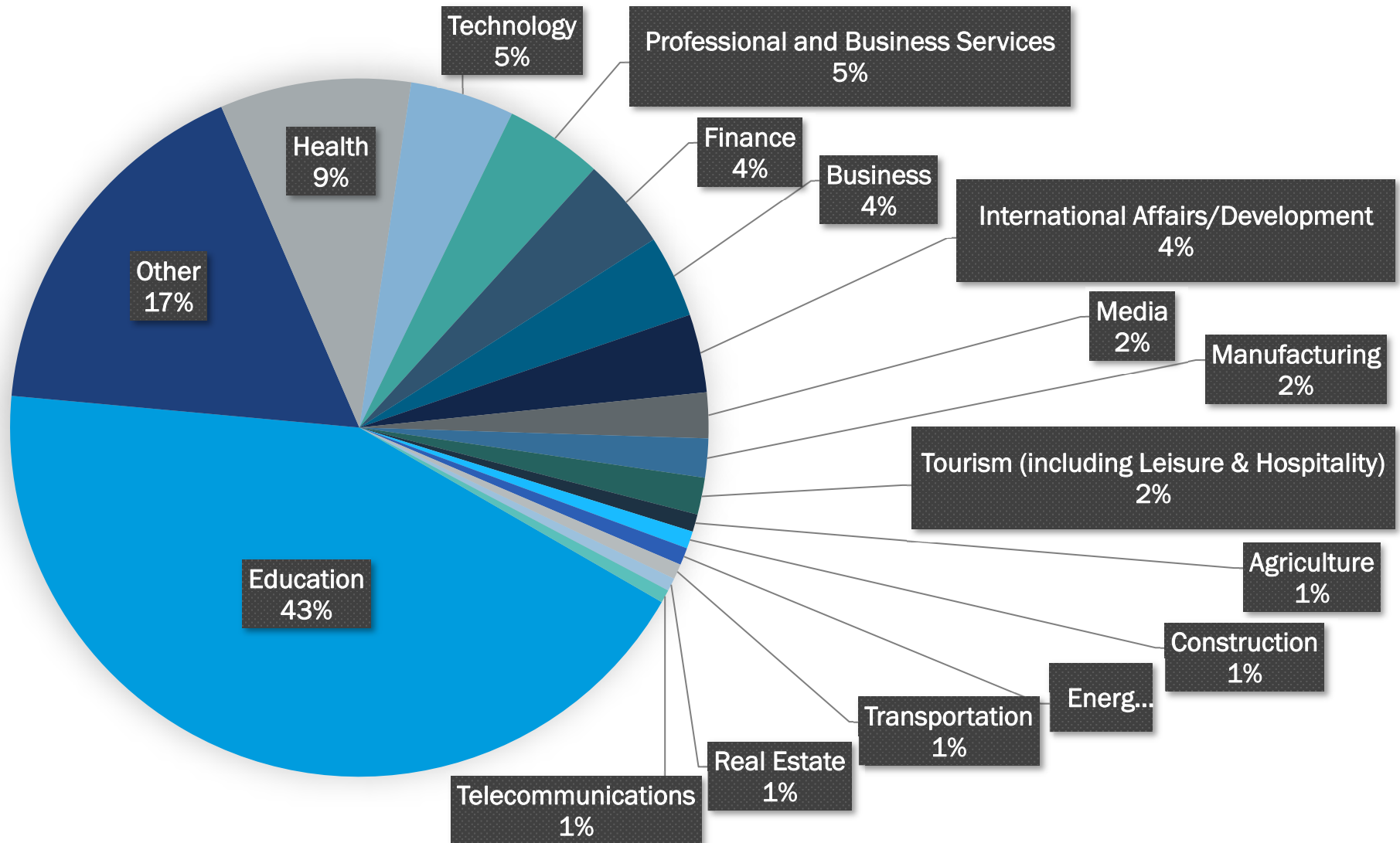
Percentage of respondents (%)



The ten most common languages in our sample

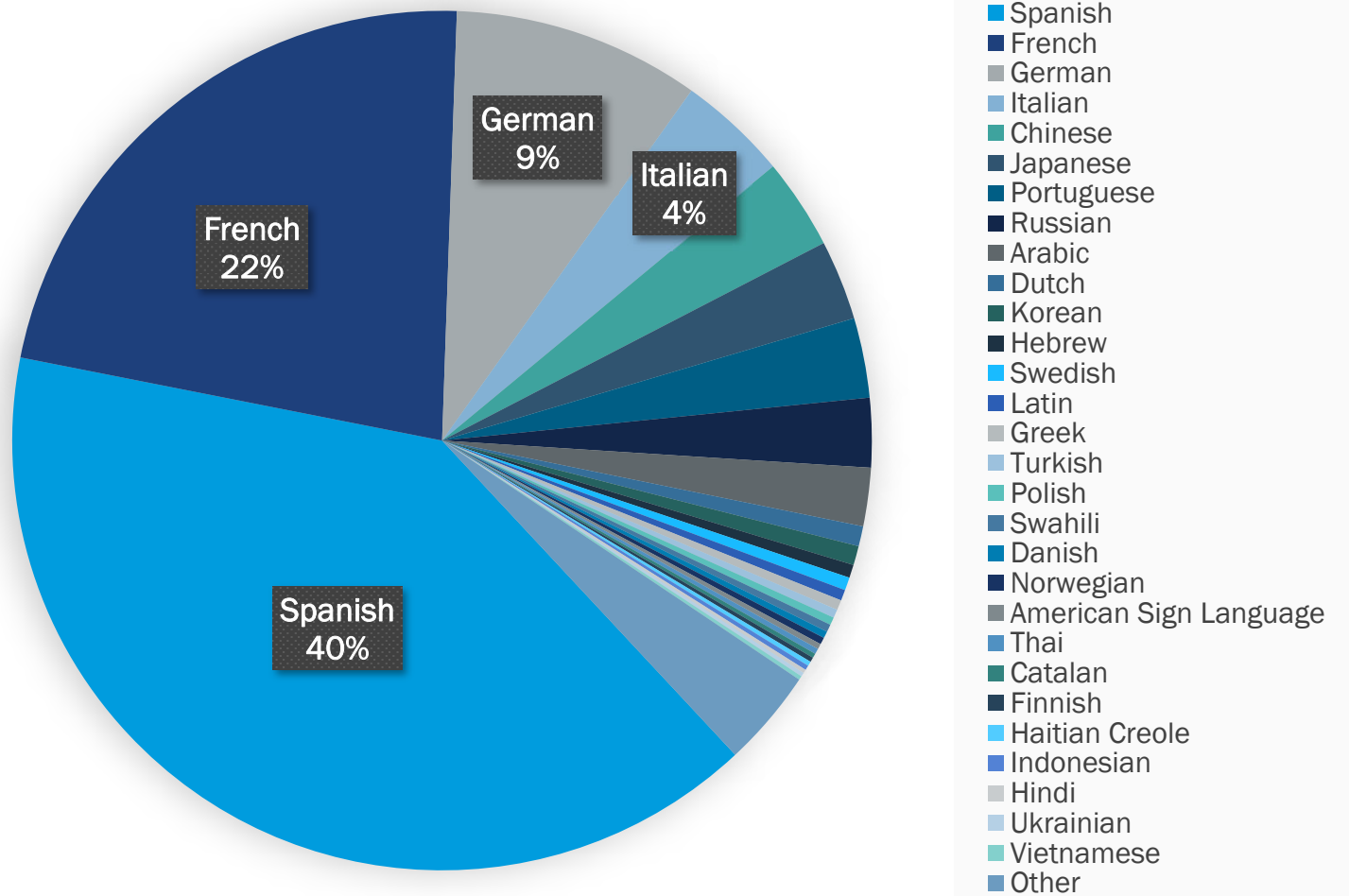


Fields of employment



How many people have used their additional languages at work? 65%

List of languages that are used at work (by at least five respondents)



Percentage among all reported languages (%)

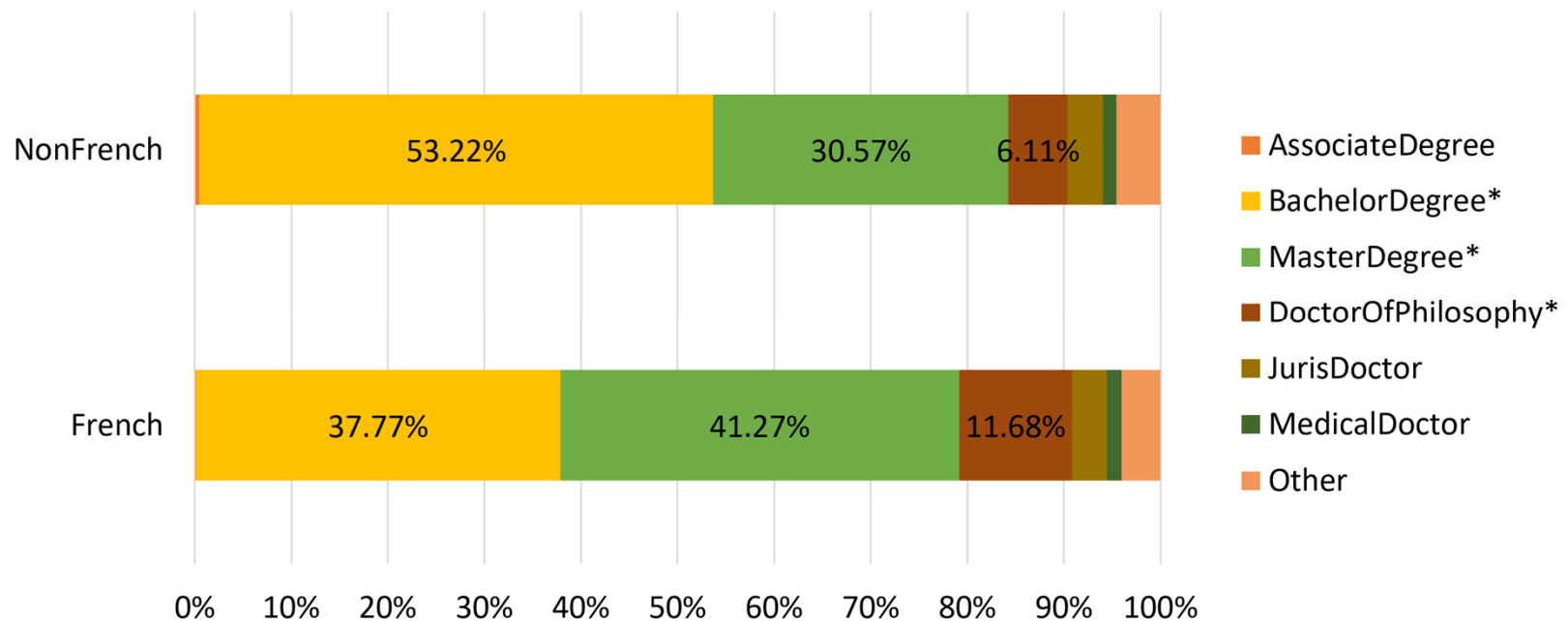
Note. In this table, the denominator used for calculating percentages is 2716.

Uses of additional languages in general: 79% (Zhuang & Kinginger, 2024)

| Activity | N | Percentage (%) |
|--|------|----------------|
| Engaging in informal conversation/small talk/courtesy needs | 2207 | 81 |
| Listening to radio/podcasts/audiobooks, TV/movies or other media | 1776 | 65 |
| Reading news, blogs, social media | 1765 | 65 |
| Sending text/SMS messages and emails | 1696 | 62 |
| Surfing the Internet | 1476 | 54 |
| Using social media, online chatting | 1440 | 53 |
| Long and short phone conversations | 1322 | 49 |
| Service encounters | 1245 | 46 |
| Reading fiction, literature, scholarly writing | 1148 | 42 |
| Engaging in community activities | 902 | 33 |
| Volunteering to help people whose first language is not English | 723 | 27 |
| Writing a diary or blog | 276 | 10 |
| Other | 213 | 8 |

Pursuit of advanced degrees

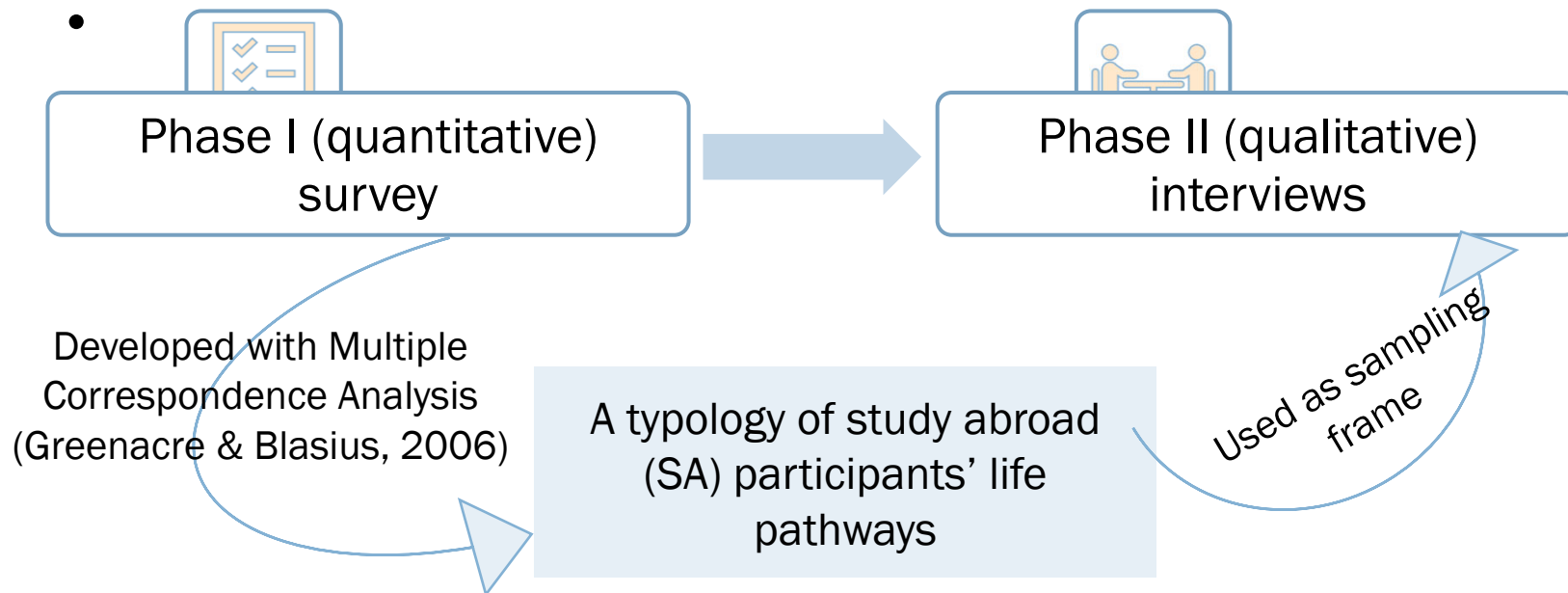
What is the highest degree you attained? / What is the degree program you are currently enrolled in?



Note: For the entire question as well as the three sub-categories marked with an asterisk (), the difference between French and non-French groups is statistically significant.*

Interviewee selection: Life history typology

- 2741 willing participants
- Goal: To interview as wide and representative range of survey participants as possible



Life history narratives

- In life stories, people find logical and emotional coherence in their life events. (Bamburg, 2010; Linde, 1986)
- “The ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with [life stories] become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory...” (Bruner, 1987, p. 31)

“Text reality” in narrative data (Pavlenko, 2007)

- Positive thinking as the “unnoticed religion of America” (Linde, 1993)
- Life stories of “generative” (i.e. psychologically healthy) Americans are about redemption: overcoming obstacles and resolving contradictions (McAdams, 2005) and thus lend themselves to the study of cognitive / emotional drama (perezhivanie).
- “From the Puritans to Emerson to Oprah, the redemptive self has morphed into many different storied forms in the past 400 years as Americans have sought to narrate their lives as redemptive tales of atonement, emancipation, recovery, fulfillment, and upward social mobility.” (McAdams, 2006: 17)

Narrative data analysis

- Reconstruct a “meta” life story from each interview (Riessman, 1993; Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014)
- Identify key cognitive-emotional dramatic/ developmental moments: “awakenings” or *perezhivanie*
- Examine how these dramatic moments contribute to overall coherence (Linde, 1986) and build stories of redemption (McAdams, 2005)

Career-related use of French

Stories illustrating **direct relevance of proficiency in French** for careers in education, business, government service, engineering and the arts

Stories of **French as a gateway to multilingualism** and multilingual careers in education, government service, international development and global health

James: Professor of Sociology in France

- (Age group 36-40)
- Year in Toulouse
- Early career professor of sociology in France
- Homestay clash of moral values:
 - “They were very conservative and I’m gay.”
 - “semi-adult child”
 - “awakened” his sociological imagination



Bonnie: Foreign Service and international education

- Age group: 51-60
- Blue-collar upbringing in small-town Minnesota
- Short-term study abroad in northern France during high school
- *Homestay clash in everyday practices
- College international affairs major
- One year in Ireland
- “I think everybody's got a switch that, when they travel outside the country for the first time, either they are amazed and enthralled and that switch is flipped and they think, Oh my God, there's a whole world out here I knew nothing about! I want to see more, right? Or they say, Oh my God, I want to run home and stay in my bed. This is too much.”



Bonnie's career

Received a scholarship for an M.A. in international affairs

Casually took the Foreign Service examination, and passed

Served at the U.S. embassy in London, then in Madagascar and Mauritius with “amazing adventures”

Now works in international education administration

A close-up, slightly blurred portrait of a woman with dark, curly hair, looking down and smiling gently. The image is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Amelia: Arts journalism and management, Playwright

- Age group: 31-35
- Year in Paris, translated her first play
- Internship in theater communication (NYC)
- As a programming coordinator for the Alliance Française, facilitated the visits of French artists to the U.S.
- Aspires to found a residential theater collective

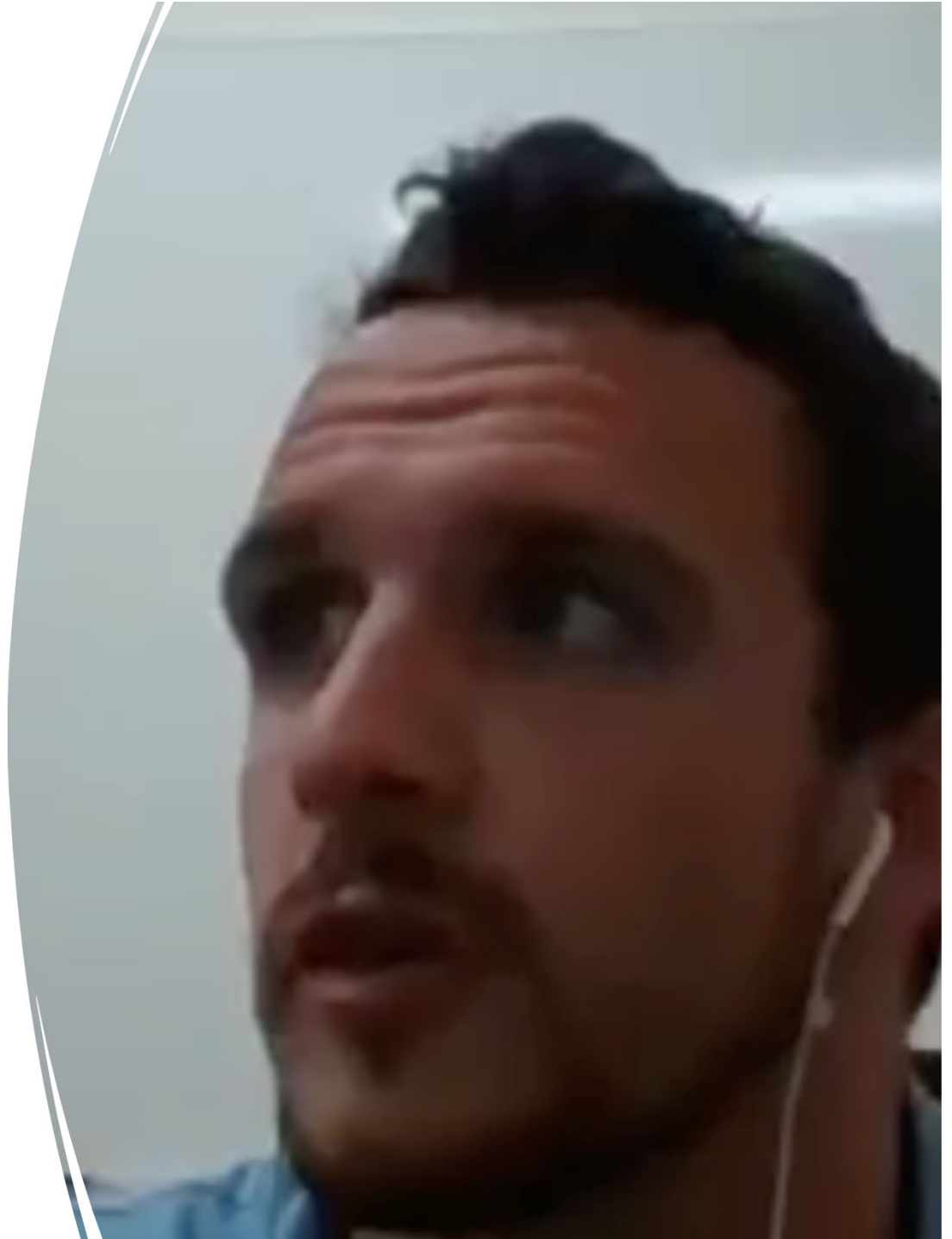
Maryse: International banking

- Age group: Over 60
- 9-week summer immersion in France, AY in Bordeaux
- MA & PhD in modern French literature, Fulbright year in France
- Program development for a medical school
- Recruited by a multinational bank, promoted to Vice President
- Independent consulting business



Tim: Ocean engineering

- Age group: 25-30
- 5-year BS/MS program in engineering and French
- Semester in Paris
- Internship semester in Marseille (highway project)
- Works for a French company building underwater positioning and navigation systems



Stephen: Professor of European history

- Age group: 51-60
- Working class family in rural New York with connections to the city (“Most everybody was police or fire department. That was how you made it.”)
- History and French major at a small liberal arts college in Virginia
- AY abroad in Paris
- Hosts were Holocaust survivors, eyewitnesses to major historical events
- Discovery, in the homestay, of his own smalltown naïveté

Stephen recalls living near Place Pigalle



Stephen's career

Ph.D. in European History with 3-year grant to study at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa

Professor of history in New York City until 9/11, now at a small, public college in a rural area

Has learned Spanish, German, Catalan and Romanian in addition to French and Italian because “history didn’t happen in English”

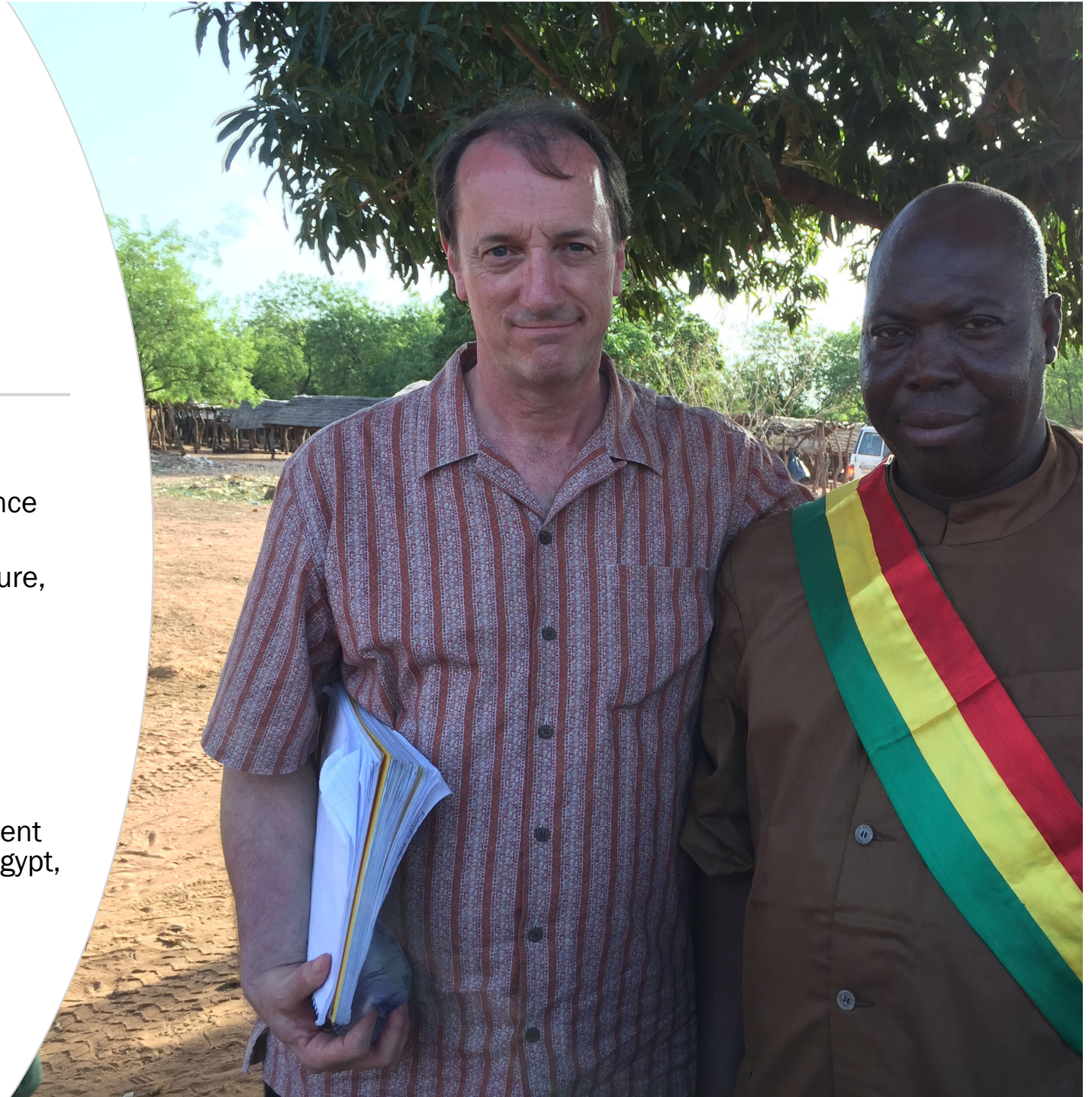


Eleanor: Online language learning materials development

- Age group: 31-35
- French and neuroscience major
- Term in Brittany
- Teaching year in rural France
- PhD in psycholinguistics
- Post-doc including development of educational apps
- Designs, implements and evaluates language learning apps for a private company

Anton: International development

- Age group: 51-60
- Sabbatical year in France during school years
- Major in French literature, year in Paris
- ESL teacher in Cairo
- Volunteer for village development project: Arabic immersion
- Thirty years of international development experience, mainly in Egypt, e.g., Executive role for Save the Children





Valerie: Government service

- Age group: 51-60
- Semester in France, business curriculum, little investment in language learning
- Undergraduate degree in finance with minor in French, MBA
- Department of Commerce
- Intensive study of Russian, Diplomatic service in Moscow, responsible for negotiations in transportation and aerospace



Victoria: Global public health

- Age group:
- 36-40
- French, Spanish, Hausa, Zarma, Tamil, Setswana
- Semester in Niger, rural hospital internship
- Meningitis outbreak: “You can be the greatest doctor in the world, but if you have no equipment there’s nothing you can do.”
- Global public health (US AID): Supports HIV, tuberculosis and Ebola prevention efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mark: Peace Corps, Foreign Service

- Age group: Over 60
- Retired Foreign Service Officer:
- French German, Russian in school
- “Language jock” in the Peace Corps
- Foreign Service: First adult-onset learner of Korean to qualify as an interpreter
- Subsequently mastered Chinese, Japanese
- In high school: “Mr. R. came along with his Wollensak recorder and offered the oral, aural methods and, you know, speaking sentences and learning dialogues and saying the language, from the word go, it was a revolution. You know? Nothing like that had ever occurred in any language. Of course, that I'd ever heard up to that time. Anyway, so I kinda liked it.”

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Thomas: Anesthesia and pain medicine

- Age group: Over 60
- Youthful insouciance
- Summer in Paris
- Wandered for 8 years: “Ski bum” in the Western U.S, au pair, Hertz driver, union organizer, restaurant manager in Paris
- Doctor without Borders in the DRC
- Head of the COVID response team at a California VA hospital

Other highlights from qualitative data

Younger participants are more career-focused than older participants.

Younger participants are learning languages in the “digital wild.”

The experience of language learning enhances fluency in ELF (English as a Lingua Franca).

The homestay tends to be more dramatic, thus memorable, than other housing arrangements.

Study abroad often provokes discovery or revision of vocations.

What matters is the ontogenetic significance of study abroad in a lifetime of experience, students’ socio-economic horizons.

Alumni profiles

- Video profile series: <https://forumea.org/resources/data-collection/careers-of-language-study-abroad-alumni-a-comprehensive-investigation/>
- [Antonia Zunarelli](#), Indiana University alumna, studied in Italy
- [Courtney Hale](#), Northern Arizona University alumna, studied in Japan
- [Amelia Parenteau](#), Sarah Lawrence College alumna, studied in France
- [Alex Johnson](#), University of Minnesota alumnus, studied in the Dominican Republic



Project partners: Universities

Arizona State University

Dickinson College

Indiana University

Michigan State University

Northwestern University

University of Kansas

University of Michigan

University of Oregon CASLS

University of West Georgia

Bentley University

The George Washington
University

James Madison University

Northern Arizona University

Tulane University

University of New Orleans

University of Minnesota

University of Rochester

Yale University



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Project partners: International Education Organizations

Amideast

API Academic Programs International

CAPA Global Education Network

CEA Study Abroad

CET Academic Programs

IFA Institute for Field Education

IFSA Future Focused Study Abroad

ISA International Studies Abroad

ISEP International Student Exchange Programs

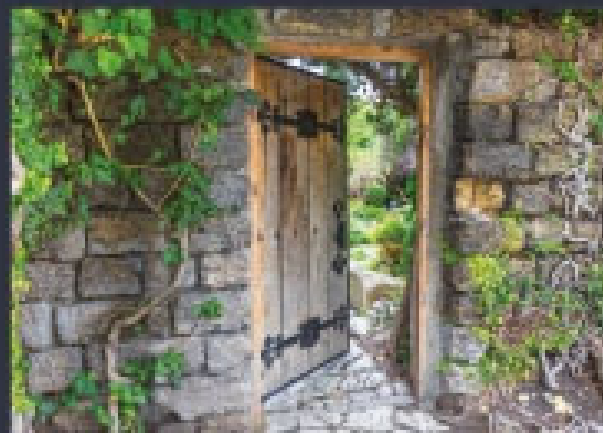
Spanish Studies Abroad

WYSE Travel Confederation

Our book
(2023)

**The Professional Lives
of Language Study
Abroad Alumni**

A Mixed Methods Investigation



Celeste Kinginger
and Jingyuan Zhuang

new
perspectives
on
language
and
education

Merci! Thank you!



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Q13. Other than English, list up to five languages that you have learned or are learning

