Training and Supporting Peer Language Educators

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- The Center for World Languages & Cultures uses a self-directed language study model to offer instruction in less commonly taught languages.
- Learners are paired with a peer educator, who is a native/fluent language speaker, but not a professional language teacher.
- Little research available about training peer educators for language learning (Lee, 2015; Ronesi, 2009).

Key Research Question

What types of resources and assistance from professional language instructors do peer educators and their students find to be most helpful and effective?

INTERACTIVE: BE THE LANGUAGE PARTNER!

Scan the QR code to take our survey. Then click "See Previous Responses" to compare your answers.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Our participant feedback study explores:
- Types of support peer educators in self-directed language programs need from trained language instructors to provide effective learning
- Resources that provide valuable learning opportunities for students (Curry et al., 2017; Kato & Mynard, 2015).

Participant Definitions

- **Language student** = an individual enrolled in a self-directed study program, a language learner (12 participants)

- **Language partner** = a peer educator who is fluent in the target language and can help others learn that language (11 participants)

- **Language coach** = a trained language instructor or faculty member who may or may not know the language being learned, but who provides support to both language partners and students (1 participant)

MATERIALS & METHODS – Cont.

Phase 1: Partner Interviews & Course Assignments (Completed)

Weekly interviews between language coach and language partners using 4 questions:
- What kind of topics and materials did you use for this week's sessions?
- How did you find these resources?
- What, if any, scheduling or interpersonal challenges came up this week?
- How can I (language coach) help you with your meeting plans for next week?

Students' reflective course assignments (Lee & Mori, 2021) will be analyzed to answer this question:

- What kinds of information or assistance is helpful to receive from language partners?

Phase 2: Data Analysis (Ongoing)

A. **Anonymization of data** & removal of all personal identifiers, including references to names, countries and languages

B. **Coding of Language Partner Interview Responses**:
Question 1: Teaching Materials & Resources – identify:
- Positive vs. negative/helpful vs. unhelpful approaches
- Focus on specific aspects of language: form, content and usage (Bloom & Lahey, 1978)

Question 2: Sources of Materials
- Self-created or researched
- Language coach/university-provided
- Student-provided

Question 3: Frequency of Challenge Types:
- Practical issues: technology, rooms, weather
- Schedule changes
- Interpersonal/relational challenges

Question 4: Types of Help Requested
- Logistical
- Technical
- Lesson planning, supplies
- Affective/affirmational

C. **Analysis of Student Assignment Responses**
- Helpful/unhelpful (+/-) experiences, resources, and interactions
- Comparison with language partner interview findings

Phase 3: Follow-up Discussions (Fall 2023)

Language partners will be invited to participate in follow-up discussions to explore data more deeply.
- How has your understanding of "language" changed as a result of being a language partner?
- How could your language coach have supported you better/differently in your role?

EMERGING RESULTS

"At the first meeting with the new language partner, maybe you could talk about how to start with someone who hasn't learned anything at all, vs. how to help someone who knows a little more, vs. how to work with an advanced learner – you don't want to baby them, but you also don't want to overwhelm them. You want to acknowledge what they already know."

Language partners need language coaches to provide:

- **Basic resources explaining language** *forms* while encouraging a wholistic view of language and the creation of language-rich environments for students
- *"I don't really have time to research for them, but they are asking me how they should be studying. When I have taken languages before, I always just took a class, so I haven't really learned the way that they are trying to learn now. I don't really know what to tell them."*
- **Support in setting expectations** with students
- *"Last week….I was supposed to meet S1 and S2, but both canceled at the last minute (meaning they canceled the same day). This was a unique situation, but I want to know what I could do for similar situations… I planned my day to be on campus around that time…my day was significantly affected."*
- **Assistance in using technology** for language learning
- *"I still have not solved access problem for setting up Zoom meetings when we cannot meet in person. I've had to ask friends to set up meetings for me, but if they forget to make me a host, I cannot share my screen."*
- **Encouragement, life advice, and leadership skills**
- *We have an age gap…because one student is about 10 years older than me, and the other student is 7 years older than me. I felt intimidated at first because they are graduate students and PhD students, but then I thought, if I was a grad student and a native speaker was helping me, I wouldn't mind the age difference. It's okay."*

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