

# **Evaluation of Motivation, Expectation, and Present Situation in 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Undergraduate Students of German Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka, Croatia**

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## **Abstract**

In this article a closer look will be taken on motivation, expectation, and present situation of third year undergraduate students of German studies in Croatia at the University of Rijeka. Due to the author's extensive experience in teaching translation classes from Croatian to German for undergraduate students in the third year, it is noticeable that most students have problems in certain areas, i.e. they are not able to correctly translate short Croatian texts into German in terms of correct grammar and syntax, even when words were explained in advance to facilitate the process of translation and upon extensive grammar practice in the first and second year of undergraduate studies. As studying a language also requires a lot of self-study and interest in the language being studied, it is certainly not enough just to sit in the courses at the university and do only the most necessary things to somehow pass the exams. It is essential to be engaged intensively with the country, the culture, and the people, to take part in exchange programmes, travel as often as possible to the country whose language you are about to learn, take the opportunity to communicate with native speakers, watch films or TV shows, read books or magazines in the target language etc. Thanks to the new technologies, nowadays one has almost endless possibilities to be exposed to the target language, even if one does not have the opportunity to travel to the destination country. But to what extent do students use what is available to them and are they at all motivated for the necessary effort of self-study? To answer these questions, a questionnaire was prepared to gain a deeper insight into the students' motivation to enrol German language and literature at the university, their expectations of what the language study would be like and the present situation in their third year of undergraduate studies. The evaluation of the questionnaire should provide information on the extent to which the students were familiar with what to expect from their studies, how they deal with the requirements and challenges, to what extent they are willing and prepared to do something outside of the courses to improve their

language proficiency autonomously, what the study of German studies should serve them in the future and if self-study has a visible impact on their language proficiency, i.e. if students who do a certain amount of self-study do have better results.

**Keywords:** German as a foreign language, foreign language acquisition, German studies, self-study, self-assessment

## Introduction

Learning and studying a foreign language is a lengthy process that requires a lot of motivation and work. Unlike learning the mother tongue, it is not driven by an inner need that is present in young children because they need to communicate with the outside world. Moreover, up to a certain age, children learn a language intuitively by imitating what they hear from the adults around them. Foreign languages are usually learned at a later age, at school or in language courses. Nowadays, in most European countries EFL is learned at preschool age because it is the lingua franca and English must be spoken in all professions. However, other foreign languages such as German are not taught at such an early age.

In Croatia, German is taught less and less in elementary and secondary schools and is usually taught as a second or third foreign language, so the language skills of students starting German studies are not at a high level. In previous years, a minimum level of B1 according to the CEFR was required to begin studying German, but for the past three years there have been no requirements regarding language proficiency, so students who have never learned German before can enrol in German studies, making it more difficult and requiring much more motivation for extra work and self-study to achieve an adequate level of proficiency.

The program is divided into three sections: linguistics, literature, and language practice. Students are required to take language tutorials in which they learn grammar and writing skills and expand their vocabulary. In the first two years, the focus is on grammar and writing skills; in the third year, they read short German and Croatian texts on various topics, familiarize themselves with terminology, and then translate short texts on similar topics into German and vice versa.

Especially those students who did not learn German in elementary or secondary school need to deepen their language skills, which requires a certain motivation to learn and self-study. Another factor is the expectations with which they enter German studies. Do they know what is expected of them, and are they enrolled for the right reason? What do they want to do after they graduate? And to what extent have they chosen the right course of study for them? Sometimes you get the impression that they have a completely wrong idea of what it means to study a language. Most of the time, they expect something like a language course and are then overwhelmed by

what is demanded of them: a lot of reading and getting to know German authors and literary epochs, morphology, syntax, semantics and, on top of that, good language skills.

### **Foreign language acquisition**

Foreign language acquisition has been studied over a long period of time and one of the factors involved in foreign language acquisition is the age of the learner. According to Apeltauer (1987), it is assumed that children have a natural aptitude for learning (foreign) languages, so that they can acquire them more easily than adults. It was even assumed that this ability is lost with puberty and that it is very difficult to learn further languages after that. Further research found that learners master different areas faster depending on their age because they have different areas of focus.

There are several hypotheses about how a foreign language is learned:

The *contrastive hypothesis* is based on contrastive linguistics and behaviourist learning theories. The framework is provided by contrastive analyses of linguistic and communicative units; semantic, lexical, and grammatical structures of two or more languages are compared. The *contrastive hypothesis* was coined by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957). The comparison of two languages is used to predict interference and transfer and thus to support foreign language learning and teaching. The focus is on sentence and phonetic structure and distributional differences between the native and foreign languages, while lexical and semantic aspects are ignored and no pragmatic comparisons are made. Problems in the comparison of two languages occur when certain units are missing in one language, e.g. the absence of articles in Russian or Croatian. This leads to various difficulties in learning a foreign language, depending on the native language of the learner.

The *identity hypothesis* assumes that the acquisition of the first and second languages is identical. The basis of this theory is nativism, i.e. Chomsky's hypothesis, in which he assumes an innate language acquisition mechanism, which he calls LAD (Language Acquisition Device). In this context, the development of linguistic competence in the second language depends on the skills acquired in the first language and on when one starts learning the second language. This theory states that second language acquisition follows the same principles as first language acquisition and uses the same linguistic structures. Thus, in both first and second language acquisition, the learner uses innate potentials and cognitive processes from first language acquisition to acquire the second language in the same pattern, i.e., in the same order, as he or she once acquired the first language.

The *interlanguage hypothesis* builds on the behaviourist learning theory of Skinner and the nativist learning theory of Chomsky. This hypothesis assumes that a foreign language is learned by first creating an intermediate language (interlanguage) or learner language in learners. The interlanguage hypothesis was first coined by Reinecke (1935) and later further developed and introduced into foreign language

acquisition research by Selinker (1969), who also coined the term interlanguage (abbr.: IL). Basically, this interlanguage is assumed to contain various elements that include features of both the first and second language, but also to have independent features that cannot be derived from either the first or second language. Interlanguage is subject to constant change and rapid evolution as the learner is constantly confronted with the language being learned and receives new input.

The *interdependence hypothesis* can be traced back to Cummins (1984). His interdependence or iceberg hypothesis describes the relationship between first language and learning another language. He assumes that the degree of literalness of the native language is responsible for the success of second language acquisition. Cummins sees the interdependence between the native language and the second language in the cognitive-academic language domain, that is, in the mastery of morphology, grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Cummins developed the iceberg model, according to which there is a Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) beneath the surface of the L1 and the L2, i.e., a common literalness of languages that is responsible for the learning of both languages. According to Cummins, each language has certain surface features, but beneath this surface are the literalities that are common to all languages.

In the *interaction hypothesis*, the competence of a language is assumed to be acquired through a particular form of interaction, the negotiation of meaning. The negotiation of meaning is nothing more than a conversation based on an emergent problem. The problem is solved by discussing it with an interlocutor and following this interaction the speaker may change his problematic statement. This type of interaction sets in motion cognitive processes that are characteristic of the onset of skill building in a language. In the interaction hypothesis, Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis and Swain's (1985) output hypothesis are combined in the form of interaction. Successful language acquisition requires not only comprehensible input but also comprehensible output.

In the 1990s, it was recognised that there were not only qualitative but also quantitative differences between first language acquisition and the acquisition of other languages, thus several new models were developed to describe multiple language learning. Concepts of multilingualism, learning strategies, and learning approaches have been developed. In addition, concepts such as learner autonomy and learner consciousness are appearing, indicating that the learner is now becoming the focus, as there are individual differences in foreign language acquisition that are not considered in the older theories.

The *Dynamic Model of Multilingualism* (DMM) focuses on a dynamic development of individual learning processes, the multilingual speaker is seen as a complex psycholinguistic system combining individual language systems from the L1, the L2 and the L3. Here, the theory assumes that all languages that exist in this multilingual system have an impact on the overall system. One focus of DMM is to study the

dynamics and change of the individual language system as it evolves due to biological factors and the behaviour of living organisms. The second focus is on creating a model of multilingualism that accurately describes the dependent and independent variables and makes predictions about how the multilingual system will evolve.

Like the DMM, the *language-switching model* of Williams and Hammarberg (1998) is a socio- and psycholinguistic model that examines the dynamic development of individual learning processes. In the language switching model, the language under study is considered L3, regardless of how many languages are learned. All languages learned prior to the language under study are referred to as L2s and thus take on different roles and functions, regardless of how the L3 relates to them chronologically or structurally. Switching between languages, code-switching, does not occur unintentionally; rather, the learner consciously decides at which moment to use which language. Basically, the language-switching model assumes that the learner can distinguish well between the languages already learned and those yet to be learned, but that there is mixing or interference between those languages. It also assumes that literality in the different languages is usually at the same level.

Hufeisen's (2003) *factor model* is linguistically oriented, where the L2 has a very large impact on the learning of other foreign languages, as it is the cornerstone for learning other foreign languages. In the acquisition of the L2, competencies are acquired that are not present in the acquisition of the L1 or at the beginning of learning the L2. Hufeisen divides the factors for learning a foreign language into learner-internal and learner-external factors. In this context, Hufeisen attaches great importance to interlanguage and sees motivation as another important factor in foreign language acquisition. Motivation occurs only when learning an L2, since it is not motivation that is responsible for the acquisition of the L1, but an inner need for communication (intrinsic motivation). The situation is different with the L2, since the learner has to put in some effort when acquiring the L2, the natural need for communication is no longer sufficient and motivation is the most important factor. Thus, L1, L2 and further foreign languages are not all acquired in the same way, but differ in their linguistic, internal and external conditions.

Aronin and O'Laoire's (2003) *ecological model of multilingualism* is sociolinguistically oriented and views language as an important factor in an individual's identity construction. The term "ecological" refers to the cultural contexts in which multilingualism is studied. At EMM, multilingualism is understood as a collective state in which multiple individuals are multilingual and multiple languages are in contact with each other. It focusses on the language systems and language codes that an individual uses, whereas multilingualism refers to a single individual and the total number of languages he or she uses, which also includes other factors such as meta-linguistic knowledge, social influences, emotions, personal attitudes, and cognitive aspects, i.e., individual abilities and resources, but which reflect basic features of multilingualism. It can be concluded that each person carries a very complex form of

multilingualism, which speaks for a very individual language acquisition and makes it very difficult to predict the course of the language acquisition process.

Groseva (1998) postulates in her *foreign language acquisition model* that the learner draws on source language knowledge and formulates hypotheses in a meta- or target language, which he then verifies and corrects through feedback from his interlocutor. It assumes that exclusively learner-internal factors are responsible for foreign language acquisition and attributes great importance to the L1 and the L2 for the acquisition of other foreign languages. Groseva assumes that L3 acquisition does not begin until adolescence, so that linguistic experience in L1 and L2 can already be assumed. Therefore, according to Groseva, L3 acquisition is more conscious and intensive than L2 acquisition, which raises the question of how the L2 influences further language acquisition processes.

### **Objective and Starting Position of the Study**

According to Hufeisen's factor model, there are certain factors in the acquisition of an L2 or L3, one of which is motivation, since an internal need for communication, as is present in learning the L1, is not found in learning an L2 or L3. Motivation seems to be an important factor in learning a foreign language that makes the learner engage with the foreign language, expose himself to the foreign language, and learn by himself to the required extent. Groseva also points to the motivational factor for learning a foreign language and assumes that learner-internal factors predominate in language acquisition.

The starting point of the study was the author's impression that students lack motivation for study and self-study and exposure to the target language. The student groups in German Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Rijeka are not homogeneous, because some students have learned German as a first foreign language, others as a second foreign language at school, and recently even students who have not learned German at all can enrol in German Studies. As a result, students have to spend more or less time on self-study and language improvement. At the beginning of German studies teachers always point out that it is very important to invest some effort in self-study, to take advantage of student exchange programmes such as Erasmus, or to watch German TV and read German books or magazines that interest them in order to get in touch with the target language.

According to the authors mentioned above, it is inevitable to expose oneself to the target language and interact as much as possible with native speakers in order to acquire as much knowledge as possible. Most students do not feel the need to use the target language, even in class, because they can communicate with their peers and the teacher in their native language.

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper insight into the students' self-assessment, their motivation, their views on self-study, their expectations of German studies and

their fulfilment and, in a final step, to show a correlation between expectation, effort invested and language competence.

## **Methodology**

This research is a qualitative research. The aim of this research is to investigate third-year German language students' self-assessment of language proficiency and motivation for self-study and their interest in the country and people of the target language. In addition, the relationship between invested effort and final language proficiency is investigated. Data collection and analysis were based on a questionnaire with a total of 10 questions, which was prepared by the author herself in view of the objectives of the study.

The questionnaire contained open-ended questions, except for the question on self-assessment of the level according to the CEFR and a question on the evaluation of interest from 1-10. It was anonymous and was given to 26 students 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at the end of their undergraduate studies in the last session of the translation course.

## **Analysis and interpretation of findings**

The first question of the questionnaire was a self-assessment of language proficiency to find out how students evaluate their own abilities. Students were asked to assess their language level according to the CEFR from A1 to C2. Some students were not familiar with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, so the author had to explain which level corresponds to which language skills.

The result of the first question was that one out of 26 students assigned their language skills to level B1, two students assessed their skills to level B1/B2, 14 students assessed their skills to level B2, two students assessed their skills to level B2/C1, and six students assessed their skills to level C1 as shown in the diagram below. The answers to the first question show that students mostly consider themselves to be at the B2 level, followed by C1, and a few think they are at the B1 level. Two students were not quite sure if they were at a particular level, so they wrote B1/B2 or B2/C1. In summary, the students seem quite aware of their level of knowledge and assess it realistically.

In the chart, the undecided students who assessed their language proficiency between two levels, i.e. B1/B2 and B2/C1, were added to both categories:

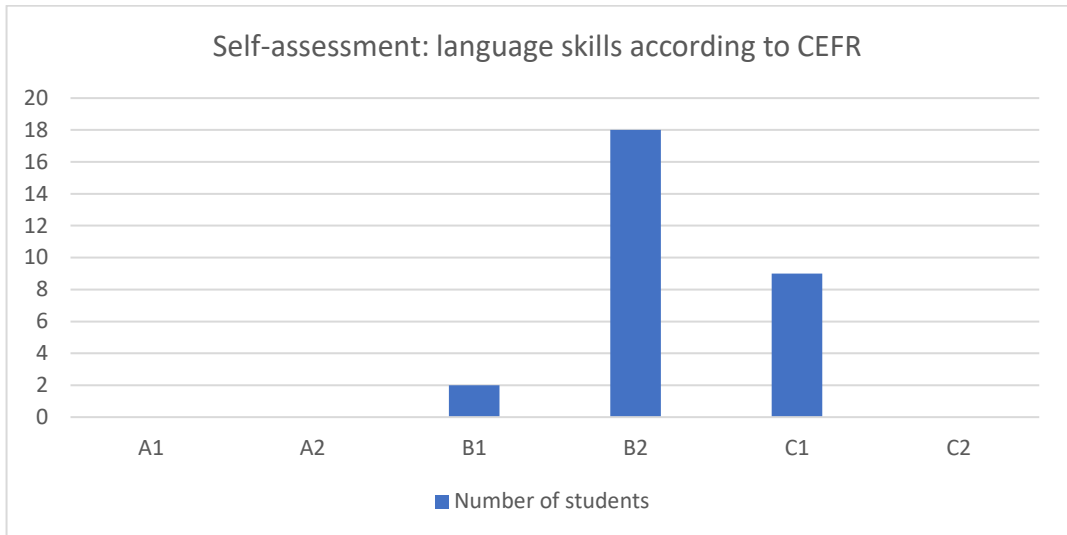


Chart 1: Self-assessment: language skills according to CEFR

The second question was divided into (a), (b), (c), and (d) because self-study was asked in specific areas: under a) they were asked how often they read books, magazines or newspapers that are not required within their German studies at the university, under b) how often they watch German movies, series or similar, under c) how often they have gone/go abroad (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) or have participated in a student exchange and under d) how often they talk to a native speaker (incl. chats on the Internet, personal communication, communication with tourists or similar).

The results were the following:

a) 11 students answered that they read rarely or too little, i.e. once in a while (newspapers or books), 3 students answered that they read German texts very often or often, 3 students read German texts at least once a week, 2 students answered that they never read German texts (neither books nor articles nor newspapers), 1 probably reads an hour a week (poems or articles), 1 student stated exactly that he/she reads a book within ten days and reads newspapers or articles a few times per week, 1 student stated that he/she reads two to three times a week, 1 student reads texts in German almost every day, 1 student wrote that he/she reads at least one text in German per day, 1 student answered that he/she sometimes reads some articles but always reads Wikipedia in German and 1 student answered that he/she reads 4-5 hours once a week.

According to the responses, students do not make much use of available written resources, as 11 students read books, magazines or newspapers rarely or not often enough, even though everything is available online nowadays, 2 students even stated that they never read anything in German other than required for class. The range



stated is from daily to sometimes. It is interesting to note that only one student reads German texts almost every day, all others do so only rarely, because reading once a week or a few times a month cannot be considered regular reading and intensive self-study.

b) 5 students watch German<sup>1</sup> series or videos on YouTube or TV daily or almost daily, 10 students watch German movies/series etc. sometimes or very rarely, 4 students watch them often or very often, 1 student watches 2-3 German movies a month, 1 student watches German movies or series once a week, 3 students watch them two-three times a month, 1 student watches them a few times a week, 1 student does not watch German movies or series at all.

Although media is almost inexhaustible nowadays and there are numerous providers like Netflix, YouTube, iptv etc. where you can watch movies, series, documentaries and everything your heart desires, only 5 students watch German series or videos almost every day, while 10 students watch them sometimes or very rarely. Again, one student does not watch German media at all and all others fall into the category of "once a week" or "a few times a month", which again cannot be considered regular exposure to German-language media and intensive self-study.

c) 1 student has been abroad ten times (concerts, trips or sporting events), but never as part of a student exchange, 3 students have been abroad once (day trip), 4 students have been abroad a few times (short trips), 3 students have been abroad twice, 8 students are abroad frequently (every year, once or twice a year), 3 students have never been abroad, 1 student has been abroad on a scholarship for one month, 1 student has been to Germany in secondary school as part of Erasmus (duration not specified), 2 students have been abroad 4 or 5 times.

One way to improve language skills is certainly to study abroad, whether through Erasmus or other scholarships, through a simple holiday abroad or a student job, because according to the *interaction hypothesis*, it is necessary to negotiate meaning, which is only possible when there is communication with an interlocutor. If the learner does not produce language, successful language acquisition cannot occur. For this reason, the university offers a wide range of scholarship programmes like Erasmus or others, and the Department of German also has collaborations, such as internships in Germany, but students rarely or never take advantage of these opportunities. As can be seen from the questionnaire, only one student has been abroad as part of Erasmus (in secondary school), 8 students are frequently abroad due to family connections, but most have rarely or never been abroad, which again indicates a lack of interest in traveling to the country of the target language and communicating with native speakers.

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<sup>1</sup> German here refers not only to German productions but also to dubbed productions from other countries.

d) Since Croatia is a tourist destination and many German-speaking tourists visit Croatia every year, various student jobs are offered, whether as waiters, animators, guides, work-placements in tourist offices, etc. As a result, there are opportunities to use the German language at home if one cannot or does not want to go abroad. Nevertheless, 16 students out of 26 state that they rarely or never communicate in German outside of the university, only 6 students state that they communicate frequently in German (especially during the tourist season), 4 students range from a few times a month to only when abroad, which is very rarely considering the previous question. Based on these results in the second question, students seem to lack general interest or motivation to take advantage of opportunities offered to them to improve their language skills outside the university in their home country or even within the university (e.g., scholarships).

The third question was aimed at the students' opinion whether they think it is necessary to learn by themselves during their German studies and to justify their opinion.

24 out of 26 students answered that it is necessary to learn by themselves during German studies. The reasons they gave varied: because lectures only give guidelines on what to learn, because languages are dynamic and constantly changing, because a language cannot be learned only at school or university, because one has to start thinking in the foreign language in order to understand the language better, because studies do not offer enough to expand vocabulary besides theory, because lectures are of no use if you do not consolidate the learning material at home, you have to expose yourself to the language constantly and as often as possible, because you know yourself where you can improve your knowledge, because additional exercises help us to improve our knowledge, only lectures in German are not enough to learn the language properly. 1 student thinks it is not necessary, but it would be good if they learn by himself and 1 student thinks that self-study is not necessary at all.

Considering the fact that there are different ways of self-study, as indicated in the second question, and the students obviously do not make much use of it, it is interesting to see that a large majority of them, 24 out of 26, answered the third question with the necessity of self-study during the study of German, and they also give good reasons for it, as mentioned above, which leaves open the question why they do not do it, although they consider it necessary?

As mentioned above, the author believes that motivation is one of the most important factors for learning a language, and it is also the driving force for self-study. The fourth question refers exactly to this: what motivates students to self-study? This was the question with the most nuanced responses. Almost every student had a different idea of what would likely motivate him/her to (continue) self-study:

3 students answered that they can only motivate themselves, 3 students answered that he/she does not know, 3 students answered that if learning materials were more

interesting and readily available, 5 students answered that a reward in form of a financial benefit, more free time, a study group or trips to German cities, would motivate them, 2 students answered that motivation would be if some courses required the acquisition of something not learned in the course, 2 students answered that living and working abroad would motivate him/her, 1 student answered that success at university and better communication with native German speakers, 1 student answered that less pressure at university, 1 student answered, that probably an interesting application for subjects he/she is interested in would motivate him/her, 1 student did not answer this question, 1 student answered that nothing could motivate him/her, 1 student answered that having German speaking friends outside the university would motivate him/her, 1 student answered that more free time and interesting topics would motivate him/her, 1 student answered that if they could learn all the things that interest them, e.g. watching movies, series etc. in German language, would motivate them:

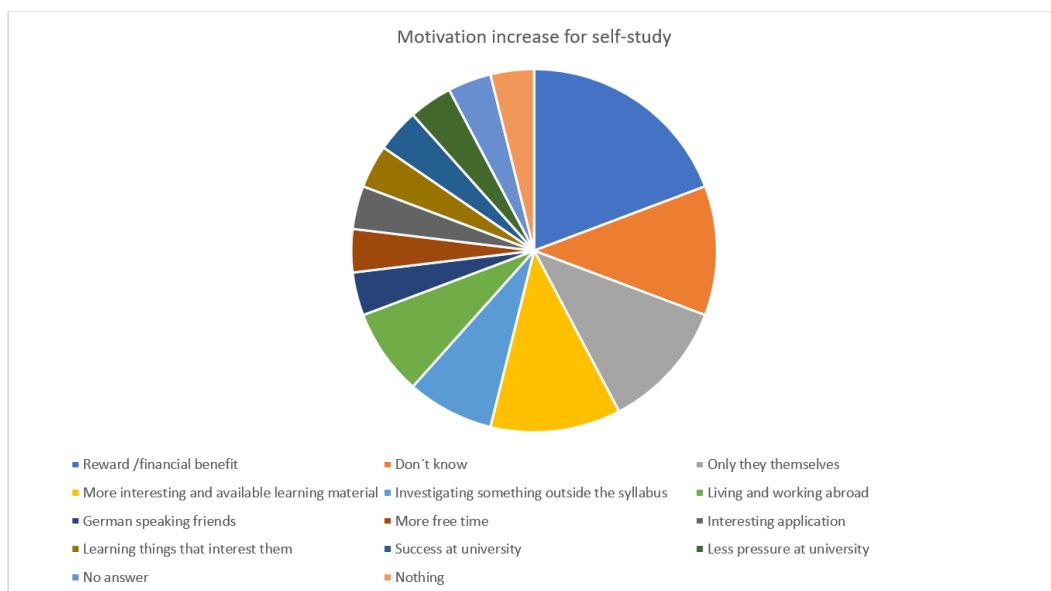


Chart 2: Motivation increase for self-study

An interesting finding is that the most frequently mentioned answer is a reward, either in the form of a financial benefit or in the form of travel or free time, followed by more interesting and available learning material, do not know, and that they can only motivated themselves. In the questionnaires, the financial advantage refers to working for money, i.e. take on jobs, i.e. translations that they would like to do during their studies and get paid for it. This is indeed an interesting point of view, because for translating and interpreting the language skills must be at a very high level, which they have not yet reached.

Since the second question was about how much they learn themselves in terms of watching German movies, series, etc., it is somewhat surprising that one student answered that "if they could learn everything they were interested in, e.g., watching movies, series, etc. in German." Obviously, the expectation here is that movies, series, etc. will be watched in classes at the university.

It is to be expected or suspected that someone who enrolls in language study is also interested in the country and its people. If the interest is there, then that in turn can be a motivation to look more closely at languages and regional studies outside of the courses at the university. The fifth question was designed to determine, on a scale of 1-10, how interested the students are in Germany and Germans (politics, economics, lifestyle, etc.).

For 7 students the interest in Germany on the scale of 1-10 is an 8, for 6 students a 7 and also for 6 students a 9. For 3 students the interest is a 6, for another 2 students a 5 and 1 student each indicated the interest with a 10 and a 4. As a conclusion it can be said that interest in Germany and the Germans varies on a scale of 1-10 between 4 and 10:

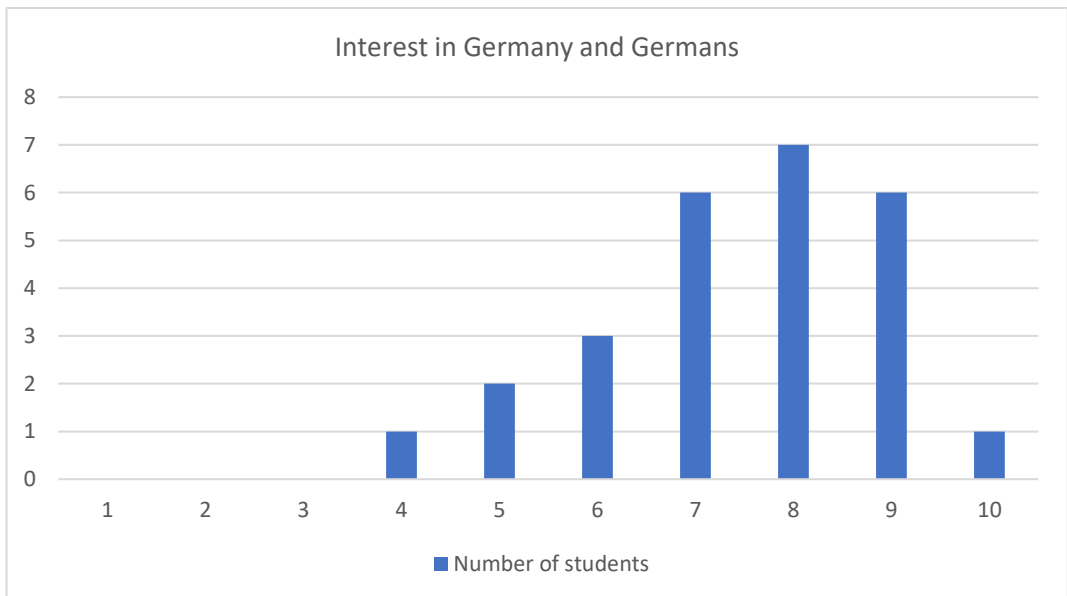


Chart 3: Interest in Germany and Germans

The sixth question aimed at how much the students know about Germany and its inhabitants (customs, way of life, mentality, etc.):

8 students answered that they know at least something about German customs, etc. know, 4 students think they know enough, 4 students answered that they know a lot through German studies, the Internet, TV and German YouTuber, 3 students answered that their knowledge is average, 2 students know a lot, 1 student thinks

he/she knows a lot and is happy to gain more knowledge every day, 1 student says he/she was born in Germany, has German relatives and learned a lot about the people through his/her work as a waiter during semester breaks, 1 student answered that he/she knows a lot because he/she watches documentaries and uses other media to get to know the culture better, 2 students did not answer the question correctly.

So this question mirrors the previous question: if there is a lack of interest in the land and its inhabitants, there cannot be much knowledge about them. Nevertheless, students say they know a lot, enough, or at least something about Germans and their customs, whether through their German studies, TV or YouTuber, or German relatives. It is interesting that even stereotypes about Germans were mentioned in the answers as knowledge about the country and its people.

The motive for taking up a course of study in German can provide information about how much motivation is to be expected from students. If someone enrolls in a course of study only because they do not know what else to do or because they have unrealistic expectations, it will be difficult to follow the classes and motivate themselves to work hard and make an effort, so the seventh question aimed to investigate which motives for taking up German studies are predominant among students.

7 students enrolled in German studies because they like the language and/or hope to improve their language skills, 7 students were good at German in secondary school and therefore enrolled in German studies, 4 students like the dynamics of the language and/or hope to get a better job if they speak the language, 1 student answered that it is the only language he/she knows besides English, 1 student enrolled in German studies as he/she has relatives in Germany/Austria and likes the culture, 1 student thinks that German is the most useful language in Europe next to English and French since Croatia joined the EU, 2 students have studied German for a long time and like the language/literature, 1 student feels connected to the language because he/she watched the German TV for many years, 1 student said he/she has no motive but only an impulse because he/she was good at German in secondary school and it would probably look good in his/her resume, 1 student calls Germany his/her second home and loves the country, the people and the language.

It is encouraging that more than half of the students chose the program because they like the language and want to expand their language skills, like the country and the people. Other motives that come up are better job opportunities if you know German and the opinion that German is one of the most important official languages in the EU so it would be good to speak it. One answer was somewhat provocative or inappropriate, because one should not study a language because it might look good on a resume.

As mentioned earlier, expectations and their fulfilment can also play a role in motivating students to study and self-study. If students have unrealistic or completely

different expectations before enrolling in a course of study, it is difficult to manage the workload and put in extra effort to achieve good results and learn something that was probably not expected, so the eighth question was aimed at what students expected from studying German before enrolling.

8 students expected an improvement in language skills, 2 students expected exactly the courses offered in German studies, 2 students expected many grammar and literature courses, 1 student expected much more creativity in literature, 1 student expected to learn more about German language, culture and literature, 1 student expected interesting topics, much communication, travel to Germany, many professors who are native speakers, 1 student expected much more, i.e. less learning because less is remembered when there is a lot to learn, 1 student expected more communication and writing, less reading, 1 student expected to learn more about culture and literature, 1 student expected a lot of work and active communication, 1 student expected many translations and less work, 1 student expected at least one field trip to a German speaking country, 1 student expected what he/she has seen in movies, 1 student did not know what to expect, 1 student expected professors to be more interested in their lectures, 1 student expected it to be difficult and challenging, 1 student did not answer the question.

In general, the majority of students expected to improve their language skills, but in the area of vocabulary and communication, grammar was the most criticised for being difficult and unnecessary. Comparing this to the career aspirations in the last question, how do they expect to work as a teacher or translator if they do not know German grammar at a high level?

The ninth question aimed to find out if students' expectations were met and what was different than expected.

8 students answered that their expectations were partially met, 8 students answered that they were satisfied with the study programme and it met their expectations, 3 students expected to learn more about German culture by travelling to German speaking countries as part of the study programme, 2 students expected more vocabulary work and/or felt that more grammar exercises were covered, 2 students felt that too much study material was covered, 2 students on the other hand felt that not enough was covered in depth, 1 student simply answered "no". Regarding the fulfilment of their expectations, more than half of the students indicated that their expectations were met or somewhat met.

The last question aimed to find out if students know what they want to do professionally after graduating from German studies. As mentioned earlier, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Rijeka offers a general undergraduate programme and two postgraduate programmes (teacher training and translation studies) in languages. Students can work in tourism, broadcasting,

newspapers, offices, etc. after completing their undergraduate studies, but they can also continue their studies to become teachers or translators.

The evaluation of the questionnaire showed that 8 students want to become teachers of German, 5 students want to become translators/interpreters, 5 students do not know yet what they want to do professionally, 4 students want to combine teaching and translating, 2 students want to combine teaching and a job in tourism (e.g. tourist guide), 1 student wants to do something not related to the German language, 1 student wants to work at a helpdesk where German language is required.

As a result, it can be stated that most students want to become teachers or translators, or they aspire to a combination of both, or they want to become teachers and work in tourism. It is interesting to note that five students do not know what they want to do professionally at the end of their studies. One student obviously chose the wrong course of study because he/she does not want anything to do with his/her field, i.e. the German language, while another might have taken a language course because he/she wants to work at a help desk and look after German-speaking customers:

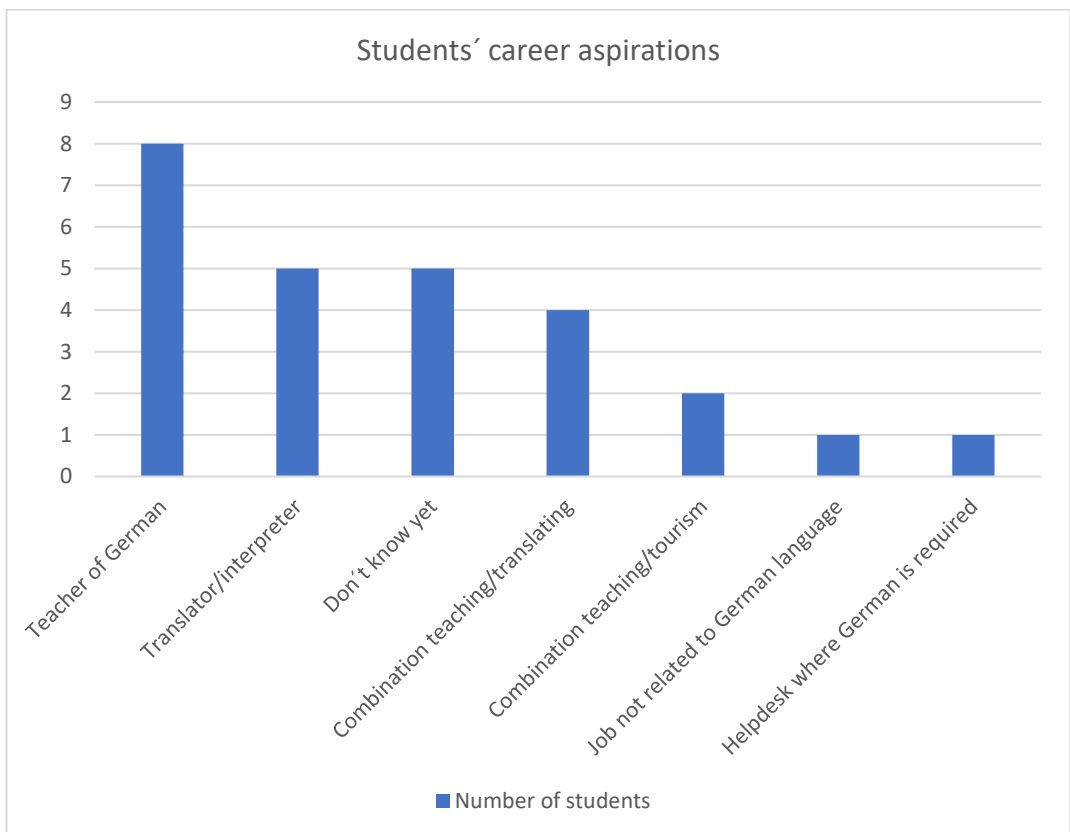


Chart 4: Students' career aspirations

In a final step, the answers were compared with the language level to which the students had assigned themselves. Most of the students who assigned themselves to language level C1 are frequent self-learners, read German texts, watch German movies, series, etc., and have visited a German-speaking country, some even for a longer period of time, except for three students who have never been abroad. They are also the ones who are more interested in German people and culture and find it necessary to do a lot of self-study.

The students who assigned themselves to C1 level are also the ones who see working for money as motivation for (continued) self-study. Presumably, they have more confidence in the language and think that their language skills are good enough to place them already on the market. Interestingly, the expectations of this group of students were only partially met and they were able to name which expectations were not met and what should be improved.

The students who assigned their language skills to B1 or B2 level mostly do not self-study a lot, do not read German texts or watch German movies, series etc. They also have not been to German speaking countries, except for three students who stated that they have been abroad (short trips, one student exchange).

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that students' motivation for self-study or study at all is related to their language skills, expectations, and fulfilment of expectations from the university. In addition, the motivations for enrolling in the programme are crucial. If a student has the impression that studying German is just a language course, the demands and tasks at the university will seem unfulfilling and difficult to master. As the analysis and interpretation of findings show, most students have rated their language level at B2 or C1 at the end of the undergraduate programme. In the degree programme, language proficiency at the C1 level according to the CEFR is required after completion of the undergraduate degree. Only half of the students consider themselves to be at this level.

On the one hand, almost all of them answered that self-study is very important during their studies, but when asked if they learn by themselves, e.g., by reading or watching TV in German, staying abroad etc. most of them gave a negative answer, i.e., they do not perform these activities often enough. According to Sheela and Rakumar (2016), these are exactly the activities that are fun and should be practised in foreign language learning (here EFL):

*"Watching sitcoms in English, reading magazines and surfing the Net are considered fun by many teachers and students and not perceived as activities that can do good to students' language proficiency. Yet these resources can considerably increase learners' general and cultural awareness and should be interwoven into studying routines, because background knowledge is a tremendous facilitator of comprehension."* (Sheela, Rakumar, p. 4463)



This allows students to improve their knowledge of the country and its people as well as their language skills. Since the syllabus at the university is very extensive and includes many subfields in which insights into theoretical background are also taught, such activities can only take place in the form of extracurricular events, such as movie nights, but it is certainly a good and entertaining way to practise at home.

The students themselves are not quite sure what would motivate them to (continue) self-study. Some feel overwhelmed with the subject matter in the course and do not have time for self-study, others do not think it is necessary, while some of them have recognised the need and do a great deal of self-study. As mentioned before, German studies students are not homogeneous, as they start with different language skills and different expectations, but on the other hand, no class is homogeneous either. There are always students who learn quickly, while others need more time to complete their assignments. But whatever their starting point:

*“Interest and motivation are essential factors when it comes to language learning, but one should distinguish between reward and work when bringing different types of media in the classroom. Learners recognize when they are being taught when they are at school, and they may concentrate on what the teacher is presenting. But when they sit on their computers at home, watching a film or playing a game, they might learn words and phrases and use them in real life situations.” (Yin, p. 153)*

According to the students' responses, they expect the university and professors to organise field trips and watch movies and series in German with them in class. Although, there are many offers for scholarships and stays abroad within the framework of Erasmus or other organisations, very few students accept these offers.

Nearly half of them lack the motivation for study and self-study and don't exactly know what would motivate them, while the other half sees the need and does extra work for their own good, what is evident in their self-assessment of language skills.<sup>1</sup>

In general, it seems that students who rate their language skills at a higher level are more motivated to study and self-study, have more realistic expectations of German studies, and are more interested in the country and its people, travel abroad, and report having more knowledge of the culture of the country whose language they are studying. There is also a relationship between the motive for enrolling in the study programme and the motivation for studying. Students who love the language and want to improve their language skills do more extra work and rate themselves at a higher language level. The lack of motivation is probably due to the fact that there is no inner need (intrinsic motivation) to learn L2 as there is in learning L1. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could be examined more closely in another study, as some students reported extrinsic motivation, such as rewards or financial benefits, as a

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<sup>1</sup> The students' self-assessment cannot be compared to the teacher's assessment because the questionnaires are anonymous. It could be that some students overestimated themselves while others underestimated themselves.

factor in their motivation. It would also be interesting to further investigate language proficiency in the native language to compare whether there is a relationship between proficiency in L1 and L2/L3, as some authors of language acquisition models (e.g., Chomsky, Cummins) claim.

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## Charts

- [1] Chart 1: Self-assessment: language skills according to CEFR
- [2] Chart 2: Motivation increase for self-study
- [3] Chart 3: Interest in Germany and Germans
- [4] Chart 4: Students' career aspirations