

The careers of language study abroad alumni: Results and applications from a mixed-methods investigation

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Project partners

- *Design and survey 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

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?

Method

- Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design
 - First strand: Large-scale quantitative online survey
 - Second strand: Qualitative professional life history interviews with selected survey participants

Data collection: Survey

- Large-scale online survey (SurveyMonkey, February-June 2019)
- U.S.-based, self-identifying language study abroad alumni
- 4,899 complete responses
- Main topics:
 - Perceived impact on professional options
 - Language profile (learning and use)
 - Study abroad
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Demographics (gender and age group)

Data collection: Interviews

- 54 interviews completed via Zoom (September 2019 - June 2020)
- Variety of professions matching the survey (education, arts, business, engineering, medicine, sports, etc.)
- Main topics: professional life story, college study abroad experiences, influences in childhood, language maintenance

Highlights from survey findings

- **Study abroad**

- Reasons for study abroad
- Multiple sojourns and their durations

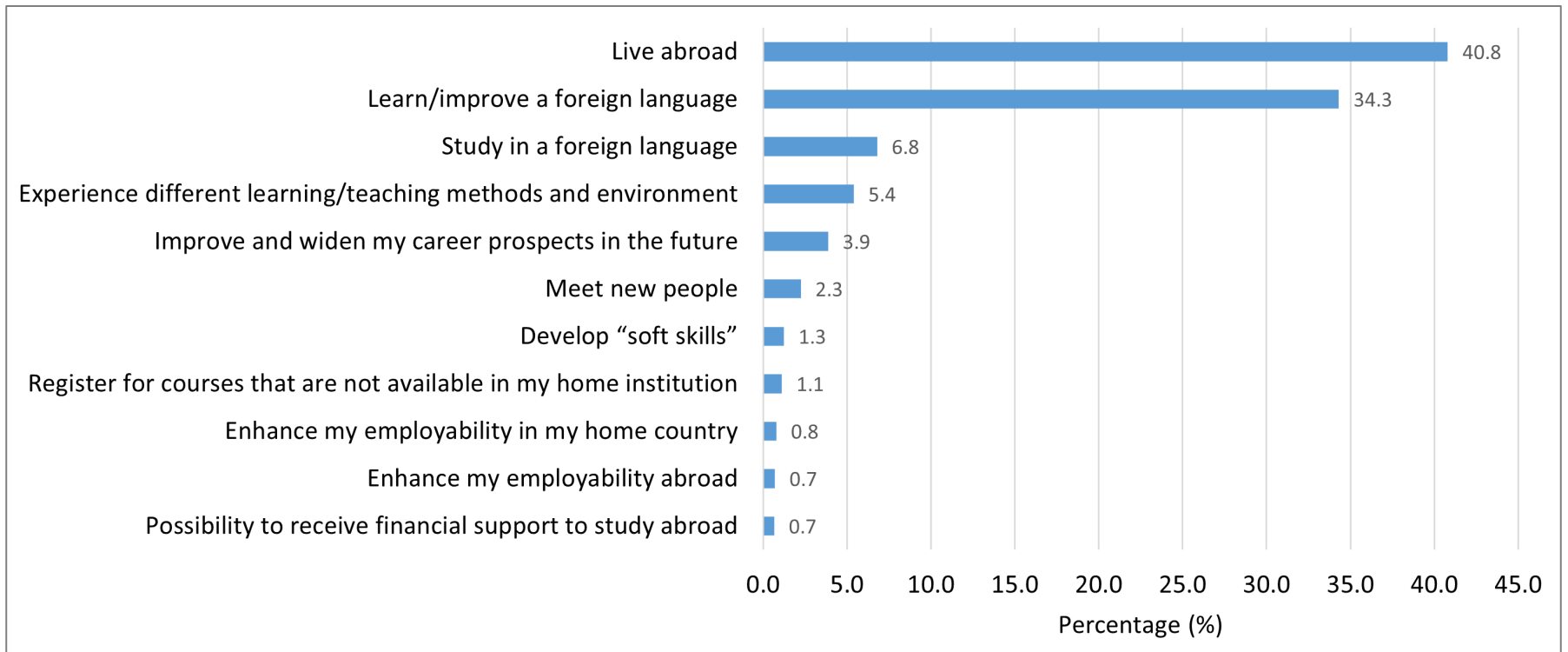
- **Language learning**

- What languages
- How many languages

- **Employment**

- Fields of employment
- Language use at work

Primary reason for study abroad

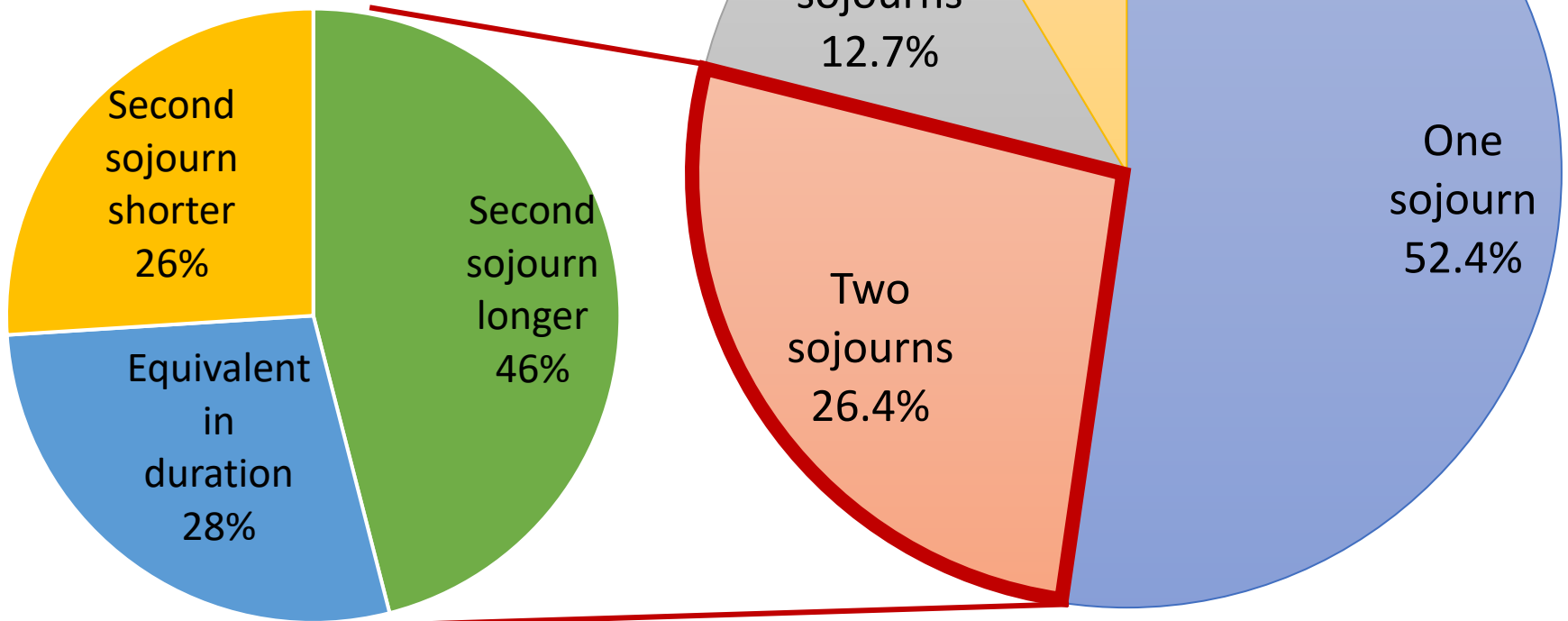


Multiple sojourns and their durations

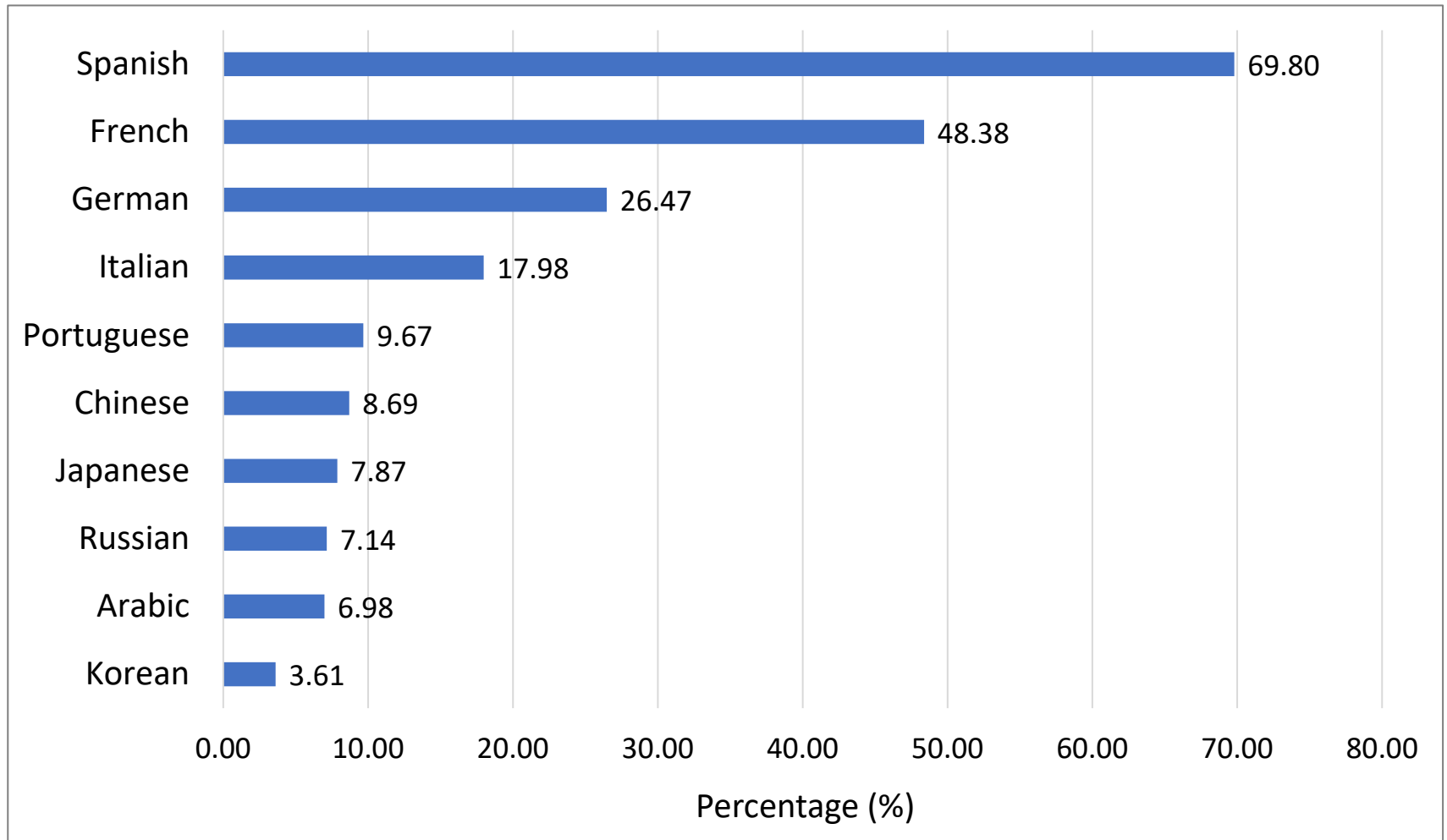
Percentage of respondents (%)

Duration of study abroad:

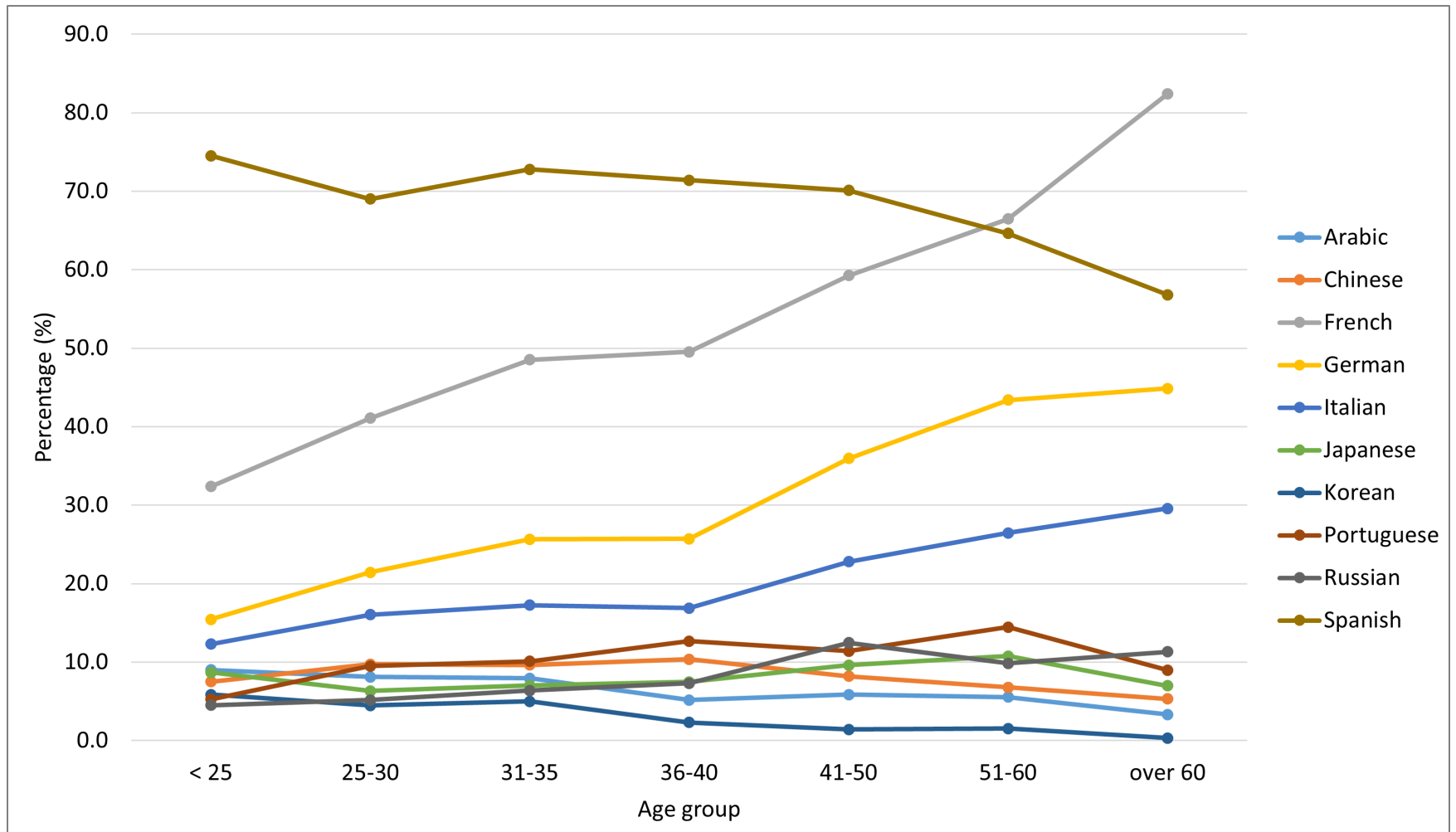
- Short term (2-8 weeks)
- Semester (2-5 months)
- Academic year (6-11 months)
- Full year or more (12+ months)



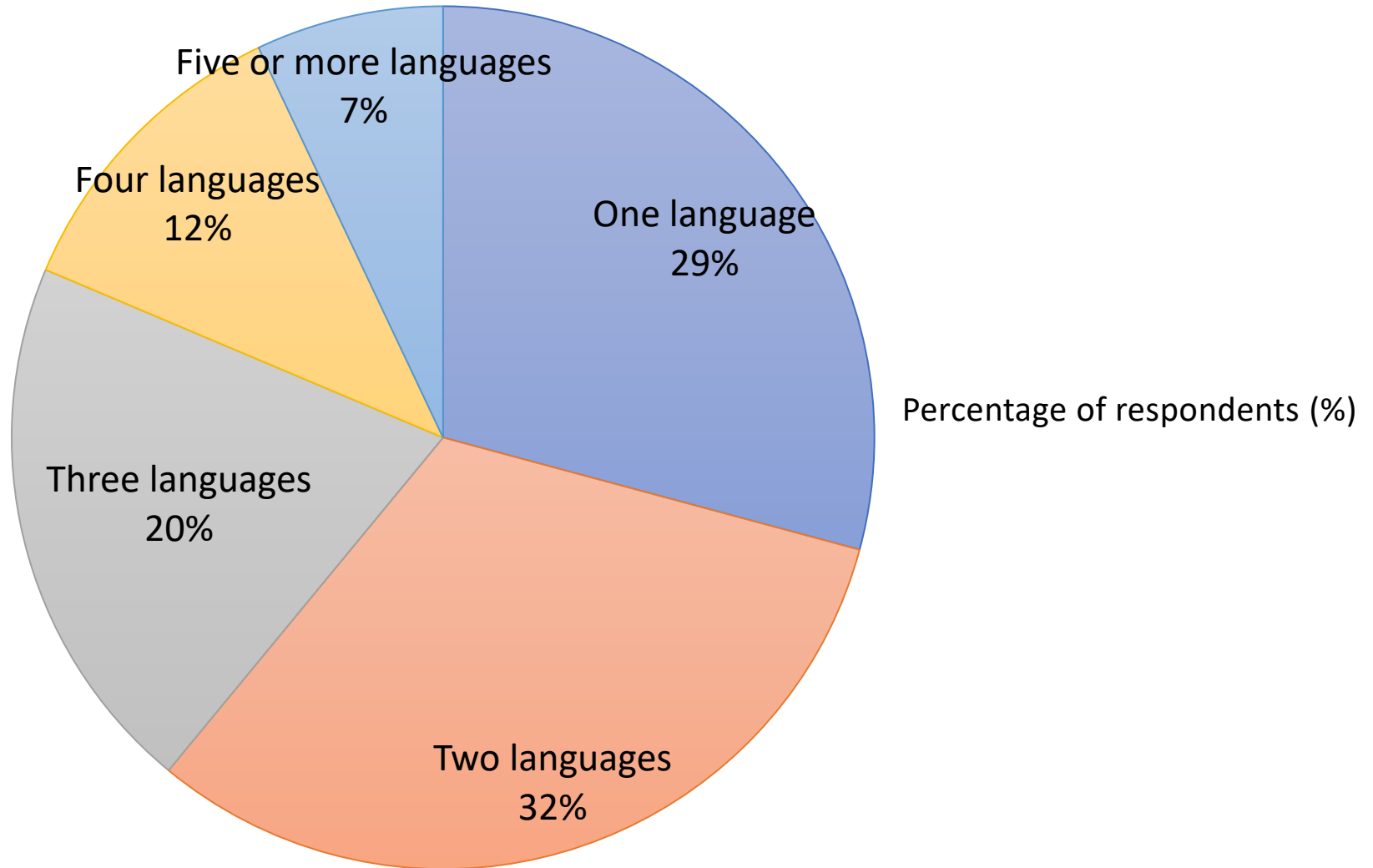
The ten most common languages in our sample



Generational changes in the languages learned



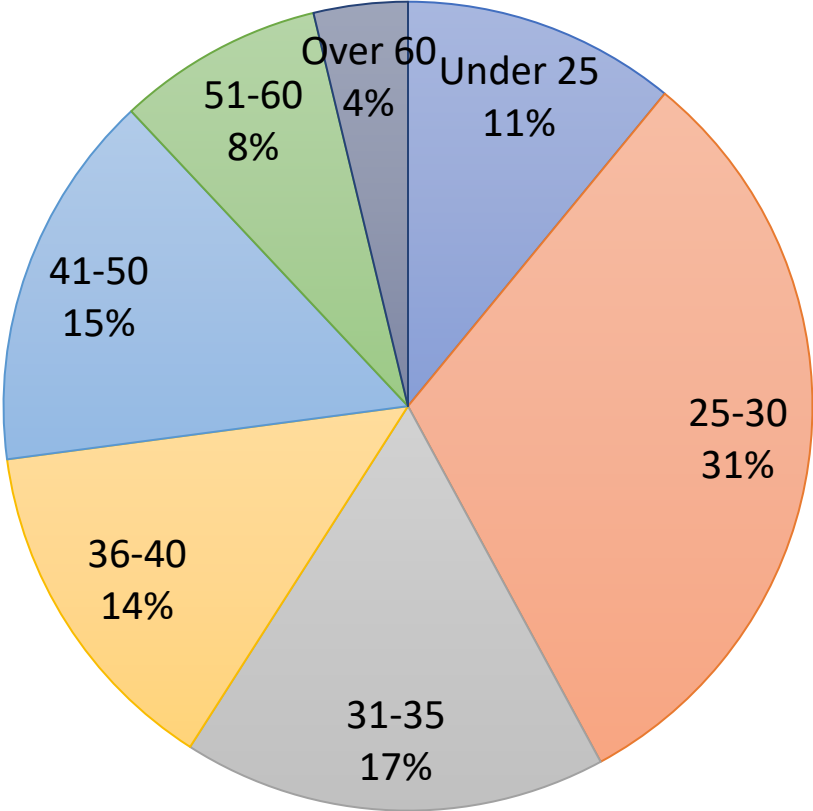
How many languages has each person studied?



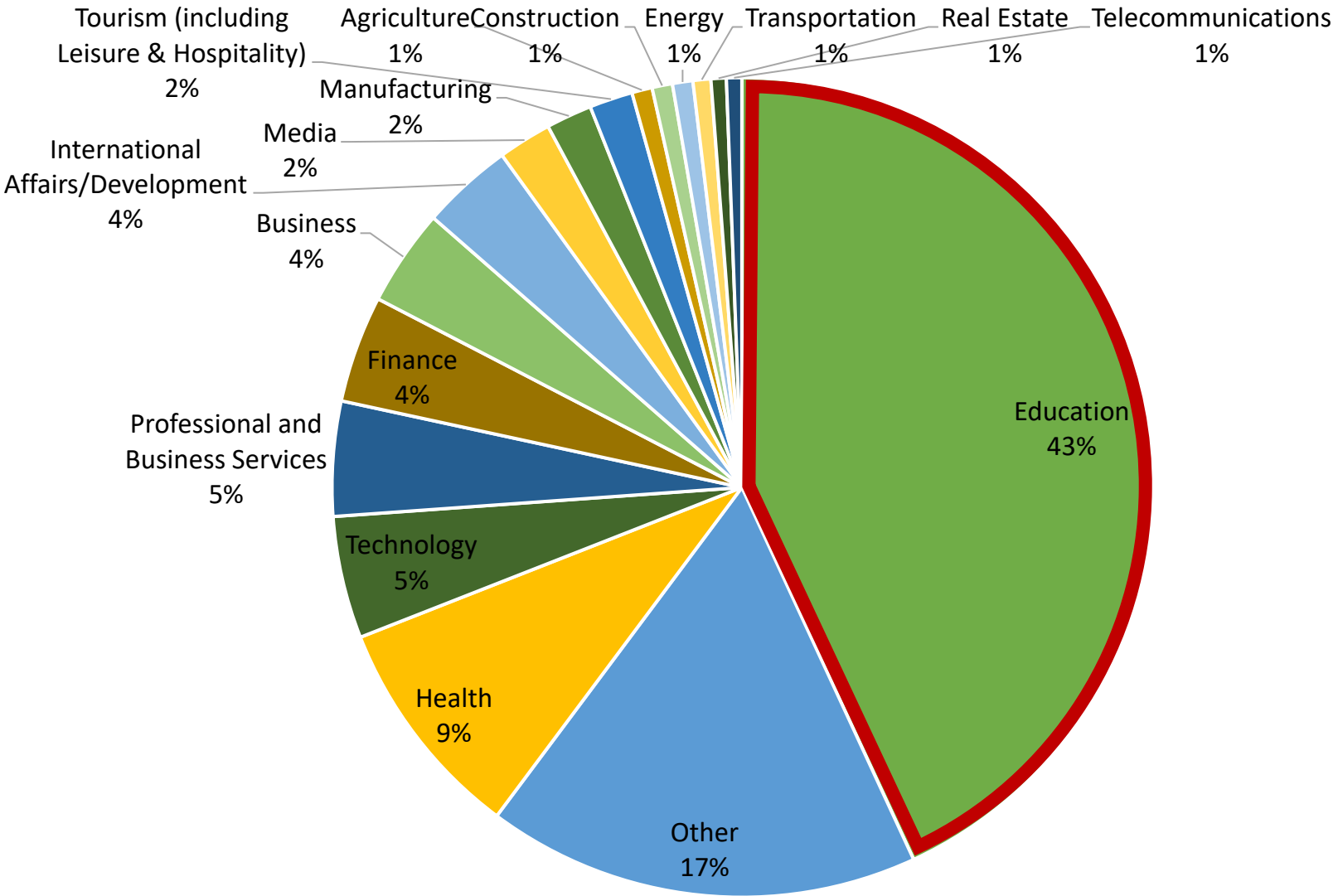
How many people in our sample are employed?

(77%, $n = 3786$)

Percentage of employed respondents from each age group



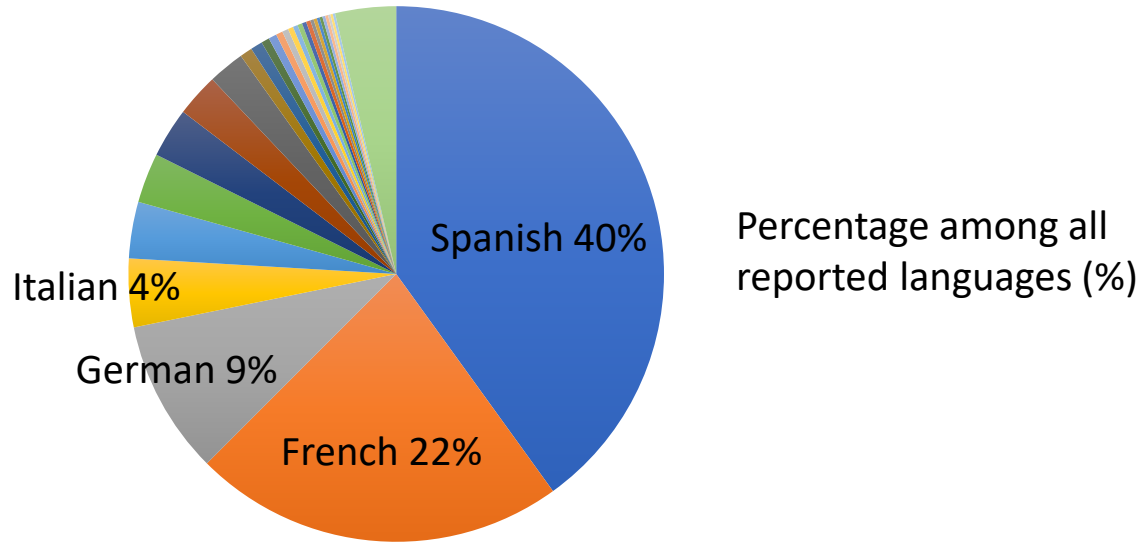
Fields of employment



How many people have used their additional languages at work?

(65%, $n = 2429$)

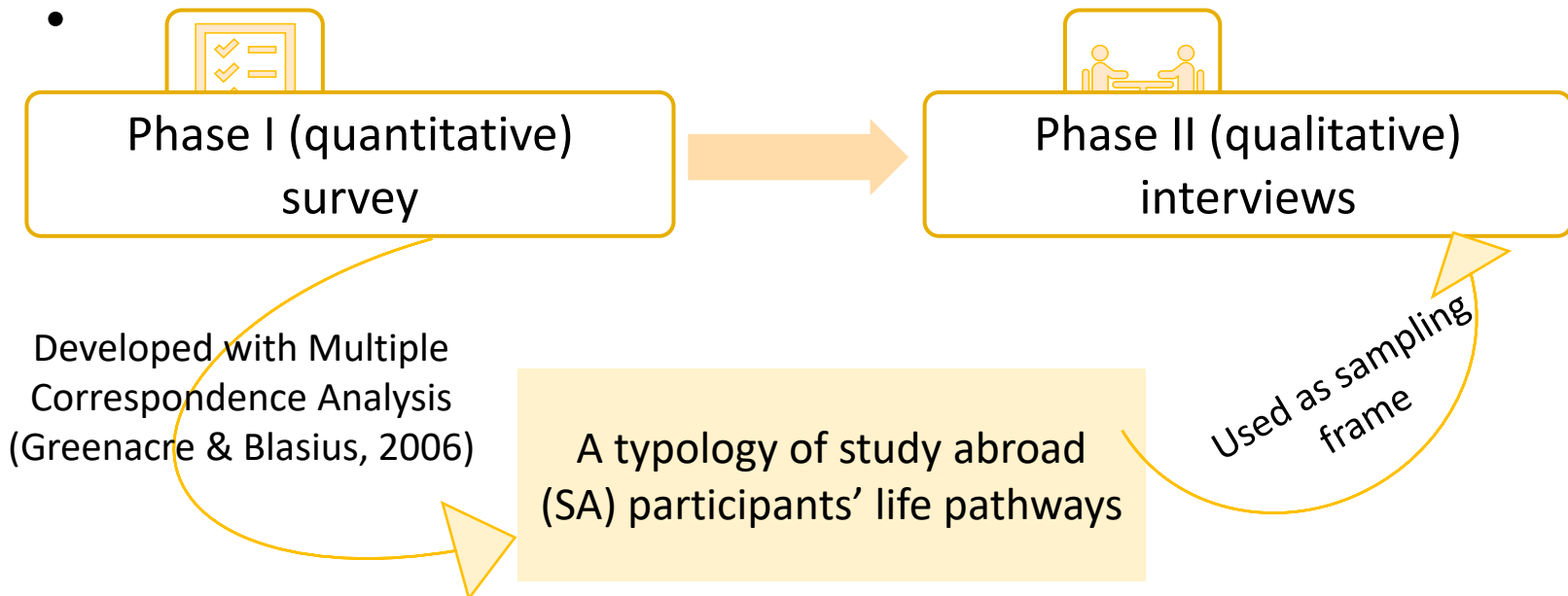
List of languages that are used at work (by at least five respondents)



- Spanish
- Italian
- Portuguese
- Dutch
- Swedish
- Turkish
- Danish
- Thai
- Haitian Creole
- Ukrainian
- French
- Chinese
- Russian
- Korean
- Latin
- Polish
- Norwegian
- Catalan
- Indonesian
- Vietnamese
- German
- Japanese
- Arabic
- Hebrew
- Greek
- Swahili
- American Sign Language
- Finnish
- Hindi
- Other

Interviewee selection: Life history typology

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



Operationalizing SA participants' life pathways

Construct	Aspect	Variable (survey question number)	
Participants' present (MCA I)	L2 use	Number of L2 activity types (Q17)	<25
		Number of L2 interlocutor types (Q19)	25-30
	Employment	Type of organization (Q38)	31-35
		Work sector (Q40)	36-40
		Position (Q39)	
	Cultural capital	Undergraduate institution's admission rate (Q49, Q56)	41-50
		Highest degree (Q50, Q57)	51-60
Participants' past (MCA II)	SA experience	Top reason for SA (Q22)	>60
		Duration of first SA program (Q23)	

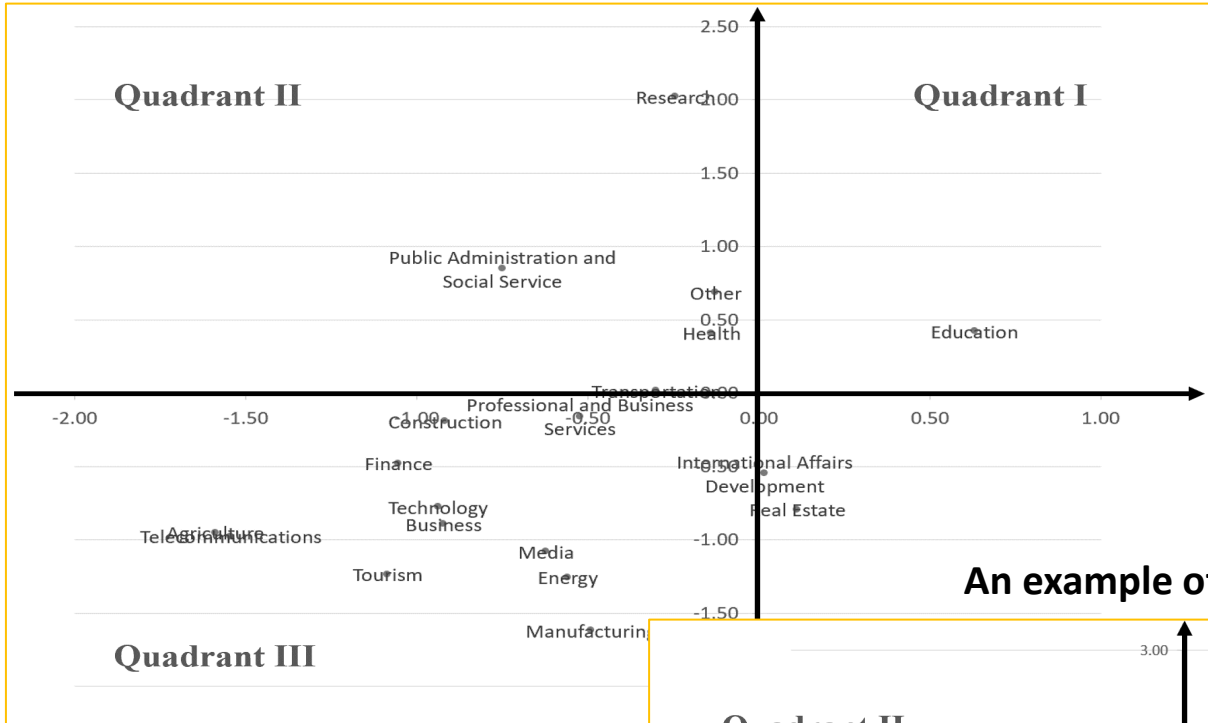
Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)

- A multivariate **exploratory** statistical technique that analyzes the pattern of relationships among several **categorical variables** based on associational frequency (Greenacre & Blasius, 2006)
- Mapping associations:
 - Proximity of points = greater association between the variables

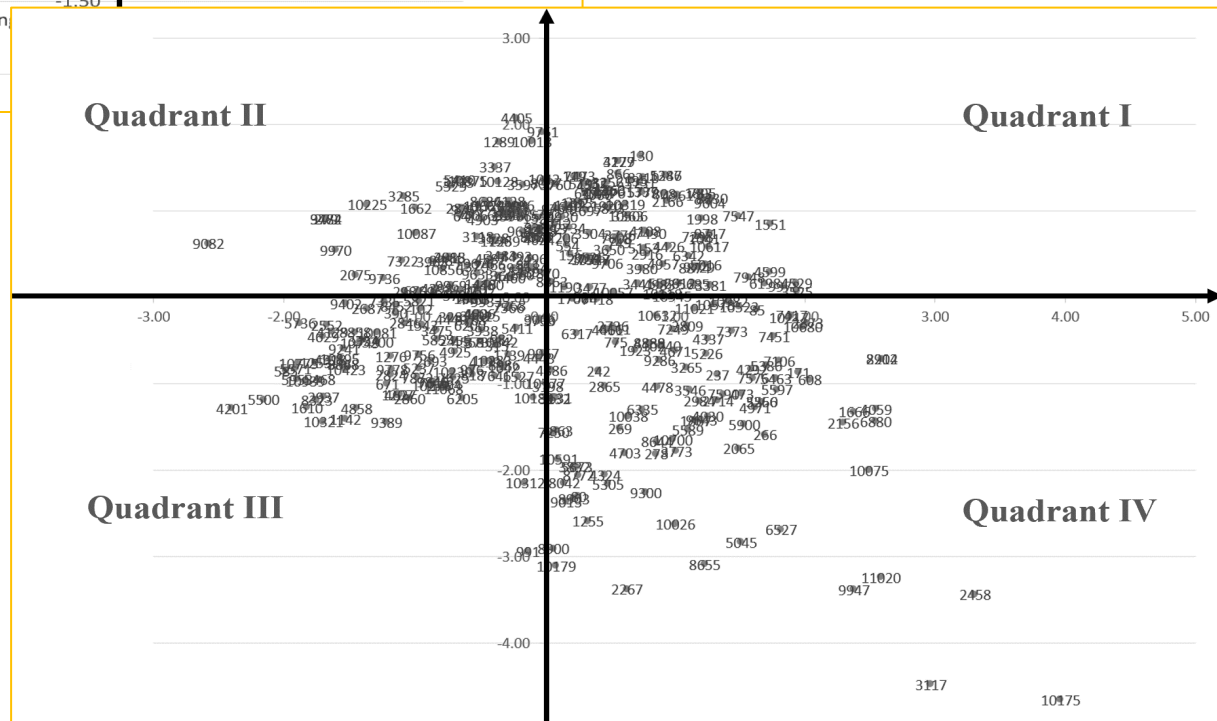
Applying MCA to the project survey

- MCA maps as a descriptive tool to identify different groups of participants (Purhonen & Wright, 2013)
- Conducted two MCAs within each of the seven age groups
- Steps:
 - Cross-tabulate sets of variables with one another
 - Map the associations between variables (“modalities map”)
 - Map participants *into the same space* (“individuals map”)
 - Randomly select participants from each quadrant of the final combined map

An example of *modalities map* created from MCA



An example of *individuals map* created from MCA



Highlights from qualitative data

Younger participants are more career-focused than older participants.

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

The homestay is more 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.

Implications of this research for CLAC practitioners...

- The outcomes observed in this study are the result of thinking about language learning through a cultures and languages across the curriculum lens
- Integrating study of language into the curriculum (as was done in the study abroad experiences of the participants surveyed and interviewed) amplifies the values and outcomes of the experience for students/alumni
- **Compelling evidence that CLAC works**

Practical Implications for Education Abroad...

Career -Integrated Global Learning: before, during, and long after

Language skills and study abroad experiences impact alumni's career decisions and satisfaction long after they return home. Give them the tools to incorporate education abroad into how they present themselves as professionals.

Suggested Resources:

- [GoinGlobal Career Guides](#)
- Drum, L., Sualp, K., & Hou, S.-I. (2022). Evaluating the Long-Term Impact of a Taiwanese Study Abroad Program on Participants' Career Choice and Professional Development: A Convergent Mixed Methods Study. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 34(1), 24–44. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v34i1.593>
- Hubbard, A., & Rexeisen, R. J. (2020). Investing in Study Abroad and Cultural Engagement: A Win-Win for Career Development. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 32(3), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v32i3.577>
- Hardy, M., & Totman, S. (2021). Taking a Pass on Assessment Grades for a Career Focused Tour of the Middle East. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 33(1), 148–167. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v33i1.507>

Make every component count

In language and cultural competency development, deep engagement and outside-your-comfort-zone applications of their nascent skills leave a lasting impact.

- Homestays vs. apartments or dorms
- Internships
- Community engagement activities

Suggested Resources:

- *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*, 6th Edition, especially section 6.2 <https://forumea.org/standards>
- [Prompts for Self-Assessment](#)

Don't "phone in" the re-entry phase

Despite career focus early on, over the lifespan of a person, Study Abroad can have many other benefits and impacts. Don't limit reflection work or program design to catering to the short-term wants and needs of students who are career-oriented. Take a whole-person approach.

Suggested Resources:

- [Leading Short-Term Education Abroad Programs: Know the Standards, 2nd Edition \(2022\)](#)
- <https://students.tufts.edu/tufts-global-education/prepare/returning/life-after-study-abroad>
- <https://forumea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Toolbox-DEAL-Model-for-Critical-Reflection-PHC-Ventures.pdf>
- https://www.studyabroad.gsu.edu/customtags/ct_FileRetrieve.cfm?File_ID=75073

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

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

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Thank you!