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Emotional experiences of Mexican language learners: A qualitative study of their effects on motivation

Experiências emocionais de estudantes mexicanos de línguas: Um estudo qualitativo de seus efeitos na motivação

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ABSTRACT: This article reports on the emotional experiences of Mexican language learners in their second year of an English language teaching programme at a state university. The aim was to identify the effects of emotions on the motivational behaviour that the students displayed in their daily classes. The instruments employed were personal narratives, electronic journals and semi-structured interviews. The results demonstrated that emotions are a source for students' development and that meta-emotions can help students to become more motivated. The study revealed that emotions, both positive and negative, can help students develop awareness, responsibility and commitment to their language learning process.

KEYWORDS: Emotions; motivation; language learning

RESUMO: Este artigo relata as experiências emocionais de alunos mexicanos em seu segundo ano de um programa de ensino de inglês em uma universidade estadual. O objetivo foi identificar os efeitos das emoções no comportamento motivacional dos alunos exibidos em aulas diárias. Os instrumentos utilizados foram diários de aprendizagem e entrevistas semi-estruturadas. Os resultados mostram que as emoções influenciam fortemente o desenvolvimento dos alunos e que as meta-emoções podem ajudar os alunos a se tornarem mais motivados. O estudo revelou que as emoções, positivas e negativas, podem ajudar os alunos a desenvolver a autoconsciência, a responsabilidade e o compromisso com o seu processo de aprendizagem de línguas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Emoções; motivação; aprendizagem de línguas.

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Introduction

Affect has been recognised as having a crucial role in Foreign Language Learning (FLL) (ELLIS, 1994; ARNOLD; BROWN, 1999); however, the investigation of emotions has not been at the forefront of the research agenda in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field (DEWAELE, 2005; GARRETT; YOUNG, 2009; ARAGÃO, 2011). Cognition has been emphasised in ELT research in spite of the interplay that both dimensions have in learning (ARNOLD, 1999; MACINTYRE, 2002). However, there are numerous scholars who have acknowledged that FLL is emotionally driven (MACINTYRE, 2002; DÖRNYEI, 2005; AKI, 2006; ARNOLD, 2007; GARRETT; YOUNG, 2009; BOWN; WHITE, 2010). Attention to emotions can help overcome problems of demotivation created by fear or anger which can inhibit foreign language learners' participation in classes. In addition, promoting the experience of emotions that enhance learners' self-esteem and that can promote empathy can contribute to increase students' motivation.

Emotions are said to be context-dependent, short-lived and subjective responses to a specific situation, object or person (DO; SCHALLERT, 2004; SANSONE; THOMAN, 2005; HASCHER, 2008). Emotions are said to control some of our mental processes (SCHUMANN, 1998), so the combination of emotional experiences with the diverse external factors learners are exposed to in any learning situation has a strong influence on learning outcomes. Although emotions can be labelled as being positive or negative, emotions per se are not detrimental or beneficial for learning processes (PEKRUN et al., 2002; IMAI, 2010). Emotions are embedded in the particular situation that causes them. In language classrooms, emotions might be caused by the interactions with the teacher, with peers or with learning materials, or they may be a reaction to the students' own feelings (SANSONE; THOMAN, 2005; SCHERER, 2005; HASCHER, 2008). Emotions can also result in particular motivational behaviours from students such as continuing to try to solve a particular learning task, or stopping to try because of a negative emotion (SCHERER, 2005).

Emotions may vary in the intensity of the feelings being experienced by students when learning a foreign language, and this intensity variation might explain students' individual learning experience appraisals and their subsequent actions during the learning processes (SCHERER, 2005;

HASCHER, 2007, 2008). As a result, emotional experiences in language learning classrooms can engender feelings, physiological responses and observable behaviour in reaction to them. In this way, emotions influence the motivation that language learners exhibit during learning activities. Barret et al. (2007) state that, ‘...an adequate account of emotional experience requires more than a specification of cause; it also requires a description of content (i.e., of what is felt)...’ (p. 376). Although no clear conclusions have been established about the shaping effects of the intensity and frequency of emotions in learning (HASCHER, 2007), negative and positive emotions have been found to diminish or enhance not only learning processes but also learners’ development (IMAI, 2010).

This article reports on a qualitative study that examined the emotional experiences of Mexican language learners and the effects of emotional experiences on motivation. The instruments used to collect data were personal narratives, semi-structured interviews and Students’ Emotional Experience Journals (SEEJ). The main analytical concern was to understand how language learners’ emotions emerged and how these experiences appeared to affect their motivational behaviour in class. For the purpose of this article, the term emotional experiences will be used to refer to feelings or emotions experienced during FLL instruction.

Emotional experiences in foreign language learning

Diverse emotions are experienced in school environments and these are a powerful influence on students’ engagement, interest and motivation (SCHUTZ; DECUIR, 2002; EFKLIDES; VOLET, 2005; GLÄSER-ZIKUDA; JÄRVELÄ, 2008; HASCHER, 2010). Emotions are said to be a result of the evaluation that students make of particular situations while learning (PEKRUN, 2000). These evaluations are influenced by previous experience, social context and by personal goals (PEKRUN et al., 2002; SANSONE; THOMAN, 2005). The interplay of these variables in one emotional event during classroom instruction may have different meanings for individual students and have diverse effects on students’ motivation (DO; SCHALLERT, 2004). It is because of these motivation variations that the effort and focus of students vary in the diverse stages of their language learning process (SHOAIB; DÖRNYEI, 2004). These temporal and multiphase aspects of motivation have been separated into three stages: reasons for doing something, deciding to do something, and sustaining

effort or persisting in doing something (WILLIAMS; BURDEN, 1997, p. 121). Emotional experiences play a significant role in all three phases. Those feelings and emotions experienced during FLL instruction are thus important to understand, so that language teachers can adjust their approach to help reduce the negative impact that some emotions can have on learners' motivation, and to enhance the promotion of those emotions that can activate, maintain and promote it.

Factors influencing emotional experiences in language learning

Different authors in emotion research in education agree on the influence of the context, current learning experiences and external sources such as peers or regulations on students' feelings and emotions (GL SERZIKUDA et al., 2005; HASCHER, 2008, 2010; ARAGÃO, 2011). Pekrun et al. (2002) found that anxiety was the emotion most frequently reported in five studies that have been conducted using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Besides anxiety, enjoyment of learning, hope, pride, relief, anger, boredom, gratitude, admiration, contempt and envy were also reported. Pekrun et al.'s studies revealed that students reported as many positive emotions as negative ones; thus, the array of emotions students go through during learning is vast. A significant outcome of Pekrun et al.'s studies is the discovery of the role played by meta-emotions (feelings about emotions) on the management of emotions. Pekrun et al. (2002) suggests that making learners aware of their feelings about their emotions may be a tool teachers should use to help students face and overcome negative emotions.

Pekrun et al. (2002) found that positive emotions like enjoyment and pride correlated positively with students' motivation to learn and to achieve goals. Positive feelings and emotions originating during classroom instruction seem to trigger students' motivation inspiring them to act in an academically productive way in order to achieve their specific goals and to continue experiencing those positive feelings and emotions in the pursuit of future academic goals. According to Scherer (2005), feelings and emotions prepare people to act; this implies that if someone is acting in certain ways, the experience of a feeling or emotion can make him or her stop that particular action (changing their motivation) or cause them to continue making the best effort possible in order to achieve a particular goal.

Garrett and Young (2009) explored the emotional reactions originating from a Portuguese classroom course over a period of eight weeks. They

described 255 positive emotional experiences and 69 negative ones. Positive and negative experiences were mainly engendered because of the teacher's voice, social relations, cultural learning and language awareness. Personal experience of the emotional impact of learning a foreign language has made Garrett reconsider her instructional approach and make adjustments in order to promote positive affiliation among students, emphasise cooperation in learning tasks and to be sensitive about forcing beginners to speak the target language (2009, p. 223).

Imai (2010) investigated the manifestation of emotions during group-work preparation for an oral presentation for an English class. He found that during task preparation, language learners' mental processes were structured through the verbalisation of their emotions, which then developed into common group feelings. Thus, negative emotions felt by the three members of the group served to construct the same feelings towards the activity through the negotiation of their reactions with the learning task they were carrying out. From this, Imai (2010) concludes that even negative emotions can be a developmental resource for foreign language learners.

Although conducted under a self-regulatory framework, the study carried out by Bown and White (2010) also reflects the emotional experiences that learners in classrooms go through. In the individual reflections of three learners, the interaction of their previous language learning experiences and current learning events and goals played a significant role on their motivational behaviour. These reflections showed how even the scarce contact with instructors initiated by learners in the learning process evoked such negative emotions that their motivation could be profoundly impacted. These students' emotions in face-to-face interaction with instructors were evoked because of the instructors' body language, non-verbal expressions and feedback provided. The significant effect of instructors in the learning process foreign language students was evident even in autonomous language learning experiences.

The studies that were reviewed above emphasise the central role of emotions in foreign language learning motivation; a topic that needs to be explored more deeply in the field of ELT. Emotions are important since they can provide us with knowledge about how to comprehend students' reactions to instructions, and they may provide us with insights about how to make language learning a more effective and pleasant process.

The research reported on in this article aims to contribute to the body of emotions research in SLA by outlining the results found in a

particular Mexican context. In this study, it was found that positive and negative emotions can help language learners' development by focusing their attention on those specific areas that they need to work in to enhance their learning process and to be successful.

The study

In this study, I examined the effects of emotional experiences on foreign language learners' motivation. The purpose of this study was to understand the effects that emotions engendered during classroom instruction had on the motivational behaviour that students display in daily classes. Thus, the research question this study attempted to answer is:

-How do EFL learners' emotional experiences in the classroom appear to impact on their motivation to learn?

Methodology

This study was carried out using qualitative methods since they allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the motives behind human behaviour (BARBOUR, 2008). The following data collection methods were selected to obtain suitable data for answering the research question underlying this study: personal narratives, semi-structured interviews and Students' Emotional Experiences Journals (SEEJ). The use of these data collection methods aimed to triangulate the information obtained from the participants. I have analysed the full data set (MÉNDEZ, 2011), however, in this article, I am reporting on the data derived from interviews and journals only, since the information shared in personal narratives was about the particular situation or event that had begun their initial motivation to enrol in the ELT programme. Thus, the information from these data collection tools was not relevant for answering the specific research question addressed in this article.

The context for this study was Mexican language learners studying an ELT programme in a Southeast state university in Mexico. The selected group was chosen because access was given to one of the two groups enrolled each year in the ELT programme where this study was carried out; thus, convenience sampling was employed (BRYMAN, 2004). A group of students who were starting their second year was considered best suited for

the purpose of this investigation (N=18; female =14, male= 4). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 24. The sample was small because the intention was to obtain rich information about students' emotional experiences in classroom language instruction and its effect on motivation. As stated by Mertens (1998), 'In interpretive/constructivist work, samples tend to be relatively small because of the depth of information that is sought from each case or individual' (p. 264).

Although at the early stages of the research project I thought about having separate sessions with the students in order to ask them to carry out some activities, later reviews of the literature allowed me to take the decision not to do so since, as Do and Schallert (2004) advise, 'Studies are needed that focus on the emotions and moods embedded in a real context rather than induced and separated out for investigation' (p. 620). I talked to the two teachers who would be in charge of the groups that I had decided would be best suited to fulfilling the purpose of the research. One of them agreed to allow me some time during her teaching hours to conduct the study and so this became the group from which students were asked to participate. After having obtained consent from the teacher, I talked to students on the first day of their term in order to provide them with information about the project, and stated its purpose. Students were invited to participate but were reassured that if they decided not to it would not make any difference to their course grades, as I anticipated that this would be their main concern about taking part in the study. Students were also informed that if at a certain time during the research they felt they did not want to continue with it, they could withdraw. I encouraged students to participate because I considered that they could gain insights about themselves as students that could help them to understand themselves better and hopefully help them to improve and be more effective at self-regulating their learning. Students who agreed to participate were asked to sign a participant consent form in which they were informed of the purpose of the research, the different activities involved, what was expected of them and who to contact if they wished to raise any issues regarding the study (see Appendix 1).

This study dealt with the sensitive topic of emotions in an educational setting where many people were involved so students were asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves and asked to change the names of peers or teachers if they were portrayed in any of their experiences. Students were also provided with a research information hand-out in which they were assured of

the confidentiality of their participation and were also informed about who would have access to the data and how that data would be stored.

Data collection

The emergence of the concept of 'learner-centredness' in the late 1970s created a movement in different areas of the ELT field. Journals are tools that can help teachers to give learners a space to express their feelings and emotions regarding their language learning process. In research, the first studies in language learning which employed journals were those of Schumann (1980) and Bailey (1980). Journals allow scholars to tap into affective factors and learners' own perceptions (BAILEY; NUNAN, 1996). According to Abbuhl and Mackey (2008), journals '...represent holistic accounts of language learning from a learner's viewpoint' (p. 105). This was of particular importance for this study since it was the learners' viewpoints about the emotions originating during classroom instruction that I was interested in finding out about; why these emotions were experienced and what factors triggered them.

During the spring term, over a period of 12 weeks, students were asked to keep a journal in which they could report on the different emotions experienced in their classroom instructed language learning. Journals have proven to be a suitable method to allow learners to record the experience of learning a foreign language introspectively (BAILEY; OCHSNER, 1983). According to Hascher (2008), self-reports about emotions in educational settings should not be 'weighted' but contextualised, since emotions originate because of specific situations. Thus, students were asked not only to report on the emotions experienced, but also to describe why and how that emotion originated (see Appendix 2). Students described the situations that caused an emotional reaction, how they felt during that event, what effects the emotion had on their motivation, and what their reaction to it was. Students were free to report about anything that they felt. They were not restricted to a set of specific situations as by limiting students to concentrating on specific situations, those affective experiences that students considered important could have been missed. This is one of the common limitations of studies on this topic in education (PEKRUN et al., 2002).

In order to help students write their personal narratives following ethical procedures, they were introduced to the four non-negotiable journalistic norms stated by Denzin (1997). This was done with the purpose

of making students aware that they had to be honest about the narrated experiences, protect the identity of the people involved in those narratives and inform about any fiction included in those narratives. Journal writing allowed students to reflect on why some changes may have been happening to their language learning motivation and to assess if emotions that originated from classroom instruction were affecting their language learning or not.

Besides writing emotional journals, the 18 participants of this study were interviewed by the researcher over a period of three weeks at the end of the term. These interviews were semi-structured and carried out in Spanish as participants preferred to use their mother tongue. In the interviews, I asked students about the emotional experiences they had reported in their journals in order to go into depth about specific topics. All interviews were transcribed and the references used in this report were translated into English.

Data analysis

This study followed a Grounded Theory approach to analysis, which was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded Theory is a strategy of analysis, which consists of a set of data collection and analytic procedures through which the researcher derives an abstract theory of a process, action or interaction from the views of the participants of a particular phenomenon (CHARMAZ, 2004; CRESWELL, 2009). The stages followed in the development of the key themes revealed by participants were: open coding, axial coding, and memoing and also the integration of categories through a storyline.

Open coding started with importing the journal sets into the Nvivo 8 software (QSR-International, 2007). Journals were collapsed into four-week periods to form three sets: weeks 1-4, weeks 5-9 and weeks 9-12. Data was carefully read to identify meaningful units of text relevant to the research foci. Units of text dealing with the same topic were grouped together in analytic categories and given a tentative code. Some text units were included in more than one analytic category because of their relevance to more than one of them. Data was systematically reviewed to ensure that references under analytic categories supported these categories. During the reassessment of analytic categories, some were collapsed and their titles refined. Parallel to the process of open and axial coding, memo writing was carried out. Memo writing is a crucial step in the data analysis because it helps the researcher

to test some ideas, refine categories and be creative about the relationships identified in the data (CHARMAZ, 2001). In the final step of analysis, a storyline was written to integrate all the analytic categories under the main theme to explain the meaning the study participants gave to the emotional experiences faced in their FLL classes.

Results

The participants' qualitative responses were organised into two major themes: (a) motivational behaviour resulting from emotional experiences (b) positive and negative effects of emotional experiences on motivation. The analysis presented below begins with a general overview of the main themes, before looking in more detail at the emerging categories within those themes.

TABLE 1
Categories and subcategories

Category 1	Category 2
Motivational behaviour resulting from emotional experiences	Effects of emotional experiences on motivation
A paralysing fear	Effects of positive emotions
A motivational fear	Effects of negative emotions

Motivational behaviour resulting from emotional experiences

Students revealed that their motivation was affected both negatively and positively. The emotion most often reported by students was fear in relation to the teachers' feedback approach, non-verbal communication and attitude; this negative emotion led them to become paralysed and minimise their interaction in classes. When teachers were near them, students remained silent or decided not to participate in class activities. Due to this, students' insecurity increased, since they were not experiencing any improvement in their ability to speak. Students feared making mistakes because of the teachers' feedback and also because it resulted in their peers mocking them. However, fear also pushed them to look for solutions to be better prepared for future oral participation. Thus, fear had two effects on students' motivation: a paralysing fear and the motivational strength fear. These two outcomes of fear are explained in detail below.

A paralysing fear

Over the 12-week period of the study, all (18) students reported they feared speaking in English. In spite of wanting to participate, the fear of being corrected by teachers paralysed students and constrained them. Students recognised that, by not participating in class, they were missing a great opportunity to continue developing their oral ability. Students perceived the teachers' feedback as quite harsh, as expressed below:

...sometimes insecurity because I do get nervous when I am at the front... yes...I think it is insecurity of making a mistake or mispronouncing a word and being scolded by the teacher because I am afraid of him... (nervous laugh). [NATALIA-INTERVIEW]

This feeling was shared by most (14) of the students in the group, as reported in journal entries:

Almost no one wants to participate, the teacher has to call our names when doing an activity because it is really rare that someone volunteers to read dialogues, small texts, or answer exercises aloud. [ANGIE-JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Due to the teachers' way of providing feedback, students' insecurity increased as they experienced diminishing feelings of self-efficacy when attempting to participate. These feelings led them to start questioning if they were doing things correctly or not. Their insecurity is described in the following reference:

It really affected me ...these days we have had more homework and I keep on questioning myself when writing... and in fact it is not helping me ...because as I am writing, I am also thinking about it being coherent or not and I end up writing senseless things. [JANE-JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Most (12) students' participation was constrained by this fear. Students were not only afraid of the feedback but also of their peers mocking them as a result of this feedback.

Because we all make mistakes... well...up to now they have not made fun of me. But on certain occasions they have been making fun of other classmates. I feel these classmates are intimidated and they feel like not wanting to speak again. I feel like that would happen to me...if they made

fun of me I would not feel like wanting to participate in class...I would feel like doing nothing because of the fear of my peers making fun of me again. [AKIRA-JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Due to the students' fears, they did not feel comfortable and an ineffective learning environment developed. Most (15) students reported feeling inhibited by some of the teachers' gestures when correcting them, which contributed to increasing their reticence to take part in class activities. Students' insecurity grew as a consequence of not feeling confident to interact in class.

I honestly say that when I go into the classroom...I am someone different....someone who doesn't feel comfortable because I feel insecure...and I am not the only one, but the fact of feeling this way....it really affects me. [RICARDO – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Students' poor participation continued for the whole term because their feelings towards teachers were validated by other negative experiences students reported in journals, including the teachers' non-verbal communication when they made mistakes or arrived late, abrupt ending of communication when they wanted to talk to them, and the students' realisation that teachers in other classes were exercising a humanistic teaching approach in which students felt comfortable, were willing to participate, dared to make mistakes and, most importantly, their marks were not as low as with teachers that were not using humanistic teaching approaches.

Being afraid of some teachers proved to have a very negative effect on students' motivation. However, being afraid of their peers' mockery had, in contrast, a positive influence on some students' motivation, as reported in the following section.

The motivational force of fear

Fear was a constant emotion experienced by this group of students. The fear of making mistakes or mispronouncing a word was present from the very first week. Most (10) students did not understand the teachers completely and this added to their fears:

...sometimes I find it difficult to talk in class....and more so when I realised there were more advanced students in the group...and sometimes I do not understand everything the teacher says, only parts. I find it really

difficult to express myself and I am afraid of them (referring to her peers) making fun of me because of my pronunciation or an incorrect sentence. [ASERINA – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Most (14) students reported being aware of their peers' mockery when mispronouncing a word or not being able to complete a sentence. The constant mocking led students to start making comparisons with their peers in class activities, as revealed by students' journals:

Sometimes I do not understand what they say...or I listen to others who speak English really well...I think someday I will be able to talk like them but meanwhile I feel really impotent at not being able to speak like that. [KENYA – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

This constant comparison between students pushed them to look for ways to improve their language proficiency. The negative mocking experiences fostered learning awareness in students, and a willingness to employ learning strategies and motivational strategies. Most (15) students realised that language learning needed an investment of time and effort in order to be successful. Students started to think about how to make their language learning process an effective one, as reported by some (8) study participants:

This event made me realise that Rodrigo speaks fluently because he has studied for many years...I decided to study more... to learn English and someday I will be able to express myself as fluently as him. [JIMMY – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Students' awareness led them to diversify their language learning approach. After a negative event, most students (14) undertook reflection in which they made an evaluation of the negative event and of their motivational sources. This reflection allowed them to think of solutions which they then transformed into learning strategies.

The process revealed by students' negative experiences is extremely interesting because the negative experiences led to two different outcomes, as explained in this section. Although (15) students felt paralysed in class in the first sessions of the course, most of them (17) decided to take an active role in their learning process and to develop strategies to make it more effective.

Effects of emotional experiences on motivation

Students' feelings about experiencing positive and negative emotions over the term were favourable. All (18) students considered that emotions, both positive and negative, were important for their learning process since reflection after emotional events allowed them to continue and to look for solutions for the academic problems they were facing. Positive emotions increased their self-confidence, allowed them to experience feelings of self-efficacy, helped the group to bond and contributed to the creation of a positive learning environment. However, the negative outcome of positive emotions revealed by some (6) students was that they just rested on their laurels since after experiencing a positive emotion; they did nothing to continue improving their language learning process. However, this period of '*resting*' did not last since negative events alerted them to continue their language development.

Emotions were important for my language learning development, without them I would not have been making my best effort during this university term. Although negative emotions were not easy to cope with, I consider that these were the ones that helped me to focus and organise my study hours as well as select which skills I wanted to focus on... [LUIS- INTERVIEW]

Students recognised that negative situations were sometimes difficult to cope with; however, they all accepted such situations as being beneficial for their language learning motivation because they were alerted by negative emotions to the areas that they needed to work on.

...the other day our first writing task was returned and nobody thought that it would be marked with such low marks; I think the highest mark was a six. We all felt really low, even me. I feel the whole group felt really bad about this. I think I am somehow disappointed, I know I am not that good at English, but I have never got such a low mark. This mark really made me feel bad and has made me wonder if this degree is the correct one for me. [JADED- JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Negative events led the students to be doubtful about their choice of registering in the ELT programme, made them feel insecure, added to the negative environment developed through fear of the teachers and made the students perceive learning English as difficult, which contributed to diminishing their self-concept and feeling of competence.

I feel intimidated when she is in the class because I think she is going to say something...she criticises and makes fun of the rest of the class...so I feel frightened because I don't want her to make fun of me...that is my fear. [BLANCA – INTERVIEW]

However, the insecurity and the perception of learning English as a difficult task led the students to develop language learning awareness and learning strategies while at the same time forcing them to exercise motivational strategies to encourage themselves, thus enhancing their motivation to learn.

Somehow emotions have helped me to reflect...to know what's right...to look for solutions for wrong things and to try to make my best effort... [LUNA – INTERVIEW]

As revealed by all (18) students in the study, negative emotions were positive because they made them think about their role as language learners, and made them realise those areas they needed to work on.

Effects of positive emotions

Students experienced positive emotions that allowed them to have feelings of enhanced self-efficacy. These feelings allowed them to see their language advancement, which contributed to erasing their insecurity and giving them confidence, as expressed by one student:

...for instance when teachers told me something good about my performance in class, I felt really happy...I was so enthusiastic all day in classes. You feel great...you feel like participating more in class because you know you are doing things right. [AKIRA – INTERVIEW]

As the term advanced, students felt more confident because they were able to see that their efforts were paying off, especially in terms of examination marks, which are very important for Mexican students:

I felt so happy...I could confirm that if I worked hard I could have good results...My quiz results were good and those items that I did not get correct... I reviewed them after the quiz so I can check my mistakes. [KENYA – INTERVIEW]

Confidence allowed students to take some risks in their language learning process and some (8) started to refer to mistakes as something that you have to go through in order to be able to speak a foreign language. Students also started looking for ways to introduce phrases or vocabulary they had heard on American TV in order to make their oral and written output more natural. These small decisions allowed them to reenergise and helped them to keep motivated. However, most (16) students recognised that after a positive emotion they did nothing to improve their language learning process:

After doing the presentation in class, I felt relief. I just felt nervous at the beginning...I thought it would be good to practice my speaking skills more but instead of doing that I decided to reward myself by skipping the following class! [BLANCA – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Students reported that after a positive emotion there was nothing to do but enjoy the feeling, so they didn't think about it. This is the only negative effect that positive emotions had on students' motivation.

Effects of negative emotions

Negative emotions were frequently experienced by this group of students. For the first time, students were dealing with being spoken to in English for the whole class period and doubts about their degree choice started to emerge from the very first week of the term. Half of the students (nine) revealed in their personal narratives they had wanted to study something different but, because of financial reasons, they had had to choose a degree at their home University. This fact made them doubtful about being on the ELT programme, as reported by one student:

This week we have been taking tests...sometimes I feel frustrated because some topics are not easy for me to understand...my grades are not good...this made me feel really bad and has made me think about whether the ELT programme is the right degree for me. [JADED – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Feeling unsure of being able to finish the degree caused insecurity in students, which contributed to their fears. Students' fears led some (nine) to see learning English as a very difficult task that they were not able to accomplish.

This perception was magnified for some by the presence of a more advanced group of students in the class. By looking at this group's performance, students realised the great gap between them and the advanced group. Students' confidence deteriorated because they started to make comparisons with the more proficient English speakers in the group. The ability divide contributed to a lack of group cohesion, which made the learning environment very ineffective:

I think that if the group were more united then we could work pleasantly... because for some classmates the activities were very easy so they didn't want to talk that much...they didn't want to participate...they just said what they were supposed to say and didn't want to practice...and I like to practice but they get bored... [ANGELA – INTERVIEW]

Lack of group cohesion contributed to students' feelings that they were not allowed space and time to practice. This feeling led them to think they were not making any progress and to perceive their pronunciation as not as good as the pronunciation of their classmates. This constrained their participation in class because they believed that some classmates would mock them. Although students reported that being afraid of the teachers and their peers' mocking was a constant feeling throughout the term, they also revealed that the effects of these events were short-lived because they could not spend all the time recalling a specific negative event.

Negative emotions started to emerge during the first sessions of the course. Students' knowledge was very basic and they started to panic when they were not able to understand everything the teachers were saying or explaining. Fear, worry and nervousness were the three negative emotions students commented that they experienced the most during the first third of the term. The ability divide in the group pushed low proficient learners to develop their language abilities. It was because of this that students started to develop a sense of responsibility towards their language learning process, which led them to develop learning and motivational strategies from the very first week of the term.

Reflection also seemed to have started early in the term because of a critical incident that students reported in the third week regarding the marking system that one teacher used in a writing task. This episode seemed to have marked the course since some students reported feeling different after this event in class. However, the negative feelings experienced at that

time were the ones that pushed them to be aware of the need to take a more active role in their own language learning process.

Language learning awareness

Although some students' realisation of the proficiency difference between them and their peers made them feel sad and frightened, it also made them aware of the time and effort needed to be able to speak fluently:

Thanks to all these experiences in class I am more conscious of the need to invest more time to study at home...I have been looking for web pages to practice and chat with native speakers so I can learn expressions and be able to speak better. [RICARDO – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Students embraced negative events as learning opportunities because all of them (18) referred to these negative events in class as a way of understanding what they were doing wrong and how to improve in that particular skill. Most students' (17) fears were about their speaking ability because it was the skill that caused their peers to make fun of them. Students started to look for vocabulary to improve their oral participation, practiced their listening comprehension by watching American TV programmes, encouraged peers to practice with them in order to gain confidence, and dedicated more time to reviewing the topics covered in class time at home.

I analysed myself and realised that I have to practice my English every day...I registered in a conversation workshop and started to review the notes from my class every evening. [JIMMY – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Most students (16) reported realising areas in which they were making mistakes, while others started to develop resilience towards negative experiences. Students considered these negative experiences as a natural process that needed to be faced if they desired to speak a foreign language. This is clearly expressed in the following reference:

I think in a negative way but thinking carefully ...positive because every time I am at the front saying something or explaining something... speaking in public helps me to overcome this weakness that I need to be a strength in the future...[JANE– JOURNAL/ Weeks 9-12]

Although some (nine) students felt insecure about their abilities to learn a foreign language during the first third of the term, most of them

(16) convinced themselves that it was a matter of practice and not a lack of intellectual ability (Covington, 1992). This contributed to students looking for solutions to improve their language knowledge by making use of different learning strategies that could help them to learn in a better way.

Students reported making use of diverse strategies in order to overcome the learning difficulties that they were facing in their daily classes. Some (8) students reported not feeling upset about the language proficiency of the advanced students but motivated to be able to speak like them in the future. The group of proficient students gave the beginner students a push to try to make their best efforts, as reported by the different styles they employed to approach their learning concerns:

I don't have to feel worthless in class just because others participate more or understand better than me. I have to make my best effort to be at their level. [NATALIA – JOURNAL/ Weeks 1-4]

Language learning strategies were tools that the students made use of in order to develop their language abilities and their confidence in class. Besides learning strategies, students also resorted to the use of motivational strategies to keep them energised to continue in the ELT programme.

Development of motivational strategies

Although students recognised that maintaining their motivation was their responsibility, they also considered that teachers could contribute greatly to it by making classes more dynamic and by making learning activities more fun. Students reflected on their family values when referring to being motivated. They considered that they needed that affective push from mothers, fathers, siblings and friends to reenergise their motivation. Most students (16) resorted to emotional self-regulation and self-encouragement in order to keep their motivation at good levels:

I believe in myself...I believe that I can achieve my goal of learning English and finishing the degree if I wish... I have to set some goals and complete certain activities that I have planned to learn more every day... believe that I can do it. [KENYA – JOURNAL/ Weeks 9-12]

Students' attitudes towards the experience of negative events were very positive. They all recognised that during life they would have to face many negative events so they had to be prepared to face them.

Discussion

The powerful role that teachers' practices have on foreign language learners' motivational behavior in class was strongly evident in the findings of this study. Although the purpose was not to make a comparison of teachers' performance, participants of the investigation reported two different classroom atmospheres that they encountered during the research period. These two learning environments led to opposing emotional experiences and, consequently, students' motivational behaviour in these classes was very different. In classes eliciting more negative responses from learners, the teachers' interpersonal skills, non-verbal communication and feedback approaches were recurrent topics when students recalled their predominantly negative emotions or discussed their feelings about the term they had just finished.

Interpersonal skills

Although one of the basic conditions for instilling motivation in students is the establishment of good teacher-student rapport (DÖRNYEI, 2001), teachers' lack of interpersonal skills in the negative learning environment appeared to inhibit this. According to recent research into the emotional intelligence of EFL teachers, it was found that teachers' interpersonal skills were highly correlated with their teaching success (GHANIZADEH; MOAFIAN, 2010). Participants in this study referred to the teachers in the negative learning environment making faces when they arrived late for class, or making gestures that they perceived to not be respectful to students and which then inhibited them from participating in class.

Learners recognised teachers in the negative learning environment as good professionals. However, they also expressed their fear, frustration and anger at the teachers' attitude and lack of understanding of their learning processes. As suggested by Dörnyei (2001), a positive relationship with students is a condition necessary for the development of intrinsic motivation. Due to excessive work loads, teachers may forget to concentrate on developing a positive relationship with students which can make a difference to learners' motivation.

Non-verbal communication

The importance of creating a non-threatening environment conducive to learning was an important tenet of humanistic education (GAGE; BELINER, 1992), and has been reported as a powerful aspect impacting on students' emotions and motivational behaviour (JÄRVENOVA; JÄRVELÄ, 2005; MEYER; TURNER, 2006; DÖRNYEI, 2001; 2007; GLÄSER-ZIKUDA; JÄRVELÄ, 2008; GUILLOTEAUX; DÖRNYEI, 2008; YAN; HORWITZ, 2008). In this study, it seems that teachers in the negative learning environment tried to develop a positive environment during the first weeks of the term. However, their efforts were not fruitful because their body language and discourse seemed to be sending the opposite message from their words. As a result, interaction between teachers and students in the negative learning environment did not develop positively. This supports Dörnyei's (2001) proposal regarding motivational strategies that a positive classroom atmosphere is a condition for intrinsic motivation to be developed.

Although teachers in the negative learning environment might not have been aware that they were sending negative messages with their voice and body language, many students perceived these as threatening their confidence and decided not to participate in their classes, which contributed to diminishing their motivation in these courses. The same was reported by a learner studying Russian in an individualized instruction programme in the USA. The learner reported feeling stupid because the instructor made faces when the learner was trying to structure a sentence. This feeling led the learner to restructure her face-to-face sessions to avoid that particular instructor so that the negative feelings were not faced again (BOWN; WHITE, 2010).

In a study by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), students' motivated learning behaviour was considered to be indicated by the amount of attention paid in class, and the extent of students' participation in and their volunteering for activities. Although participants in this study reported high levels of motivation to complete the ELT programme, they also expressed their lack of motivation towards participating in the courses they were taking with teachers in the negative learning environment because the tone of voice used by these teachers was not neutral and this contributed to the diminishing of learners' self-confidence. As a result, the classroom environment was very strained.

Feedback approach

The feedback approach employed by teachers in some classrooms seemed to the learners to be judgmental and non-formative in nature (DÖRNYEI, 1994). The feedback on participants' first writing tasks was a critical event for most of them because of the detailed correction and marking system used by one teacher in the negative learning environment. Oral and written feedback made students question whether what they were doing was correct or not. This constant questioning increased students' insecurities and also created the feeling that they were unable to learn English. When teachers provide oral feedback their words and gestures can be taken as a judgment made about their students' personas, rather than as simply referring to students' language advancement, this can contribute to students' insecurities and doubts about their competence. According to Arnold (2007), a student's self-concept can be compromised when receiving feedback because the teacher might reinforce feelings that are already low. Perceptions of the teacher as being judgmental rather than informative about individual progress corresponded with reduced motivation. This pattern is consistent with Noels et al.'s (1999) findings that the more students perceived their teachers as failing to provide instructive feedback, the less intrinsically motivated they were.

Conclusion

This qualitative study has confirmed previous research findings on the strong impact of emotions on foreign language learners' motivation not only in classroom instruction (GUILLOTEAUX; DÖRNYEI, 2008; GARRETT; YOUNG, 2009; IMAI, 2010), but also in individualized settings (BOWN; WHITE, 2010). Language learning is a process replete with negative and positive emotions, thus, the appropriate management of students' emotions is necessary. Language teachers need to help their students make their emotions work for them and not against them. As suggested by Pekrun et al. (2002), meta-emotions can be used by teachers to find out about the feelings originated by the emotions felt while learning a foreign language. Thus, it is important to address emotions by asking students to talk or write about them so they can understand those feelings and reflect on them. In this study, participants revealed that meta-emotions functioned in this study as triggers for creative thought in order to direct those negative emotions into actions to help reduce experiencing negative emotions frequently. Without doubt,

this is a topic that should be further investigated in order to find ways to help students manage their emotions to their advantage.

Since many external factors are beyond a teacher's control, internal factors can be addressed by teachers in order to influence students' motivation in a positive way since, as suggested by Dörnyei (2007), '... the motivating character of the learning context can be enhanced through conscious intervention by the language teacher' (p. 720). In terms of pedagogic implications, the findings suggest that teachers' interpersonal skills, non-verbal communication and feedback approach can have a pervasive influence on students' motivational behaviour in class. Teachers may worry about being well-prepared when facing a new group of students, and work hard to design a syllabus according to the students' levels, preparing interesting material so students can master the course content more easily. Although those aspects of language teaching are important, it is also necessary to review our attitudes during classroom instruction. By showing commitment towards helping students learn, teachers can make a difference in students' motivation. Students in this study revealed the importance of being supported in individual areas that needed reinforcement. By providing students with extra practice in those particular areas, teachers can show to students that they care about their learning processes.

A positive attitude on the part of the teacher and appropriate interpersonal skills are important, as reported by participants in this study. The paramount importance of promoting cohesiveness in an English course is highlighted by students' comments. This is crucial for language learning because the nature of the subject makes the process a very sensitive one in which the students are more exposed to feelings of humiliation or embarrassment.

This study has also furthered our understanding of the bidirectional impact emotions can have on language learners' motivation. Results suggest that emotions are closely related to motivation, impacting on it both positively and negatively. Although negative emotions may be considered detrimental to motivation (HORWITZ, 2001; PEKRUN; ELLIOT; MAIER, 2006), the findings of this study show that negative emotions in the context of the study also served as learning enhancers. Positive emotions were also revealed as having a negative impact on learners' motivation: since students thought they were doing well enough, they did not make any further efforts after experiencing a positive situation or event. These results suggest that emotions, both negative and positive, contribute to enhancing and diminishing motivation, and are important for understanding language

learning motivation fluctuation. Thus, more research to corroborate this specific finding should be conducted.

Although negative emotions are generally perceived as having a negative effect on the language learning process, it seems that their impact depends on the context where these are experienced. Future research on motivational factors that help students to overcome negative experiences should be done in different contexts in order to better understand how to help students maintain their levels of motivation in foreign language classes.

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APPENDIX 1

Participant consent form

Project title: Emotion and Language Learning: an Exploration of Experience and Motivation in a Mexican University Context

Researcher's name: XXX

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio taped during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored in audio and text form during the completion of the research and that I may have access to my personal data, if required.

Signed

Print name **Date**

Contact details

Researcher: xxx mobile phone (xx)

APPENDIX 2

Data generation instrument: Students' Emotional Experiences Journals (SEEJ)

Students' Emotional Experiences Journal

Date: _____

Most learners experience different emotions during their daily learning classes. It is useful to keep a record of your different feelings, emotions and mood changes, and to reflect on the situations that made you feel that way...

1. What emotions have you felt this week in your English class?
2. Which of the emotions that you have noted above did you feel the most strongly?
3. Can you explain what happened and how you came to feel this way?
4. What effects did/has this had on your motivation to learn English?
5. What did you do about it?

Data de submissão: 02/09/2014. Data de aprovação: 17/11/2014.

