

## **THE TEACHER AS A SOURCE OF MOTIVATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM**

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### **1. TEACHERS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

It is currently assumed that the success or failure in learning a foreign language depends on some fundamental factors:

- a) The learner's social context: sociocultural and socioeconomic factors.
- b) The learner's personal characteristics: age, cognitive and affective characteristics and personality traits.
- c) The learning process: quality of strategies, techniques and cognitive operations.
- d) Conditions under which learning takes place, which includes EFL and/or ESL situations.

Our work has been done in EFL contexts, that is, in Spanish classrooms where English is taught as a compulsory curriculum subject, in a non-supportive environment. In these situations, results depend very much on the didactic treatment applied by the teacher:

- Types of objectives that teacher and students aim to achieve.
- Contents selected to obtain the objectives
- Strategies and techniques employed in the classroom
- Materials and resources used

But not only the didactic treatment in itself is important, the personal characteristics and personality traits of the person that applies that treatment in the classroom, his/her teaching style, attitudes and personal qualities are also fundamental.

Dunkin and Biddle's model of teaching (1974:38) also make the outcome of the teaching and learning process dependable on three major set of variables:

- a) The teacher's characteristics (presage variables)
- b) The pupil's properties (context variables)
- c) The classroom teaching (process variables: includes teacher and students' classroom behaviour)

According to this model, EFL teachers exert certain effects (presage variables) depending on their characteristics as individuals, their formative experiences, their training, etc. EFL teachers' classroom behaviour and teaching styles are considered process variables and are influenced by the former.

Stern (1984:500) also maintains the same major variables identified by Dunkin

and Biddle (1974) but introduces some changes in the model he proposes. The teacher's together with the learner's characteristics are considered presage variables and influence the process variables.

Both models can be included within the process-product paradigm (see for example Gage 1978, Brophy 1983, Good 1979, Wittrock 1986) and consider that the teacher's didactic and personal qualities have a great influence on the learning process and consequently on the learning product. The influence on the learning process is exerted not only through effective teaching strategies and techniques, but also by generating positive attitudes and motivation for learning the FL.

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## 2. TEACHERS AS MOTIVATORS

Finocchiaro has identified twenty-four hallmarks of superior teachers, some of which are related to personal and affective factors (1988:3-5):

- Making learners feel loved, respected and secure and that they can achieve success by concentrating on the teacher's comprehensible input and tasks.
- Keeping motivation of students at a high level.
- Offering a relaxing atmosphere for learning.

Prodromou (1991) aimed to discover students' views of good and bad language teachers and found out that students

### like teachers to

be friendly  
know how to treat them  
be forceful, but not strict  
be educated  
be funny  
believe in students  
be proud of students  
have a personality of their own  
be good advisers  
be experienced

### dislike teachers to

be very strict  
be too authoritarian  
be very serious  
be bad tempered  
talk too much  
speak flat  
be distant from students  
treat kids like objects  
be too sarcastic and ironic  
make them feel anxious

We believe that all these attitudes -and others- towards the foreign language teacher have a strong influence on the student's motivational state because motivational factors determine to a great extent the degree of learning success.

Gardner, in his social-educational model (1985:147), relates the student's outcomes to four individual differences: intelligence, language aptitude, attitudes and motivation and situational anxiety. In previous works, Gardner has summarized the major components of motivational characteristics. He distinguishes a set of variables (1975:58):

- Group specific attitudes. In our case, attitudes towards English speaking communities and desire to integrate into those societies.
- Attitudes toward English as a subject in comparison with other curricular subjects.

- Attitudes toward the foreign language teacher
- Attitudes toward the classroom methodology: activities tasks and teaching resources.
- Influence of parents and the social environment as sources of motivation.

### 3. OUR RESEARCH WORK

We have also controlled those variables in the Spanish educational context and have presented some provisional results in Madrid et al. (1993). In this paper, we have focused our attention on the teacher as a source of motivation.

#### 3.1. Variables controlled

The first questionnaire provides information about the motivational agents or factors that influence most the student's interests and attitudes toward the study of English, among the following:

- Tasks carried out in the EFL classroom
- EFL teacher's qualities

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- Parents
- Characteristics of the subject in itself, as a linguistic discipline
- The desire to integrate and live in the foreign country
- The instrumental importance of English in present day society

The second questionnaire was open. It gave us reasons why students like or dislike their EFL teacher and their opinion about the fundamental characteristics and qualities of good English teachers.

- Finally, we administered a closed questionnaire in order to know:  
Which of the following characteristics are more relevant for students:
- The English teacher physical appearance
  - His/her scientific knowledge
  - The teacher's didactic preparation
  - Personality traits

Which specific qualities and behaviours are liked and disliked, among the following:

*Physical appearance:*

- 1 Being handsome/pretty
- 2 Being elegant

*Scientific preparation:*

- 3 Have a deep knowledge of the subject
- 4 Have a good pronunciation
- 5 Being fluent

*Teaching performance:*

- 6 Prepare classes
- 7 Inform about objectives and contents
- 8 Try to motivate students
- 9 Explain with clarity
- 10 Follow an adequate pace
- 11 Organize games
- 12 Being fair with grades
- 13 Encourage participation
- 14 Assign homework
- 15 Control discipline
- 16 Assign pair work
- 17 Prevent anxiety
- 18 Offer oral activities
- 19 Assign written tasks
- 20 Use the students' names
- 21 Test students frequently

*Personality traits*

- 22 Tolerant and flexible
- 23 Hard, rigid, strict
- 24 Hardworking
- 25 Authoritarian
- 26 Fair and just
- 27 Available and helpful
- 28 Kind and polite
- 29 Active
- 30 Original and creative
- 31 Responsible
- 32 Balanced and quiet
- 33 Firm and confident
- 34 Tidy and careful
- 35 Happy, optimist and friendly

### **3.2. Sample**

The three questionnaires were administered in the three educational levels: Primary education (Grades 7th and 8th), Secondary education (Grades 3rd and 4th) and University level (Translation and interpretation students, 1st year)

### **3.3. Results and conclusions**

#### **3.3.1. Primary Education (Grade 7th, age 12-13)**

This sample consisted of 34 learners studying 7th grade at a Private, church sponsored primary school in Granada.

In the first part of the questionnaire the students were asked to rank in order the influence of six given factors. The instrumental value of the language in society, followed by parental influence and classroom activities were, in that order, the three most important sources of motivation. At the opposite end of the scale come the teacher's qualities, the subject itself, and the integrative motive.

Learners had also to explain, in an open questionnaire, the reasons why they like

or dislike their teacher and gave their opinion about the fundamental characteristics and qualities of good English teachers.

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A large majority of the learners like their current teacher (88%). The reasons given are:

- She understands learners
- She feels very confident and explains well.

In support of this they indicate that the qualities of the teacher which they most highly value are that he/she should be *pleasant*, and that they should *use the FL in class*.

In the closed questionnaire, a list of qualities were given to the learners to make them choose the most relevant. First, they gave their opinion about the importance of the English teacher's physical appearance, scientific knowledge, didactic preparation and personal traits.

Academic training takes priority over the other aspects of the "ideal" teacher. It is followed by didactic abilities, personal characteristics, and appearance, in that order.

These kids liked their English teacher and their opinion of her is not only that of a normal student but that of those who in a big number go to other places to have private lessons. They know how an English class is given by another teacher, the number of things that can be done in the classroom and that can be the reason why the activities they would like doing in class are not the ones they really do.

On the other hand, they want their teacher to use the FL in class. Nevertheless, they know that if their teacher used English in class it would be really difficult for some of the students to understand her. The solution she is going to give to this situation after having read these results is to use English from the lowest level, and that way she will make the students feel better when having to use English in class.

In this group, the use of the FL in class was an important source of motivation. Some of the students have demanded that though the teacher insists that most of them are not going to understand her.

### **3.3.2. Primary Education (Grade 8th, age 13-14)**

The age of the students tested ranged from thirteen to fifteen years-old. When, at a very specific level, students were questioned in relation to their sources of motivation, it was obvious that the figure of the teacher did not seem to be very important when compared to other potential motivating factors (leit motifs). Instrumental and integrative incentives, the influence of the parents etc. were regarded by students as more attractive sources of motivation. We should not forget that the learning of a second language differs broadly from other disciplines also imparted in a classroom setting. Obviously, the main difference lies in the very peculiar circumstances (conditions) surrounding this particular subject. Indeed, the attractiveness intrinsic to the learning of a second language contributes to the existence of a significant increase in the degree of motivation. In this specific case, we are not just dealing with the teacher and the student

somehow isolated in the classroom. The learning of a second language is not only restricted to the subject itself. On the contrary, the learning of a second language also implies the acquisition of a vast amount of cultural input reflecting all different aspects of an idiosyncratic nature. A possibility to communicate with other individuals belonging to completely different cultures, the opportunity to understand different ways of expression, music, traditions and customs undeniably lessen the strength of the teacher as a potential source of motivation.

Nevertheless, we should take into consideration that, when in a different part of the test, students were asked to evaluate their attitude towards their teacher, the result, surprisingly, could be regarded as fairly positive. We can infer from this that the figure of the teacher seems to develop his/her work correctly without intervening, at least in an evident way, as a crucial factor in the sources of motivation. A homogeneous 42.1 % of the individuals asserted that they liked their teacher; a 44.7 % of them selected the second choice (I like him/her a little bit) whereas just a small percentage of a 13.1 % of the students chose the third alternative (I do not like him/her) as the option reflecting their personal attitudes. A striking fact to be underlined is that the students configuring this 13.1 % of the total number of individuals were characterized by a high level of academic achievement. However, a significant number of the subjects who showed a

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preference for the first option controversially presented a low level of academic achievement. How are we supposed to handle this? In a different section of the test, students were asked to justify, in very specific terms, their positive attitude towards the teacher. Two factors were constantly repeated:

- She explains well.
- She is nice.

Congeniality, as we can infer from the outcome of the tests, is one of the most important aspects for these individuals who, we should always bear this in mind, have ages ranging from thirteen to fifteen years-old. On the other hand, it becomes clear that students pursue an ideal teacher with a good academic/professional standing and, at the same time, a more casual way of implementing his/her work. They want a good teacher (in a stricter academic sense) but they also want a good communicator as their instructor; a person who shares their problems and goals and who, to a certain extent, becomes their friend.

In relation to the physical features, it is interesting to point out that even though they are taken into consideration by the students, they are not highlighted as an issue of outstanding relevance. In fact, when students were requested to express their preferences with respect to the (most important) qualities that should define an ideal teacher's profile, we found that those related to the physical appearance were located low down on the scale.

However, those qualities referring to the personal, didactic and scientific aspects were regarded as decisive by a significant number of individuals. Consequently, we can infer the importance not only of a good academic standing but also the relevancy of the teacher's personality. The classroom, it is important not to forget it, is a living body formed by emotional individuals, in short, by human beings. This reflects a need for a teacher who offers a positive feedback and responds to very specific requirements of

support, help and understanding.

In a more concrete and detailed study of these four aspects mentioned above (physical, didactic, scientific and personal), we found the following conclusions:

- In relation to the scientific training of the teacher, the subjects of our study regarded "having a good pronunciation" as a key quality in the teacher, even more important than for instance "having a good knowledge of the subject".
- When asked about the didactic aspect, the students considered that "to explain with clarity" and "to create a relaxed atmosphere" in conjunction with "organizing games in the classroom" and "being fair and equitable", were very significant features in a teacher.

Nonetheless, other options such as "to give homework regularly", "to set exams" and "to organize an important amount of written activities", were not very popular among students.

Obviously, once again we can test our hypothesis that there exists no inclination towards those alternatives implying a stricter and more academic view of the task developed by the teacher. Finally, when dealing with the personality of the teacher, qualities such as being nice and polite, congenial, funny and optimistic were considered by students as very important. Nevertheless, other qualities such as being demanding and authoritarian, which obviously denote a stricter view of the system were characterized by an evident lack of popularity.

### **3.3.3. Secondary Education (3rd grade, age 16-17)**

The results are part of a research developed in the spring of 1992 at a state secondary school located in the northern district of the city of Granada. The group comprised 28 students (15 female, 13 male).

Our primary task was to analyse the main sources of motivation in the EFL classroom, following the theoretical approach defined by Gardner (1985); nevertheless, it came to be pretty obvious, later on, that the context in which we had to carry out our project would compel us to modify -to some extent- the final conclusions of Gardner's work. It was then that we could observe how important the teacher was in the language learning (LL) process by influencing the student's motivational state.

It was easy to confirm that their *main source of motivation* was not any other than an instrumental one, after which came some others concerned, on the one hand, with the LL situation -the subject itself, the classroom work, the teacher's qualities, and, on the other, with a very distant integrative motive and an apparently irrelevant parental encouragement.

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All this made us think, first of all, that when students do not have any real contact with the language -as in our case- they will necessarily be interested in it or moved towards it simply because of some practical reasons; and secondly, that, as a consequence, the teacher must be ascribed an important role in this process for having to introduce the student to the foreign language -English- and to the subject -Inglés III- for becoming the only -closest and most decisively influencing- representative of both of them in a non-

bilingual context, and for moulding -consciously or not- the student's attitude towards these through his/her own attitude shown in the classroom.

Considering this, we tried to study the *student's attitude towards the teacher*. The results were different depending on their different motivational states, but the average was rather good, closely connected with the rate of achievement of the students.

#### **Open questionnaire**

The less motivated students (21%) took into consideration her less positive personal features (i.e., to be occasionally angry, to be elitist) rather than her academic ones in order to explain their dislike for her -although some of them added to this the type of methodology used (somewhat boring) for the same purpose. The more motivated ones, nevertheless, looked on her academic abilities to express both their liking for her (i.e., to teach well, to have a good planning, to bring her training up-to-date) and their criticism (i.e., limited use of English in the classroom, too theoretical lessons).

#### **Close questionnaire**

In spite of the different points focussed on by these students, their ideal teacher was very alike, being her/his main characteristics a knowledge of English, an ability to teach it and kindness to carry out the process. They preferred a teacher who could master both didactic and academic skills:

Good pronunciation, fluency, clear explanation, fair marking, using new exercises -especially oral ones-, or helping less advanced students; and, at once, could appear as personally engaging and encouraging the student's interest.

Thus, for them, other questions such as either her scientific preparation and physical appearance, or more precise features such as their homework and the excessive control of the class were quite irrelevant.

Accordingly, we came to the conclusion that the teacher seemed to have a key role in the LL process, that both her/his personal and academic features were taken into account by the students as motivating or discouraging tokens, and that, although it was somewhat easy to make up the image of the archetypal teacher, it is really hard to achieve that perfect worker when so many contextual constraints are involved in the process.

#### **3.3.4. Secondary Education (4th grade, age 17-18)**

"If students aren't learning it is assumed to be the fault of the method, the materials or the teacher. Yet the success of a learning program involves far more than the mere act of teaching" (Richards, 1990:1).

An in-depth study of the motivating forces in a group of language students should prove to be a very useful tool in understanding important attitudes for language learning. The study may be conducted at the beginning of the course, in which case it will provide information vital to the teacher conducting needs analysis, or mid-term for the teacher to take stock of the situation and effect any changes deemed necessary in the light of the results, or at the end of the course to investigate past methodology. The

results, if studied carefully, will offer insights that should not fail to be revealing.

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This study of COU students was conducted among a group of 17 State School pupils in the province of Granada at the beginning of the academic year. It will be readily understood that these students are studying English because they have to (a foreign language being a compulsory part of the curriculum) and this may or may not coincide with their wanting to study a language.

The group had had the same teacher for the two preceding years and some of them for the whole of BUP. The teacher was placed fifth in order of importance only ahead of the influence of their parents. This negative attitude towards the importance of the teacher was borne out by the analysis of their comments on what they considered to be the qualities of a good teacher.

The overall rating for the teacher was of 1.3 (in a scale ranging from 0 to 2), and was explained by the students in the following way. Forty per cent stated that the teacher had shown marked preferences towards certain members of the group (the good ones) and despised and looked down upon the others. The teacher was also thought to be impatient, moody, and not to have good teaching methodology by thirty-six per cent of the group.

Scientific knowledge obtained a rating of 1.8, didactic preparation 1.6, personality traits 1.5, and physical appearance 0.5 (scale: 0-2). Forty per cent considered that the language teacher ought to be good-tempered, pleasant, patient and interesting. Thirty per cent emphasised the importance of explaining well and assessing fairly, while twelve per cent stressed the importance of knowing the subject well and being able to maintain discipline.

These results show how a teacher who receives a low rating in the questionnaire can affect the learners' feelings about the teacher's role, and in particular how the teacher is considered to be a relatively unimportant motivating factor in the language learning process.

Allwright & Bailey (1991:162) point out that "a teacher may be liked as a person, and well respected as a professional, and yet not teach in a way that suits everybody in the class, to the extent that some learners may find that teacher quite useless to them". So it appears to be important to discover what activities and learning strategies suit a particular group as well as to understand what profile they expect in a competent teacher. This study revealed significant ideas about the language teacher as seen from the learners' point of view.

### 3.3.5. University level (1st year)

Frequently two teacher "types", known as the *instructor*, and the *socializer*, are described (Brophy 1985). Essentially these are opposites, which we might call the stereotypes of the university teacher (*instructor*) and the primary school teacher (*socializer*). Characteristically, the former presents academic content and supervises what is learnt, whereas the latter aims to develop learners' mental capabilities, promotes good interpersonal relations and a good inter-group atmosphere, and prepares learners to be good citizens. Some of the differences in their behaviour are that *instructors* emphasize academic input; are impersonal in their relations with

learners; fall back on the head teacher (in the school context) when dealing with questions of discipline; put the blame for problems on factors other than themselves; and promote the idea of the teacher as a just, authoritarian figure. In contrast, *socializers* emphasize the socializing of learners; pay attention to learners' personal and behavioural problems; personalize their interaction with learners; dislike, and are inefficient when dealing with backward learners; put the blame for problems on the family or social background; promote qualities of patience, love for learners, and so on, as being those of the teacher; are more inclined to punish learners, or to reward them; consider the classroom to be where learning should take place, and where human relations should be developed.

In the light of this division, this study begins by placing the relevant significance

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of the teacher in context, as a result of the participants comparison of the teacher with other motivating factors. Then, and always bearing in mind the nature of the sample we are dealing with (see below), we describe how participants saw their teacher - whether as an *instructor* or a *socializer* - and examine their preferences for an "ideal" teacher, in the same terms.

The questionnaire was administered to 32 First Year students on the Diploma course in Translation and Interpreting at the University of Granada School of Translators and Interpreters. Amongst other subjects, they follow a course in 'Translation into English from Spanish' which primarily focuses on FL reading and writing skills. These learners have all chosen to follow FL studies at university level, and have gained entrance to this particular course on the basis of their academic performance.

#### **3.3.5.2. Sources of motivation**

Learners rank ordered six given factors in terms of how much they had been influenced by them. On the basis of the average scores for each alternative we establish that the instrumental motive is the most important (4.94, out of a possible 6), the subject matter itself second (4.48), and the integrative motive third (4.32). The qualities of the teacher ranks fourth, scoring 3.46; and the other two factors are significantly less important still. Moreover, 25% of the sample did not respond to this item.

#### **3.3.5.3. The English teacher**

##### **Open questionnaire**

Participants were asked their opinion of their current teacher, and their responses gave an average of 2, meaning that the teacher in question was very popular. The lists of reasons supporting this, and of preferred qualities and characteristics to be found in a good teacher, show that participants clearly considered their teacher to be a *socializer*, with 61.3% of responses falling in this bracket, and only 15.3% in that of the *instructor*. The remaining responses could be attributed to either category.

This preference is carried over when the question is depersonalized. Asked to present their preferred qualities and characteristics of a good teacher, 62.1% of the total responses can be classified in the *socializer* category, and only 14.1% in that of the *instructor*. Again, the remaining responses could be attributed to either.

### Closed questionnaire

This questionnaire offered participants a closed list of qualities and characteristics of a good teacher divided into four sections: physical appearance, scientific knowledge, didactic preparation, and personality traits. Average scores of 2, for didactic preparation, 1.94 for scientific knowledge (more *instructor* than *socializer* characteristics), and 1.88 for personality traits (more *socializer* than *instructor* characteristics) indicate that participants perceived little difference between each of these. Physical appearance (0.03) was not even considered.

These four general areas are broken down into discrete items and scored in the same way. In contrast to what was indicated by the responses to the open questionnaire, the most highly rated characteristics were all of the *instructor* type. Ten items were specifically attributable to each type of teacher, and the average percentage score giving *instructor* characteristics most importance was 52.6%, with a range from 97% to 0%. For *socializer* characteristics, the average was 46.3%, with a narrower range of between 78% and 28%.

A clear and consistent impression of the learners image of a "good FL teacher" as a *socializer* comes from the results of the open questionnaire. However, this is contradicted by their thoughts on the "ideal" teacher prompted by the closed questionnaire. In order to put this into perspective there are two points that we will make before drawing specific conclusions. Firstly, it is clear that a highly popular teacher - in this case a *socializer* - can distract learners' attention from their initial objectives even in an examination-specific class. Two individual negative comments entered in response to the open questionnaire stated that the relevance of class activities to exams, and the occasional lack of clear objectives were concerns. Secondly, on a clearly instrumental course of this type, participants could have been expected to be concerned about their teacher's ability to prepare them to work as translators. However, this does not appear in any responses. Perhaps this clarity is lacking as learners had yet to verbalise their expectations of the course.

To conclude, perhaps the principal message of this study is that teachers, whichever their personal style, should be aware of the needs of their learners, and that - particularly at university level - they should be able to broaden their approach so as to provide learners with both *socializer*-type and *instructor*-type teaching.

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