

STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract.

The learning process has changed over time with the application of new teaching methods, techniques and strategies that combine to help students achieve their goals. Being competent in a foreign language is more than having a great language instructor who provides information and assignments related to specific skills, it means that students' motivation and attitudes play an important role in the learning process. According to Gardner (1985, p. 136) language teaching focuses on the student's perception in relation to the context in which it is taught. In this way, students' motivation and attitudes are, to some extent, responsible for success or failure in language learning. Therefore, this article expounds on the motivation and attitudes in foreign language learning.

Keywords: Motivation, Attitudes, Language Learning, Extrinsic Motivation, Behavior.

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language and society, and language and social behavior. In other words, sociolinguistics is concerned with the processes of socialization and social interaction that result from the interplay between language and society. In this process, language is closely related to the social structure and value systems of society; therefore, different languages, dialects, and accents are evaluated in diverse ways. Language judgments are made from different perspectives, which are mostly arbitrary and based on social connotations. Thus, subjective attitudes toward language are vital in explaining favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward languages. It is these favorable and unfavorable thoughts that the following study

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aims to investigate, more specifically, the positive or negative attitudes and motivation that students of the San Ignacio School in the city of La Paz show toward the teaching of the English language originated in response to the effectiveness or inefficiency of the language instructor during the class delivery.

Although the new Bolivian Constitution recognizes 36 official languages, Spanish is by far the one with the largest number of speakers. Interestingly, despite the new language policy adopted by the government, Spanish is still considered a language with a higher status concerning foreign languages in Bolivia (INE, 2012). Due to this fact, the information we obtained from the INE (2012), we can conclude that Bolivians aged 9 to 45 mostly speak English as a foreign language.

Given that this research is about attitudes and motivation toward language learning, we deem it important to provide an overview of the key factors that may affect language learning. An important fact when learning a foreign language is the necessity of practicing it in a relaxed atmosphere where any anxiety factor is lowered; another aspect we should consider is the fact of being given purposeful tasks that may require exploiting the idea of cooperativeness and using social skills, which are important and closely related to the learning process that happens within the classroom.

In addition, we can even state that not only the cognitive processes are responsible for success or failure in language teaching, but also the affective factors (motivation). A previous survey carried out with the second-grade students of San Ignacio High School made us aware that language teachers are sometimes unconcerned with the class development, which could lead us to believe that they do not care about their students' performance (lack of classroom management, poor or no feedback, and poor pacing of the lesson). We consider the above to be an important element in the formation of students' positive or negative attitudes toward language learning; it allows us to consider within the conclusions that students might "learn" or "pick up" those attitudes from teachers and adopt them for themselves, and how this can influence students' attitudes toward language learning either positively or negatively as a result of their behavior and performance in class. This is the reason why we want to focus this study on students' behavior and attitudes toward learning English.

The different studies conducted within the field of attitudes towards L2 language teaching focus on the student's perception of

English as a foreign language or for particular languages in general associated with the context in which they are learnt and in which the language is taught. (Gardner, 1985, p. 136).

This reinforces our idea to focus this study on these aspects and it takes into account the essential characteristics of behavior in trying to obtain specific information about prestige and language in contact with students who are immersed in the learning process.

In summary, the following article presents and analyzes the attitudes and motivational effects of second-grade high school students in language learning at San Ignacio School in La Paz Bolivia. The type of research is active and descriptive because the study describes the behavior shown during the delivery of English classes to describe the performance of students to gather relevant information about the effects of cognitive and affective behavior for efficient language teaching programs, particularly the teaching of English at the school level.

2. Development.

This study has been designed to investigate the extent to which the teacher's academic performance influences students' perceptions and attitudes toward language learning. It aims to find out whether the teacher's performance and the classroom management skills he/she uses in the classroom can be directly responsible for the students' positive or negative judgments.

The need for this study emerged as a result of the new educational reform that the Bolivian government wants to implement, as well as because the English language is granted a lower status, although the current government has tried to keep it on par with Spanish, a language widely used throughout the Bolivian territory.

The theoretical, social and practical value of the research aims to identify and describe the types of behaviors and attitudes shown by the students to determine whether there is acceptance or rejection towards English language learning.

The fact of investigating language attitudes towards language learning standpoint and the degree to which these attitudes positively or negatively influence the likelihood of students in successful language learning is of high importance in the field of applied linguistics and, to a lesser extent, sociolinguistics. Consequently, the theoretical value

of the research is to establish a link between Applied Linguistics and Sociolinguistics to describe students' attitudes toward language learning.

Applied Linguistics will let us know how classroom management and language teaching techniques developed during the teaching process influence the students' motivation in class in terms of adopting a positive or negative position towards English. However, sociolinguistics will be useful to determine how the current social situation in our country influences students' perceptions and preferences for learning a language.

As for the social justification of this research, it is worth mentioning first of all the awareness that I have gained empirically, both as a student and lately as a language instructor. Both experiences made me realize that if the class is motivating and dynamic, the students will respond more positively to the activities in class. From this we can conclude that the language teacher should be aware of making students realize the benefits of learning a language and motivating them to use and apply the language in all stages of the class.

Thus, the social implication of this study is to understand the importance of effective classroom management and the extent to which being committed to the language teaching profession as well as having a positive attitude toward the language or languages they teach will affect language learning. Furthermore, with the results we will obtain, we want language teachers to consider the importance of examining possible solutions to avoid the creation of a discriminative environment towards the languages in focus.

Finally, the practical implications of the research. As elucidated before, it is based on the sociolinguistic aspects of language since it describes the positive or negative attitudes that students have and how these attitudes influence the language learning process. It deems that the results obtained will help future researchers to use this study as a referential work to continue their studies on linguistic attitudes and motivation and their effects in different areas such as education, religion, mass media, etc., as well as language teaching in terms of teaching techniques and different variables (behavior and motivation) that are considered in the teaching and learning process to be followed in the future.

Main Goal:

- To identify the kind of students' attitudes and motivation for

learning English as a foreign language in the 2nd grade of a high school at San Ignacio School in La Paz - Bolivia.

Specific Objectives:

- To describe the positive and negative motivations that second-grade students express through learning a foreign language.
- To identify students' attitudes which help us describe the kinds of motivation in the class sessions.
- To describe a possible favorable and motivating environment in which students feel comfortable learning English.

Methodology

The method used to conduct the research is a mixed approach, which means quali-quantitative, because it allows us to use instruments to achieve the main and specific objectives, due to the statistical analysis of the data was obtained to get relevant information that allows us to identify these attitudes and emotions expressed during the class performance.

Type of Research

The type of research is action research because it aims to identify language attitudes and motivation shown during students' class performance and development among students in the second grade of high school. In addition, to describe in detail the techniques used in language learning classes; and the interest in the way the lessons are taught and administered. This will let us know how the students react concerning the language (English), showing acceptance or rejection. After analyzing it, we will continue with the explanation of the information we have obtained, in order to later explain the social situation that our country is going through in terms of the educational policies that have been established through the application of the new law Avelino Siñani - Elizardo Perez.

Population

Students from San Ignacio School who attend the afternoon program of the high school; they will be teenagers ranging (from 12- 14 years old) all of them belong to the second grade of the high school, having a total of 200 students as the total population.

Sample

Second-grade high school students from five different classrooms divided into two English levels, intermediate and high intermediate; almost 40 students per classroom for a total of 450, with 12 different English classrooms where male and female students are mixed, during the 2016 academic year, based on the following statistical formula proposed by Spiegel (1979:125) to define the sample with 10% error and 90% validity:

N = total Number of participants, e = error (10%), n = sample, p = probability in favor, q = against probability, and Z = validity (90%).

$$n = \frac{Z^2 p \cdot q \cdot N}{Ne^2 + Z^2 p \cdot q}$$

Contrasting, Moya and Saravia (cited by Lexin Ayala 2006, p. 130), since the population is not representative at all, since it is not an extensive number of participants; it is advisable to work with the 10% of the population (which is represented by 20 students); and to lower the scale of error the 10% of the population should be multiplied by two, so we will work with 40 students from 5 different classrooms. Both statistical techniques confirm that the sample should be 90 students from two different levels of English.

Instruments

The instruments recommended for this study are multiple-choice questionnaires that will help us to measure and know the attitudes and preferences of the students. They will also be valuable to get as much information as we can about the students' perception towards the languages in focus, because they will be a mechanism to determine the language attitudes shown in learning a language.

The questionnaire has been made considering a Likert scale, which is based on the types of items or phrases that have been carefully selected, it will help us determine the students' preferences. Its purpose is to be precise and reliable for measuring the social phenomenon and the attitudes expressed by the students. The first questionnaire has 29 items related to the student's learning preferences measured on

a scale from 1 to 5, where students will choose once to express their acceptance or rejection through the options given.

The second questionnaire has 17 questions. It will help us to determine the teachers' and students' classroom performance and how that behavior influences the classroom performance and development in the class sessions. Besides, it will help us to determine the students' preferences through language learning and favorable and unfavorable behaviors through language learning. As in the first questionnaires, students will have to choose between 5 options to express their preferences, which will later be analyzed and interpreted to obtain the final data and conclusions.

Context Description

The study was carried out at San Ignacio School, a school located on Hugo Ernest Avenue in the Bajo Seguencoma neighborhood of the capital city of La Paz. The school has a total of 2500 students, of which 650 students were enrolled in the 1st and 2nd grades.

The rest of the students are enrolled in primary and secondary levels, English is considered an important subject because the students are divided into different language levels according to their knowledge. For example, in High Secondary, students are divided into 6 levels (Basic, Intermediate, High Intermediate and Advanced).

Talking about the first and second grade of the high school, in the English classes the students are divided into two different English levels, the intermediate and the advanced. Where they can practice and develop the language as much as possible, in all classes students have to practice all the grammar skills to become proficient in the English language since it tries to become a bilingual school.

To achieve this goal, the students have English classes 4 days a week and they have to be evaluated once a week. The students have to practice all the skills every day to be in touch with the language. So, the activities are carefully planned and selected to achieve the school's main goal.

The Participants

The study was carried out at the San Ignacio School, among the students of the second grade of high school; the questionnaire was

administered to 92 randomly selected students (42 women and 50 men) within a range of ages between 12 and 14 years. The distribution of participants can be observed in the following graph.

Table. 1 and Graph 1: Distribution of participants according to gender (own source)

Gender	Frequency
Men	50
Women	42
Total	92

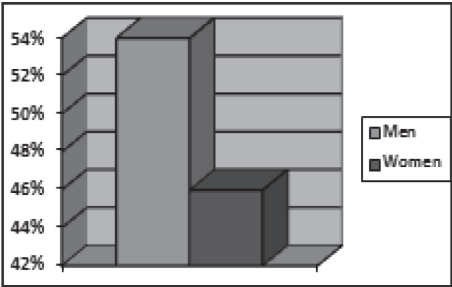
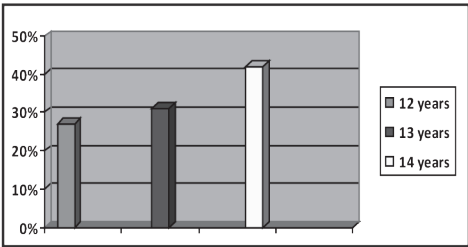


Table. 2 and Graph 2: distribution of participants according to a range of age (own source)

Age	Frequency
12 years	25
13 years	30
14 years	37
Total	92



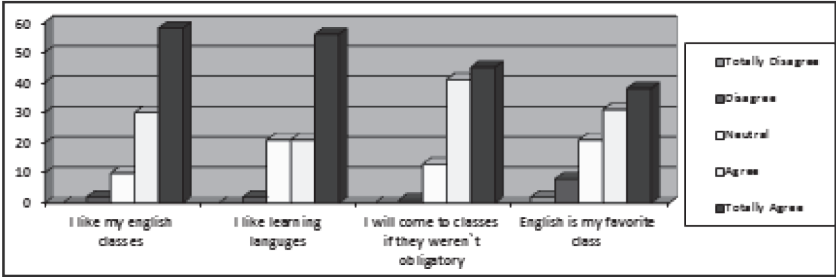
3. Results

The second questionnaire refers to the students’ perception through their English class and how motivated they are in the class sessions, depending on their perceptions and the teacher’s performance in class. This questionnaire will help us to identify the motivation and attitudes students have through the English language, depending on some variables such as activities, performance, confidence, behavior and feelings.

Table 1. Attitudes through the English language

QUESTION	N	1	2	3	4	5
I like and enjoy my English classes	92	0%	2%	10%	30%	58%
I like learning languages (English)	92	0%	2%	21%	21%	56%
I would have English classes if they weren't a school requirement	92	0%	1%	13%	41%	45%
English is my favorite subject at school	92	2%	8%	21%	31%	38%

Table 1. Attitudes through English language

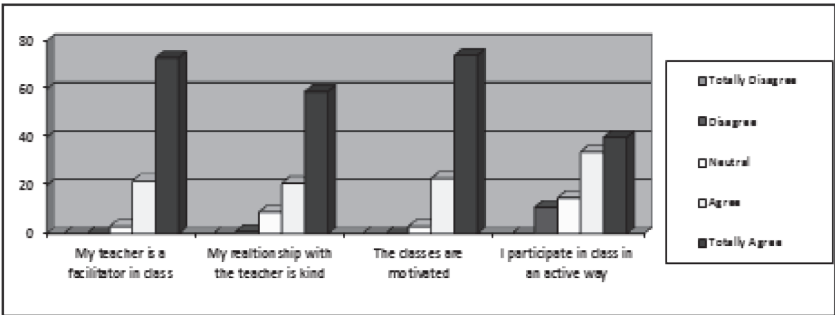


Taking into account the information above, we can say that students express and show favorable attitudes towards the English language because 58% of students agree with their English classes saying they like it, then 56% say they like learning languages (English). Besides that, 45% and 41% agree with having English classes even though they were not a school requirement. Finally, 38% and 31% strongly agree that English is their favorite language. Table 1 shows the favorable attitudes of the students in English class, which means that they are motivated and their perception of the language is positive.

Table 2. Class and teacher`s performance

QUESTION	N	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher is a facilitator and guide in class	92	0%	0%	3%	22%	73%
My teacher`s relationship is kind and it motivates me to keep learning	92	0%	1%	9%	21%	59%
Classes are fun, active, interesting, and motivating	92	0%	0%	3%	23%	74%
I participate actively in English class	92	0%	11%	15%	34%	40%

Table 2. Class and teacher`s performance

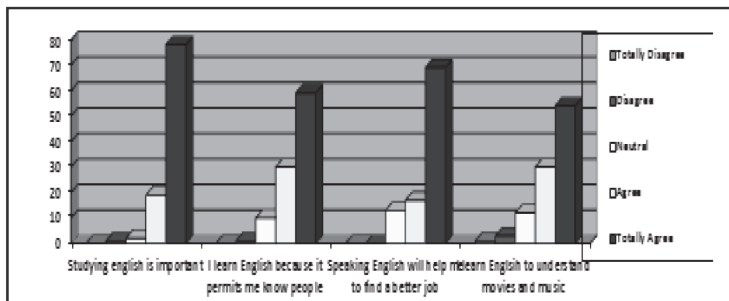


Looking at the chart above we can say that 73% of the students consider their teacher as a facilitator and a guide in the classroom, if we compare with the last question in chart one we can infer that students prefer teachers who guide them instead of just being the center of the class, 74% of the students agree with motivated, dynamic, interesting and fun classes motivates them to learn; it could be interpreted because intrinsic and extrinsic motivation facilitates the learning process, so while the more motivated the students are the more favorable attitudes they will express through the language. Then, 59% of the students consider that teacher-student relationship is friendly and that motivates them to learn. Again, attitudes are not only observed in students, but also teacher's behavior is essential to motivate or demotivate students in the class performance. Finally, 40% of the students participate actively in the class session, this can be analyzed as a fact in which students express favorable attitudes, if they participate actively, it means they feel comfortable with the classes and it makes them participate in all the planned activities.

Table 3. Students' Perception in the English Language

QUESTION	N	1	2	3	4	5
Studying English is important because It allows me to be in touch with people who speak this language.	92	0%	1%	2%	19%	78%
I learn English because it permits to know lots of countries	92	0%	1%	10%	30%	59%
Speaking English is useful to get a better job	92	0%	0%	13%	17%	69%
I learn English to understand movies, songs, etc.	92	1%	3%	12%	30%	54%

Table 3. Students' Perception in the English Language

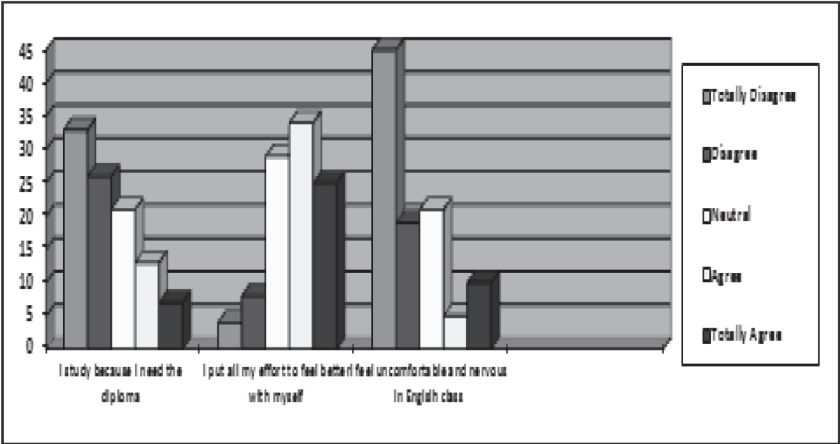


The graph above shows us the students’ perception of learning the English language. It will help us to know the attitudes that students have according to their personal preferences. 78% of the students agree with learning English because the language will allow them to communicate with people who speak it, then 59% of the students agree with learning English because it will allow them to know people from different countries; on the other hand, 69% of them agree with speaking English will improve their way of life (better jobs) and finally 54% of the students learn English to understand movies and songs. Looking at the percentages above, we can say that the students show favorable attitudes toward the English language, and these perceptions make the students feel motivated to learn the language.

Table 4. Students’ attitudes in English language

QUESTION	N	1	2	3	4	5
I only study English because I need the high school degree	92	33%	26%	21%	13%	7%
I put all my effort into English to feel better about myself	92	4%	8%	29%	34%	25%
I feel uncomfortable and nervous in English class	92	45%	19%	21%	5%	10%

Table 4. Students’ attitudes in the English language



The graph above can help us to determine the students’ attitudes through language learning and how intrinsically motivated they are to learn English; as in the previous graph in this part, the students were

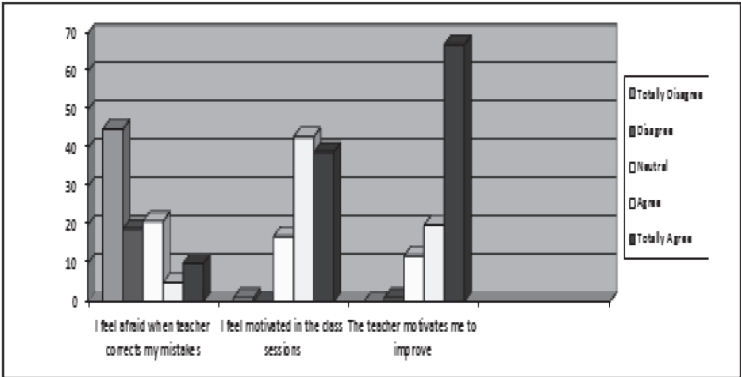
asked some questions related to their preferences in learning English and the result is interpreted in this way: 33% of the students disagree with learning English only because they need a high school diploma; in this case, they have other types of motivation that make them learn English at school. Then, 34% of the students agree with putting all their efforts in English class to feel better about themselves, maybe because they like the language and they have a specific purpose to learn it; and finally, 45% of the students disagree with feeling uncomfortable in class, it means that most of them feel comfortable because the classes are different and they like them.

From the previous explanation we can conclude that intrinsic motivation is really important to make students apply and learn a foreign language, students must feel comfortable with the class and the activities and besides that they need to know the importance and use of the language.

Table 4. Extrinsic Motivation in language learning

QUESTION	N	1	2	3	4	5
I feel afraid when the teacher corrects my mistakes	92	45%	19%	21%	5%	7%
I feel motivated with a good attitude during the class sessions	92	1%	0%	17%	43%	39%
The teacher motivates me and it helps me to improve my language performance	92	0%	1%	1%	20%	10%

Table 4. Extrinsic Motivation in language learning



The chart above helps us to determine the extrinsic motivation in language learning, which is expressed by motivation and class performance, so the analysis is the following: 45% of the students disagree with feeling afraid when the teacher corrects their mistakes, maybe the students feel more comfortable when they are corrected instead of being ignored; 43% of the students feel motivated in the class sessions and it allows them to express good and favorable attitudes towards language learning, as it was mentioned before, motivation is essential to create a favorable or unfavorable environment in the class. And finally, 67% of the students agree with feeling motivated in the class sessions, besides saying that it helps them to improve their language performance; maybe it happens because the students have to feel comfortable in the teaching-learning process, so the teachers' support is essential to develop favorable attitudes perception through language learning.

As can be seen in the charts above, the questionnaire was related to the students' perceptions of language learning and how these perceptions influence the students' attitudes, at the beginning we could evidence that most of the students like and prefer to study English; in this case they express favorable attitudes toward the language, so it will make them learn the language in a good mood. Later, most of the students agree with having dynamic classes, constant participation and good relationship with the teacher. These variables let us infer that comfort is an essential factor to develop and perform activities favorably; students have to be motivated and face favorable attitudes that allow them to learn and acquire the language successfully. Then, students express that they have an intrinsic motivation to learn languages because they consider English is important to keep in touch with people who speak this language, that because English fulfills their expectations such as visiting countries, meeting people, understanding songs and movies, and getting a better job. This kind of perception allows us to verify once again that intrinsic motivation is essential to develop consciousness and favorable attitudes in the language learning process.

The students need to know why and how important the language is for them and to have a reason to make this process easier, that is why the last two tables referred to motivation, language performance and comfort; most of the students study English because they feel motivated in the class session. It means that while more motivated they feel more favorable attitudes are expressed, these attitudes can be determined by the way they perform in the class session, participation,

nervousness expressed in the daily work and finally how open they are through teacher's correction. Most of them agree with having a process in which the teachers support them in the activities, it makes them feel more comfortable and it helps them to have a good performance in the class sessions besides expressing more favorable attitudes towards the teaching-learning process. In conclusion, motivation is essential to make students express favorable attitudes towards the learning process because it allows students to express favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards language learning as a result of behavior, students' perception towards language and class performance.

4. Conclusion

Considering all the information analyzed and observed, we can mention the following to determine the attitudes and motivation of students. It is essential to know the students' preferences and determine how motivation is identified and selected according to the information gathered, it also has a relationship with attitudes and the way these two variables are determined along the research. To understand these variables, it is important to quote Gardner (1928, p. 98), who defined motivation as the relationship between effort, affect and desire, and Fishman (1970, p. 43) and Dittmar (1976, p. 181), who defined attitudes as "behavior" composed by cognitive, affective and conative language structure.

Moreover, after observing the results gathered from the instruments applied to the students, interesting results were obtained and used to improve the teaching practice, motivate and change students' attitudes in the classroom. Both questionnaires provide appropriate information to be considered and applied during the teaching-learning process. This information is relevant at the moment of designing and planning classes because students prefer more dynamic activities in which they can feel comfortable and motivated to become competent in a foreign language.

The results obtained allowed us to modify and use different techniques and materials to improve the students' self-confidence, because, as it was mentioned above, motivation includes stimulation and by the way classes and activities are planned, they become a useful resource to stimulate the students' performance. It has been done because most of them do not feel frustrated when teachers correct their mistakes or when they speak in front of the class; students prefer to have

activities in which they can include and demonstrate all the knowledge they have acquired in a second language classroom. Besides, the knowledge is important because it allows them to show all the skills they have learned during the class sessions. Most of them preferred to have classes completely in a second language instead of translating them or being translated into their mother tongue.

Regarding my own experience as a teacher for more than 12 years, I can say that the best way to make students apply the language they have learned is to make them speak all the time; if they can speak and use the language as much as possible in class, they will be able to use grammar structures appropriately and correct their own mistakes. So the classes have been completely changed and the skills have been included all the time so that they can notice that it is not just grammar or vocabulary that is being taught all the time. This allows us to increase student participation and interest in the activities performed in the class sessions.

We have to be aware that attitudes and motivation are vital variables if we want to make students proficient, and if one of our goals as teachers is to make them competent, we have to reinforce not only their knowledge of the language itself, but also their personal perception of the language being taught. And the only way to do this is to improve our teaching practice. We must be conscious that all the techniques, methods and materials we use and apply are really important to achieve our teaching goals, but without them our daily practice may become useless and monotonous.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation was delimited by the relationship between the teacher-students, the teacher's performance, dynamic classes, and the teacher's support during the class sessions. In all the previous variables mentioned, the students agreed that being supported and having a good relationship with their teacher helped them to improve their confidence in the moment of using the language in class. In addition, dynamic, participative, fun and innovative classes allow them to perform and develop better, achieving better results in the teaching-learning process. Thus, all the results obtained allowed me to change the teaching methodology and behavior during the class performance. Innovation was essential to achieve my teaching goal.

Finally, we could say that this study has been a useful tool to be considered at the moment of applying procedures and techniques

in a class; it will help us to improve the teaching practice and to plan the activities better to have excellent results in the teaching-learning process. As a teacher, we consider it important to always be aware of the minimal details expressed by the students, because they help to determine and verify how the class is going. Attitudes and motivation are really important to make students learn and apply their knowledge appropriately.

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